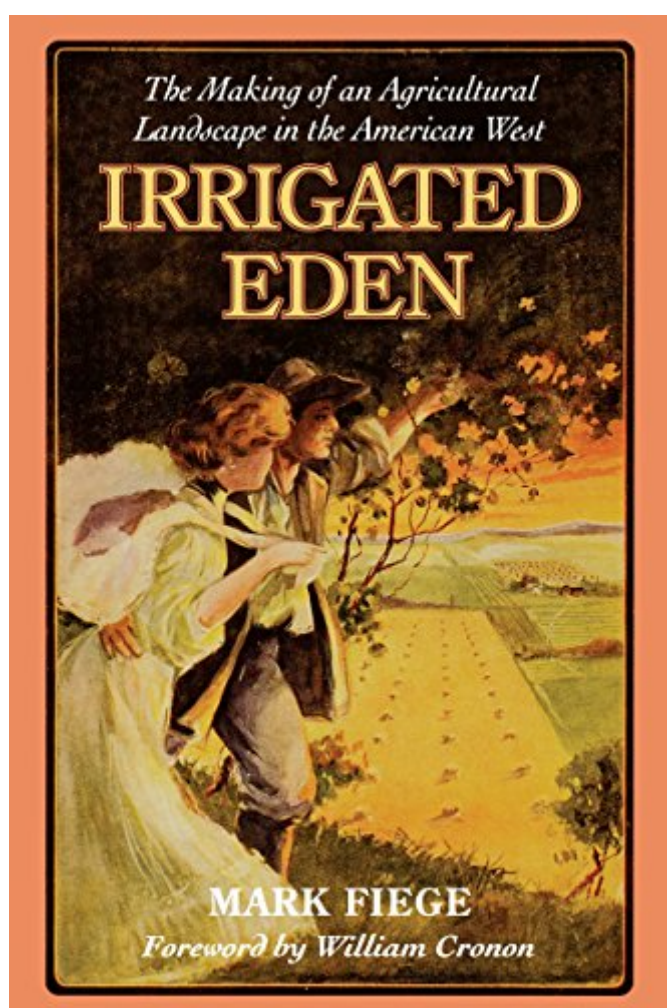


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Irrigated Eden: The Making Of An Agricultural Landscape In The American West (Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books)



Synopsis

Irrigation came to the arid West in a wave of optimism about the power of water to make the desert bloom. Mark Fiege's fascinating and innovative study of irrigation in southern Idaho's Snake River valley describes a complex interplay of human and natural systems. Using vast quantities of labor, irrigators built dams, excavated canals, laid out farms, and brought millions of acres into cultivation. But at each step, nature rebounded and compromised the intended agricultural order. The result was a new and richly textured landscape made of layer upon layer of technology and intractable natural forces—one that engineers and farmers did not control with the precision they had anticipated. Irrigated Eden vividly portrays how human actions inadvertently helped to create a strange and sometimes baffling ecology. Winner of the Idaho Library Association Book Award, 1999 Winner of the Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Award, Forest History Society, 1999-2000

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Customer Reviews

People interested in the history of western agriculture should read this. I found it very interesting to compare the Southern Idaho irrigation projects he describes with what was happening along the mid-Columbia with private small irrigation projects during that period, through my own family, described in "Orchards of Eden" White Bluffs on the Columbia, 1907-1943" Also good to compare with the Autobiography of a woman who actually lived that life of irrigated wheat farming in Idaho during that period, "Sagebrush People" probably out of print now, too bad. Dr. Donald Worster's book "Rivers of Empire" is highly critical of what was done to the natural world in the effort to green the desert, and I tend to sympathize with what he says, while Fiege takes the position that irrigation has learned to live in harmony with nature. But what happened to those small farmers in the meantime? The good life got swept away in corporate farming I am afraid.

Irrigated EdenIn summary water along the Snake River in Idaho is unpredictable, not quantifiable, fickle and limited. Even in the 1920s when there were no uses competing with agriculture it had to be rationed. The surface water, ground water and aquifer commingle freely and as such should be jointly monitored and managed with "honest" diligence. When it comes to the water there is no such thing as partitioned individual water rights anywhere along the Snake River in Idaho because we are all inextricably woven together in one tub and an action by one entity will affect everyone else in the tub. What one man passes another man drinks. Mark Fiege has done an excellent job of quantifying both the temporal and philosophical circumstances surrounding the acquisition and use of water for agriculture along the Snake River in Idaho up until about 1920. This book is a great place for one to begin to understand the genesis of water acquisition and husbandry for agriculture in Southern Idaho. The first two thirds of the book and the notes are the best features of the book. The last third tends to drift away into a philosophical stretch without any real conclusions. Mark should now write a book that brings the use of water along the Snake River in Southern Idaho up to the present time and weave together all of the contemporary competing uses for that water. Based on his research Mark should take the next step and make some recommendations for the future husbandry of our water. Mark has only done the first half of the job because the story is exponentially dynamic and just beginning. Finish the story.

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