



Not So Golden State: Sustainability vs. the California Dream

Char Miller

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In *Not So Golden State*, leading environmental historian Char Miller looks below the surface of California's ecological history to expose some of its less glittering conundrums. In this necessary book, he asks the tough questions as we stand on the edge of a human-induced natural disaster in the region and beyond. He details policy steps and missteps in public land management, examines the impact of recreation on national forests, parks, and refuges, and assesses efforts to restore wild land habitat, riparian ecosystems, and endangered species.

Why, during a devastating five-year drought, Miller asks, is the Central Valley's agribusiness still irrigating its fields as if it's business as usual? Why are northern counties rich in groundwater selling it off to make millions while draining their aquifers toward eventual mud? Why, when contemporary debate over oil and gas drilling questions reasonable practices, are extractive industries targeting Chaco Canyon National Historic Park and its ancient sites, which are of inestimable value to Native Americans? How do we begin to understand "local," a concept of hope for modern environmentalism?

To inhabit a place requires placed-based analyses, whatever the geographic scope—examinations that are rooted in a precise, physical reality. To make a conscientious life in a suburb, floodplain, fire zone, or coastline requires a heightened awareness of these landscapes' past so we can develop an intensified responsibility for their present condition and future prospects.

Miller explores these issues and more in *Not So Golden State*, and understanding them will be critical in our creation of more resilient, habitable, and equitable communities for California's future.

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Christine Knox:

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