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**Review: The World's Water: The Biennial Report on Freshwater Resources 2002-2003**

By Peter Gleick, et al.

Reviewed by [Ryder W. Miller](#)  
San Francisco, California, USA

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Peter Gleick, et al. *The World's Water: The Biennial Report on Freshwater Resources 2002-2003*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002. ISBN 1-55963-949-0. US\$32.50. Recycled Acid Free Paper.

There are two possible paths before us, Peter Gleick in the third *The World's Water* points out. We must decide between the "soft" path and the "hard" path to manage our fresh water resources. In Gleick's and contributor Gary Wolff's words "the 'hard' path-relies almost exclusively on centralized infrastructure and decision making: dams and reservoirs, pipelines and treatment plants, water departments and agencies. It delivers water, mostly of potable quality, and takes away wastewater. The second path-the 'soft' path-may also rely on centralized infrastructure, but complements it with extensive investment in decentralized facilities, efficient technologies, and human capital. It strives to improve the overall productivity of water use rather than seek endless sources of new supply. It delivers diverse water services matched to the users' needs and works with water users at local and community scales" (p. 1).

In the developing world more than one billion people live without access to fresh water and 2.5 billion without access to proper sanitation. Gleick and Wolff write: "half the world's population still suffers with water services inferior to those available to the ancient Greeks and Romans" (p. 2). An estimated 10 to 20 thousand children die each day of preventable water-related diseases. Water remains a security issue, and wars will probably continue to be fought over it.

All the issues, international situations, indices, and data are daunting, but the authors go a long way towards showing how important the issues are. Much thought has gone into researching the subject, but much work needs to be done. There are a large numbers of definitions, and in chapter four the authors struggle to establish indices to monitor the supply of fresh water, some of which are complicated.

Included in this compendium on *The World's Water* are the arguments for us to change our ways so as to adopt the soft path for water use, and discussion of the issues involved in the globalization of water, the pros and cons of privatization of water (making water supply dependent upon market

forces), the attempt to create indices to measure water conditions, the water battles of the American Southwest, the worsening situation in the Pacific Islands, Turkey's GAP Project, international damming issues, water in space, and new water data. Included are updates, and there are also expansions of the subject matter from the previous compendiums.

What emerges from this work is awareness of the need for us to be as concerned about water as we have been about gasoline. In parts of the western world we take water for granted, but water could become scarce as it is in the developing world. If you cannot do it yourself, get your landlord to fix your leaky faucet.

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