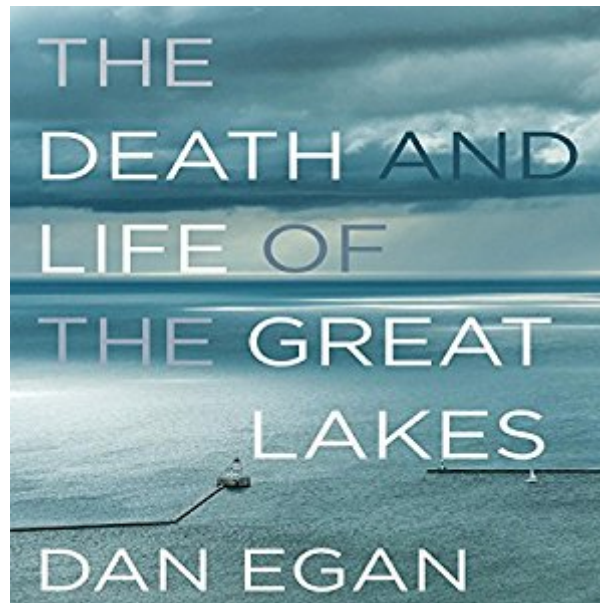




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# **The Death And Life Of The Great Lakes**



## Synopsis

The Great Lakes - Erie, Huron, Michigan, Ontario, and Superior - hold 20 percent of the world's supply of surface fresh water and provide sustenance, work, and recreation for tens of millions of Americans. But they are under threat as never before, and their problems are spreading across the continent. *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes* is prize-winning reporter Dan Egan's engaging portrait of an ecological catastrophe happening right before our eyes, blending the epic story of the lakes with an examination of the perils they face and the ways we can restore and preserve them for generations to come. For thousands of years, the pristine Great Lakes were separated from the Atlantic Ocean by the roaring Niagara Falls and from the Mississippi River basin by a "subcontinental divide". Beginning in the late 1800s, these barriers were circumvented to attract oceangoing freighters from the Atlantic and to allow Chicago's sewage to float out to the Mississippi. These were engineering marvels in their time - and the changes in Chicago arrested a deadly cycle of waterborne illnesses - but they have had horrendous unforeseen consequences. Egan provides a chilling account of how sea lamprey, zebra and quagga mussels, and other invaders have made their way into the lakes, decimating native species and largely destroying the age-old ecosystem. And because the lakes are no longer isolated, the invaders now threaten water intake pipes, hydroelectric dams, and other infrastructure across the country. Egan also explores why outbreaks of toxic algae stemming from the overapplication of farm fertilizer have left massive biological "dead zones" that threaten the supply of fresh water. He examines fluctuations in the levels of the lakes caused by manmade climate change and overzealous dredging of shipping channels. And he reports on the chronic threats to siphon off Great Lakes water to slake drier regions of America or to be sold abroad. In an age when dire problems like the Flint water crisis or the California drought bring ever more attention to the indispensability of safe, clean, easily available water, *The Death and the Life of the Great Lakes* is a powerful paean to what is arguably our most precious resource, an urgent examination of what threatens it, and a convincing call to arms about the relatively simple things we need to do to protect it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dan Egan's book is fascinating from start to finish. I learned a myriad of new facts about the Great Lakes' geological and inherent histories, as well as about accounts of invasive species introduced through the miscalculations of people and governments. Egan's compelling talent for telling stories with engaging details and intriguing characters makes this book an enjoyable educational experience.

The title, "The Death and Life of the Great Lakes" is apparently a take-off on the title of Jane Jacobs' "The Death and Life of Great American Cities." But don't let that put you off. Dan Egan is a newspaper writer and knows how to write readable material, first-class readable material. This is not a science book about the Great Lakes, but rather science reporting (however, if you don't believe in science, don't waste your money) on ecology and hydrology and how man manages to mess up evolved nature, with the Great Lakes serving as the hook. It's quick and easy reading, but the kind of book that will make you shake your head in disbelief about the short-sightedness of too many people. I bet you'll learn lots more detail about invasive species of water creatures that have harmed the Great Lakes and other bodies of water than you already know, unless you follow this sort of thing closely. You'll also learn about the sinking of the S.S. Eastland on the Chicago River in 1915 "which killed hundreds of passengers," the point being that if a boat load is not properly balanced, the boat will tip over. Less useful, you'll learn on page 251 that James Camak, a University of Georgia math professor, "had a weak chin" and on page 256 that Chauncey Olin, an 18-year-old boy, had "a beak for a nose and ears the size of saucers." I highly recommend.

This is a superb and comprehensive history of the efforts men have made to control the Great Lakes, and the often hugely harmful results, usually not anticipated. The Seaway was obsolete when it opened because its locks were too small, and shipping containers launched about the same time changed the whole nature of commercial navigation. But ships using the Seaway did bring in

devastating foreign invaders, from aquatic plants to sea lampreys, alewives, and mussels. Egan is good on the financial interests, the appalling inaction by the EPA on ballast and pollution from farms, and the Army Corp's resistance to consider shutting down the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal which threatens Lake Michigan with an invasion of carp. I've read pieces of many of the topics he covers, but he goes into great depth and links the pieces together in a very readable book. His conclusion seems to be to proceed with caution, but there is hope. Native species such as lake trout and whitefish are rebounding and there's hope for perch.

For all those who love the Great Lakes and are concerned about the future environmental health of this nation, this book should be required reading. It ranks with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in my opinion as a book that should bring environmental concerns to a much wider audience especially now in the era of possible extreme budget cuts to the EPA and climate deniers.

Maybe not of interest to everyone, but if you have history with, and love for the Great Lakes this is a great read. I turned the pages like it was a murder mystery and I could hardly wait to find out the next clue about what would live and what would die beneath the waves. Full of fascinating science and interesting trivia and history. I am going to read it again to help me remember what I learned.

very well presented, engaging writing... the costs to us of pollution by invasive species is something we should all be more aware of as it is likely going to get much worse before it gets better

Spent more than half my life living on the shores of Lake Erie and Lake Michigan, yet there was so much I didn't know. I have learned so much from this book! It is excellent and highly recommended, whether you live by the Great Lakes or not. I remember walking the shores of Lake Erie as a child with all the dead fish piled on the beaches. I didn't go back to the beach for years. I have also gazed in wonderment as I watch salmon every year heading up a stream where I hike along Lake Erie, wondering how they got there. Now I know! Who knew they stocked the Great Lakes with millions of Pacific salmon? Some still hold on to this day. And when living in Chicago, I never understood exactly why they reversed the flow of the Chicago river, and how they did that. ALL of these questions and more answered in this important book. Please read it!!

A MUST read for anyone concerned about the Great Lakes or the environment in general. Egan is a fine author who presents a complicated scientific discussion in very easy to follow layman's terms.

Believe it or not it is a page turner! Highly recommended.

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