

Bob Hewson reading Dam Nation by Stephen Grace

Dam Nation is a 12 chapter 260 page outline of Western Water use and abuse. The focus becomes the Colorado River, however it includes stories of many other western rivers from the Columbia to the Rio Grande. As the title suggests, the book describes the beginning, the current situation and for some, the end of dams in the Western US.

If someone is looking for a book to feel good about our Nations investments in dam and diversion construction, they might want to look elsewhere. The author does a great job to describe needs that turn into justification for action in building these gigantic structures only to find out that many of these so called needs were really wants by a few privileged folks who used these efforts for personal gain. Just as I was becoming totally irritated by the facts of the matter, the author added more information of how possibly the structure could be justified by true needs that were sometimes unrelated to the original reason the dam was built.....such as power needs to fight a war. These balancing acts within each story kept me entertained as well as sharing some terrific insights.

Did I really use the word entertained in the above description? Yes, this author has a unique way of threading stories into the otherwise facts / figures and complexities of the subject matter. Stephen also does in my opinion a great job of using just enough history to set the stage without getting too far into the weeds which easily could toggle the snooze switch. The author sets the stage, tells the stories and then brings the reader in using present day events to have them recognize, we are part of the story. In looking back on the "experience" of this book, I would make a guestimate that over 50 unique and different stories are told within the 260 pages which makes for a fun read.

Would I recommend the book? I absolutely would.

Why might I recommend the book? Bottomline, it is a fun read. Yes it is packed with facts – figures and important details both historical and present day however presented in humorous, irritating, curious, enlightening manner. The reader will certainly gain a significant amount of knowledge about western water and its complexities in use.

What 3 key points would I like to share and discuss with the class?

For every action there is a reaction and for that we must be flexible, patient and understanding because no one solution solves everyone's challenges.

Sometimes that which made sense then - doesn't mean it has to make sense today and we should be prepared to use latest data to possibly make better decisions for future.

Politics certainly has its place however if we rely on Government to solve our problems, Government will continue to be the problem.

I came away with the enthusiasm to get more involved within the community for our water concerns. This book both empowered me and gave me a kick in the pants to get involved.