

# Great Lakes Water Wars

## by Peter Annin

### About the Book

The Great Lakes are the largest collection of fresh surface water on earth, and more than 40 million Americans and Canadians live in their basin. Will we divert water from the Great Lakes, causing them to end up like Central Asia's Aral Sea, which has lost 90 percent of its surface area and 75 percent of its volume since 1960? Or will we come to see that unregulated water withdrawals are ultimately catastrophic?

Peter Annin writes a fast-paced account of the people and stories behind these upcoming battles. Destined to be the definitive story for the general public as well as policymakers, *The Great Lakes Water Wars* is a balanced, comprehensive look behind the scenes at the conflicts and compromises that are the past-and future-of this unique resource.

### Praise for the Book

“Water is the lifeblood of the forty million people who live in the Great Lakes Basin. The Great Lakes Water Wars is a captivating account of past challenges as well as the social, economic, and ecological challenges we must overcome as our insatiable thirst exceeds nature’s ability to provide. It is a comprehensive and easy read, placing Great Lakes water woes in a global context. This book should be required reading for anyone whose life depends on Great Lakes water.”

— **Michael P. Dombeck, professor, University Of Wisconsin- Stevens Point, University of Wisconsin System Fellow of Global Conservation, and former chief, U. S. Forest Service**

“This is a thoroughly researched, well-balanced, and captivating history and analysis of the increasing tensions and possible solutions related to water use and diversion from the great Lakes. It is both inspiring and startling reminder of the Lakes’ vulnerabilities. Everyone who lives in the Great Lakes Basin should read it; everyone who takes freshwater for granted should read it.”

— **Deborah L. Swackhamer, codirector, Water Resources Center and professor of environmental chemistry, University of Minnesota**

*Courtesy of Island Press*

## About the Author

A veteran conflict and environmental journalist, Peter Annin spent more than a decade reporting on a wide variety of issues for *Newsweek*. For many years he specialized in coverage of domestic terrorism and the radical right, including the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City and the Branch Davidian standoff outside Waco, Texas. He has spent many years writing about the environment as well, including droughts in the Southwest, hurricanes in the Southeast, wind power on the Great Plains, forest fires in the mountain West, recovery efforts on the Great Lakes, and the causes and consequences of the "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico.

Since January 2000 Annin has worked as Associate Director of the Institutes for Journalism and Natural Resources, a nonpartisan national nonprofit that organizes educational fellowships for mid-career environmental journalists. ([www.ijnr.org](http://www.ijnr.org)) In September 2006 he published his first book, *The Great Lakes Water Wars*, which has been called the definitive work on the Great Lakes water diversion controversy ([www.greatlakeswaterwars.com](http://www.greatlakeswaterwars.com)). In 2007 the book received the Great Lakes Book Award for nonfiction.

Since 2004 Annin has served as the volunteer executive director of Gull Rock Lightkeepers, a nonprofit dedicated to restoring Gull Rock Lighthouse, a storied Lake Superior light 2.5 miles off Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula. ([www.gullrocklightkeepers.org](http://www.gullrocklightkeepers.org)) He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a master's in international affairs from Columbia University in New York.

## Source

*About the author.* Great lakes water wars, Retrieved October 28, 2008, from <http://www.greatlakeswaterwars.com/about.htm>

## Jack Lessenberry Essay: Saving the Lakes - 10/11/06

Here's what a United Nations report said three years ago: "At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Earth is facing a serious water crisis. All the signs suggest that it is getting worse, and will continue to do so unless corrective action is taken."

That's true enough, but don't hold your breath until things get better. There are still people in Michigan who think that the one thing we will never have to worry about is fresh water. They should all read Peter Annin's new book, *The Great Lakes Water Wars*, and see his pictures of the Aral Sea, in what used to be Soviet Central Asia. In the 1960s, it was almost as large as Lake Superior.

Now it is nearly all gone. Ninety percent of the water has disappeared. You can stand on a dry sea bed that was under forty-five feet of water not all that long ago. For miles there is nothing, except the hulks of rusting fishing boats.

This was once a thriving ecosystem, and a center of the Soviet fishing industry. It is all dead now. What water remains is so salty that almost nothing can live in it. Soviet planners diverted the rivers that kept the Aral Sea replenished with fresh water, so they could irrigate new lands in the desert.

Within a few years, the sea began to die.

You may think it couldn't happen here. Well, think again. We live in a world where two-thirds of the world's population soon will be facing water shortages. We live in a nation where virtually all the population growth is where water is in increasingly short supply.

Forty years ago, when the water sparkled and fish played in the Aral Sea, Michigan and Ohio had a total of 47 congressmen. Water-strapped Texas and Arizona had a mere 31. Today, they have 44, and we have only 37.

And we lose political clout, and the water-needy states gain, with every census. Someday a thirsty nation may look to the Great Lakes as their last desperate hope.

And what do we do then? How do we protect the Lakes from greed and pollution and corrupt or foolish politicians, whose idea of the long view ends with their next election?

We could start with the Great Lakes Water Resources Compact, signed last year by all eight states which border the lakes. This agreement prevents most new water diversions, and requires every state to have a water conservation plan. Ontario and Quebec have signed a companion agreement. But for the Compact to have any clout, the legislatures of all eight states have to ratify it.

Not one has yet done so.

We don't have forever. I do not want to someday drive across the Superior Mud Flats to gaze at the ruins of the Edmund Fitzgerald.

Besides, if that happens, we'll probably all be dead anyway. And if you don't believe that could ever happen, get Peter Annin's book. And look hard at what used to be the Aral Sea.

### Source

Lessenberry, J. (2006). Jack Lessenberry's essay's and interviews: Essay: saving the lakes - 10-11-06. Retrieved October 28, 2008, from [http://jackshow.blogs.com/jack/2006/10/essay\\_saving\\_th.html](http://jackshow.blogs.com/jack/2006/10/essay_saving_th.html)

## Discussion Questions

### Current Events & Politics Discussion Questions

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not?
2. What did you know about the subject prior to reading this book? How has this book changed or enhanced your view of the subject?
3. Did the book seem adequately researched? Why or why not?
4. What did you find to be the most interesting events in this book? What, if anything, surprised you?
5. What impact do you think the central figure (or figures) portrayed in this book will have on history? Can you see this book being discussed in later years?
6. With omnipresent media influences around us all day—cable television, talk radio and blogs, as well as traditional media outlets like print and broadcast—do you look for books in this genre (current events & politics) to deliver a different perspective to you? Did this book do that?
7. If the subject is political and is not in line with your personal political beliefs, how did you feel about reading it? Has it changed your opinion at all? Why or why not?
8. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book?
9. What did you like or dislike about the book that hasn't been discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read other works by this author? Are you inclined to read more books on the topic? Why or why not?

### Source

Reading group guides: the online community for reading groups. Current events & politics discussion questions. Retrieved October 24, 2008, from [http://www.readinggroupguides.com/no\\_guide/guide\\_current\\_politics.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/no_guide/guide_current_politics.asp)

*Courtesy of One-Minute Book Reviews*