

**Discussion Questions**  
***Blue Revolution: Unmaking America's Water Crisis***  
**By Cynthia Barnett**

**Chapter 1: The Illusion of Water Abundance**

Do you think the United States is in a water “crisis,” when it has so much freshwater relative to other places?

Did anything surprise you about the biggest uses of water in the United States?

What is your reaction to Americans’ personal water use compared with people in other nations?

Barnett says that “it’s not that we don’t have enough water – it’s that we don’t have enough water to waste.” Where do you see water wasted (i.e., where do you see an “illusion of water abundance”)?

**Chapter 2: Reclamation to Restoration**

What are some of the lessons and unintended consequences of drainage and other alterations in the Everglades of Florida or the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta of California?

Water management is political because political bodies pass water laws and fund water projects. Yet, most citizens don’t pay attention to the politics of water. How does this apathy hurt water resources? Do you have any ideas for changing it?

**Chapter 3: The Netherlands: Deluge, Dams, and the Dutch Miracle**

Barnett points out that the Dutch are much more intensely focused on water than Americans. Why is this?

Do you think it will take a crisis of epic proportions for us to embrace a water ethic, or is this something we might do without crisis?

**Chapter 4: Energy**

How are water use and energy use interrelated?

Which U.S. energy source requires the most water to produce, and how should the demands of different sources help inform state and national energy policy?

**Chapter 5: Agriculture**

Agriculture and energy each withdraw about a 40 percent slice of the U.S. water pie. Why does agricultural water use have such a bigger impact than that of energy water use?

How might changing agricultural practices reduce that demand?

Who bears the burden of today's agricultural practices?

Ethanol is seen by alternative-energy advocates as having great potential for reducing our reliance on fossil fuels. What are possible unintended consequences?

### **Chapter 6: The Water-Industrial Complex**

Why do you think energy efficiency has gotten so much more attention as part of the U.S. "green" movement than water?

What is the difference between a "supply-side" and "demand-side" strategy for managing our freshwaters?

### **Chapter 7: Singapore: Of Songbirds and Sewage**

What do you think about Singaporeans recycling every drop of their water? Would you be willing to drink highly treated water recycled from sewage? Why or why not?

How are some parts of the United States already doing so?

### **Chapter 8: The Big Dipper**

What do you think of moving water long-distance from places that seem to have plenty (such as the Great Lakes region) to places where water is scarcer (such as the arid Southwest)?

Florida, Georgia, and Alabama have been fighting over the Chattahoochee River for more than 20 years, at great expense to both taxpayers and water resources. Why do you think the political and legal systems have been so ineffective figuring this out? What other institutions or players would you like to see called in?

How are churches in Atlanta addressing a water ethic? How do UU principles apply to the human right to water and a national water ethic?

### **Chapter 9: The Business of Blue**

How is it that people are willing to pay extraordinarily high prices for water in a plastic bottle, yet few value the water that comes from their tap? Is water too cheap?

How could raising the price of water help solve water problems? What are some arguments against?

### **Chapter 10: Australia: Dry Down Under**

Australia experienced an epic drought that stretched the entire first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Scientists say the continent was seeing the water impacts of climate change earlier than the rest of us. What is the message for the United States? Do you think Americans are open to hearing such a message? Why or why not?

In the United States, women make up only 11.5 percent of working engineers and only 10 percent of utility workers. Do you believe this could have any bearing on the management of our water or energy resources? Why or why not?

### **Chapter 11: An American Water Ethic**

Why do you think an Endangered Species Act case in San Antonio was able to do what many other court cases, political efforts, and water-awareness campaigns have not?

Rainfall is an easily available, inexpensive, and ample source of water for irrigation and other uses in many parts of the country. Why don't more people tap rainwater?

### **Chapter 12: Local Water**

During your childhood, what was the closest water body? Were you able to swim and play in it, or not? How does that place shape your view of water?

How might you define a "water ethic" at these levels: Personal? In your local community? In the United States? What about overseas?

### **BONUS QUESTIONS!**

What is the natural source of the water you use at home?

After you use that water and it swirls down the drain, where does it go?

How does the human right to water – access to safe, sufficient, affordable water for daily human needs – have a place in the "new water ethic"?

Try the [UUSC Water Scavenger Hunt](#) and learn about your local water and potential impacts on it. Being better informed will help to realize the human right to water in your community.

