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Downriver: Into the Future of Water in the West by Heather
Hansman (review)

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(Review)

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the partisan Kavanaugh hearings and a presidential impeachment trial. The fault lines will likely harden before a breakthrough is achieved.

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Downriver: Into the Future of Water in the West. By Heather Hansman. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pp. 248. \$25.00 cloth; \$18.00 ebook)

“Water, for me, and for most people I’ve met on the trip isn’t something I can think about passively” (p. 149). Those are the words of environmental journalist Heather Hansman who has written a valuable and informative travelogue of her 730-mile journey down the Green River to its junction with the Colorado River. *Downriver* contains her commentary on the state of the river, sprinkled with useful information on the laws that control the river, federal water regulations, and studies that address contemporary issues such as endangered species and climate change. *Downriver* is largely based upon her personal observations coupled with interviews of river stakeholders encountered along the way, including ranchers, farmers, miners, municipalities, river managers, scientists, Indian tribes, and recreational users.

The strength of the book is its river’s eye view of the largest tributary of the Colorado River, the Green, from its source in the Wind River Range of Wyoming to its confluence with the Colorado River in Utah’s Canyonlands National Park. Hansman is particularly focused on examining how the river impacts local citizens and how humans have shaped the river over time. Above all, she is concerned about the river’s future. Hansman is particularly adept at explaining technical information in layman’s terms. For example, *Downriver* offers clear general information on current technical/scientific subjects such as endangered fish and how climate change is impacting the river. The public often wonders why it is important to maintain critical river habitat for the maintenance of endangered fish such as the Humpback Chub and Razorback Sucker, both native fish, but never in the sights of fishing enthusiasts. She visits Ouray National Wildlife Refuge, home of a U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife Service’s endangered species fish hatchery and explains the many challenges the wildlife biologists face in implementing this

Endangered Species Act–mandated program, a requirement that is not well liked by citizens of the region, who see it as a huge waste of money and river management priorities. The maintenance and growth of native endangered species, Hansman explains, provides reference point to the overall health of the river ecosystem. However, she notes that human needs tend to win with water issues, and endangered species often lose if they compromise human-driven economic interests.

The presentation of each chapter is often jumbled because Hansman mixes her first-hand rafting observations, interviews, and some historical material, often on the same page. Her interviews with people dependent on the river, including city officials, water bureaucrats, ranchers, farmers, and recreational users are a strength of the study. Hansman has an ability to ask clear questions that often lead to complicated answers that she simplifies for the general reader. For example, how does one go about filing a water right and how do water rights work? A particular interest of hers is how dams, diversions, and other works of man have reshaped the natural river. Yet as she notes, when a person is on the river it can appear to be a magnificent work of nature.

Downriver could have benefitted from illustrations, photos, and more maps. The dates she was on the river and in certain places would be a useful addition, perhaps added to a map. Hansman's contextual information is weak in places and would benefit from a more obvious engagement with the literature of western water history.

Scholars will find little new information in *Downriver*, but the academic world is not Hansman's prime audience. If you want to gain an appreciation for what is the least-known section of the Colorado River system, the book will hold interest. Her digressions into historical issues are generally interesting, if often undocumented, and will not discourage readers from learning about the multitude of laws, regulations, bureaucracies, and river constituent groups. Hansman is both fearful and hopeful for the river's future. Her excellent coverage of climate change hovers like a dark, rainless cloud over the book. Yet she also believes that rivers may be managed to align water use with urban demands, while also preserving rural life and food production if stakeholders commit to being more flexible. She is at her best summarizing the current state of the river. The upper Green River is the only section of the Colorado River system that may have some, limited water available for future allocation and that makes Hansman's observations all the more significant. However, that unallocated water may be an illusion because of unresolved tribal claims, the needs of the energy industry, and the likely impacts of climate change.

Book Reviews

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