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## Book Review: *Not a Drop to Drink: America's Water Crisis (and What You Can Do)* By Ken Midkiff

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Not a Drop to Drink: America's Water Crisis (and What You Can Do).** By Ken Midkiff. Foreword by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2007. xxv + 197 pp. Notes, index. \$14.95 paper.

"The struggle over the world's water resources will be the defining struggle of the twenty-first century, and the battle has already been joined," states Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in the opening line of his foreword to Ken Midkiff's *Not a Drop to Drink: America's Water Crisis*. Midkiff provides numerous detailed examples, including the Colorado, Rio Grande, and Missouri Rivers, and the South West and California, of how in just a few decades we have depleted our water supply. In chapter 2, "The Wells Run Dry: The Time Is Up in the High Plains," he warns that ultimately there is no such thing as sustainability of irrigation from the Ogallala Aquifer. Creating a Buffalo Commons on the High Plains, he states, "is no longer a proposal, but an almost inevitable reality." Because much of the 35% of U.S. food produced in the High Plains depends on irrigation, Midkiff concludes that drying up the Ogallala will have a major impact on the nation's food supply. He lists 17 other aquifers, from Alaska to Puerto Rico, where what is happening to the Ogallala is also occurring.

Midkiff presents his case with the clear purpose of raising our awareness and concerns. In some instances, however, he exaggerates the problem. He claims that the North Platte and South Platte Rivers at their confluence are perennially dry and that it is now possible to cross the Platte River in central Nebraska without one's toes getting wet. Yet as I write this review streamflow in the central Platte River at Overton is about 500 cubic feet per second. He correctly observes that in many areas the Ogallala Aquifer will be dry in 30 to 100 years, but he also asserts that the Ogallala receives little recharge from precipitation and no recharge from the Rocky Mountains. In Nebraska, however, the Ogallala Aquifer still receives significant amounts of water from the Rocky Mountains and recharge from precipitation in the Sandhills. As a result, in Nebraska the amount of water in storage from predevelopment to the year 2000 has actually increased. Such exaggerations throw doubt on Midkiff's conclusions and weaken his overall case.

Exaggerations notwithstanding, many of Midkiff's observations are definitely worth heeding. The Ogallala Aquifer is going dry in many areas. Midkiff also sees the price of water continuing to rise as cities have to go to greater lengths to obtain it. He warns that the enormous impacts of global warming will make water resources planning more uncertain. He predicts that many legal compacts, decrees, and contracts will have to be changed because they were based on hydrological assumptions

that are no longer true. He makes a strong case against allowing our water supplies, so critical to life itself, to be privatized. And perhaps most important, in his end-of-the-chapters sections on *What You Can Do*, he convincingly argues that remaining vigilant at the local level is the best way to sustain our water supplies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. **Ann Bleed**, *Senior Program Manager, CDR Associates, Boulder, Colorado, and Former Director of Nebraska Department of Natural Resources*.