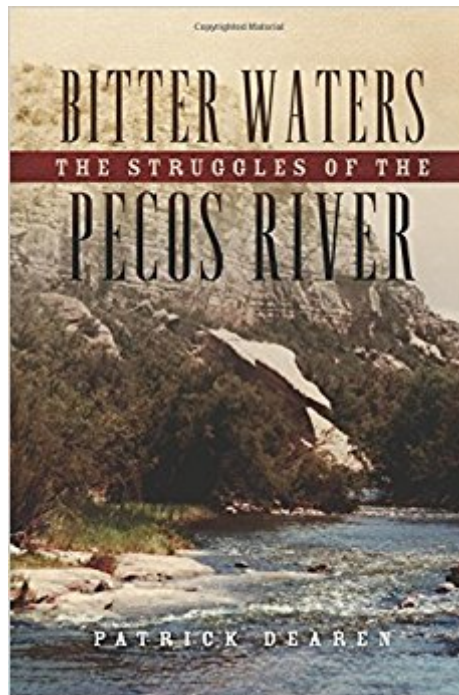




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Bitter Waters: The Struggles Of The Pecos River



Synopsis

WINNER: 2016 NEW MEXICO-ARIZONA BOOK AWARD Rising at 11,750 feet in the Sangre de Cristo range and snaking 926 miles through New Mexico and Texas to the Rio Grande, the Pecos River is one of the most storied waterways in the American West. It is also one of the most troubled. In 1942, the National Resources Planning Board observed that the Pecos River basin "probably presents a greater aggregation of problems associated with land and water use than any other irrigated basin in the Western U.S." In the twenty-first century, the river's problems have only multiplied. *Bitter Waters*, the first book-length study of the entire Pecos, traces the river's environmental history from the arrival of the first Europeans in the sixteenth century to today. Running clear at its source and turning salty in its middle reach, the Pecos River has served as both a magnet of veneration and an object of scorn. Patrick Dearen, who has written about the Pecos since the 1980s, draws on more than 150 interviews and a wealth of primary sources to trace the river's natural evolution and man's interaction with it. Irrigation projects, dams, invasive saltcedar, forest proliferation, fires, floods, flow decline, usage conflicts, water quality deterioration--Dearen offers a thorough and clearly written account of what each factor has meant to the river and its prospects. As fine-grained in detail as it is sweeping in breadth, the picture *Bitter Waters* presents is sobering but not without hope, as it also extends to potential solutions to the Pecos River's problems and the current efforts to undo decades of damage. Combining the research skills of an accomplished historian, the investigative techniques of a veteran journalist, and the engaging style of an award-winning novelist, this powerful and accessible work of environmental history may well mark a turning point in the Pecos's fortunes.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Bitter Waters is full of facts and numbers but is a comfortable read. As author Patrick Dearen shows, the current and future demands on the Pecos will most likely bring on some great challenges.”
•Rick Tate, Texas Commissioner, Pecos River Commission
“A thought-provoking study. To all who realize that water will be more priceless than gold, this is a must-read.”
•Ray Willis, New Mexico Commissioner, Pecos River

“Bitter Waters offers an artesian well of information that will captivate the leisurely and scholarly-minded reader alike. From rich descriptions of the river’s ecology and geomorphology to colorful narratives of its present-day apologists and adversaries, author Patrick Dearen gives a clear-eyed and unfettered picture of the river’s historical and contemporary struggles. Whether you worry about the future of our wild things and wild places, depend upon the river for your land or your livelihood, or simply care for a tough old, meandering river that has loomed large in the history and settlement of the West, this book needs to be at the top of your reading list.”
•Carter Smith Executive Director, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Patrick Dearen, winner of the Spur Award from the Western Writers of America, is an authority on the Pecos and Devils Rivers and the author of ten nonfiction books and twelve novels, including *The Big Drift*, *The Illegal Man*, *To Hell or the Pecos*, and *Crossing Rio Pecos*.

Very well researched and very informative. If you are interested in New Mexico’s water, you should read this book! Without taking sides, it inadvertently highlights the ridiculous nature of the 1947 Compact, a good idea that was not based on reality.

A good book about the history of the Pecos river and the ranchers and farmers who use its water.

Well researched and written. Thanks

For all who care about the Pecos, a river of legend and tall tales, here’s reality. Patrick Dearen has written a masterful story of the river, past, present, and future.

Another good book.

Very interesting since I grew up in grandchild in the sixties. I have seen up to the steep banks and just a trickle. Seen lots of salt draft.

Always a good read

NATURE & ECOLOGY Patrick Dearen Bitter Waters: The Struggles of the Pecos River University of Oklahoma Press Hardcover 978-0-8061-5201-1 (also available as an ebook), 256 pgs.,

\$29.95 March 2016 WINNER, 2016 NEW MEXICO-ARIZONA BOOK AWARD The headwaters of the Pecos originate 13,000 feet up in the Sangre de Christo Mountains of New Mexico.

“Fed by snowmelt, springs, and monsoon rains,” writes author Patrick Dearen, “the Pecos plunges over dramatic Pecos Falls within its first four miles and tumbles on down out of the Sangre de Cristos’ elongated horseshoe of thrusting peaks and massive ridges. The Pecos proceeds on its way to the Amistad Reservoir where it mingles with other tributaries on their way to the Gulf of Mexico. The first historical record we have of the character of the Pecos River is from a Spanish expedition in 1583. Antonio de Espejo christened the stream El Salado (salty). By 1942 the National Resources Planning Board declared that “[f]or its size the basin of the Pecos River probably presents a greater aggregation of problems than any other irrigated basin in the Western U.S. The challenges include, but are not limited to, decreasing flow, recurring droughts, salinity, sedimentation, golden algae, low oxygen levels, the needs of endangered species, recreational overuse and abuse, and thickening of watershed brush (imported salt cedars). The Pecos River Resolution Corporation (PRRC), incorporated in 2007, is a nonprofit dedicated to documenting the Pecos River of the past and present [and] exploring remedies for its ills and its potential for the future. Bitter Waters: The Struggles of the Pecos River is the first stage of this project and also represents Midland resident Patrick Dearen’s more than thirty years of personal exploration of the river. Dearen brings his novelist’s skills to natural ecology, and he does an excellent job of relating the inter-relatedness of things. As a result, Bitter Waters is more literary than expected. Dearen’s prodigious research provides a wealth of well-organized facts and figures snugly wrapped in narrative. Carefully chosen photographs, many from Dearen’s personal collection, enhance the text. One of the most basic considerations when attempting to “restore the Pecos is

determining a baseline target. Is it 1583, 1961, or sometime in between? The Spanish began irrigation farming in 1794; dams, reservoirs, and canals appeared in the late nineteenth century; drilling of wells began in 1911. As early as 1891, the issue of flow in such salty water was identified. Waste from mining enterprises was dumped directly into the Pecos. The federal government did their part by mismanaging protection of the headwaters and watershed with policies that suppressed wildfires and allowed overgrazing. Project Gnome, an initiative of the Atomic Energy Commission, detonated a nuclear bomb underground, over an aquifer that ultimately emptied into the Pecos at Malaga Bend, in 1961. The amount of salt carried downstream, threatening the Amistad Reservoir's future as a municipal water supply for two nations, became an international issue in 1964. Climate change spurs the northward spread of the Sonora and Chihuahua Deserts. Texas and New Mexico have fought in legislatures and courts for decades over apportionment of the life-giving Pecos. The future of an enormous expanse from northern New Mexico to the mouth of the Pecos and on down the Rio Grande to the Gulf of Mexico is at stake. Whether or not the Pecos River can be saved remains an open question. Originally published in Lone Star Literary Life.

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