

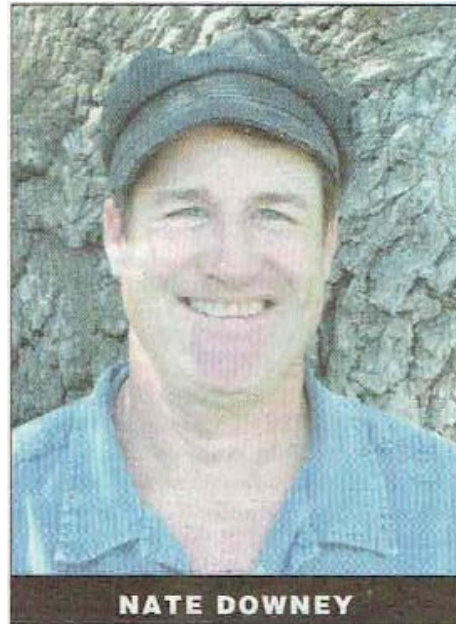
Big dams suck

Large institutions love to spend big money. First, it's part of the old win-friends-and-influence-people gig. Befriending the power structure of a region, state, or nation? Build a reservoir.

Second, our buy-in-bulk mentality makes us think that it costs more to spend \$10,000 in 100,000 places than to spend \$1,000,000,000 in one place. But dumping money quickly, dramatically, and enormously is not the same as investing carefully, effectively, and productively. The World Bank's big water projects are perfect examples. Often with worthy intentions, this overgrown outfit will squander the cost of a cistern system in the time it takes you to read this.

We've always known that myriad faunal species are affected negatively by big dams, but it turns out such structures are one of the primary causes of fish extinction. We may have an intuitive sense that a few poor folks have had to move for large river-impeding projects, but were you aware that close to 80,000,000 people have been displaced by dam development? We used to think that hydroelectricity was much cleaner than coal, but due to the methane released by the decaying plant material in a reservoir, we've recently discovered that hydroelectric power generators can contribute to global warming more than coal-fired utilities. Rather than causing this kind of pollution, dead and dying flora are supposed to remain on the landscape, perhaps tucked along the edge of an arroyo, streambed, or riverbank where they might provide the nutrients necessary for soil building.

Everyone understands dams lose vast quantities of water to evaporation, that they account for significant carbon miles during construction, and that they scar the face of Earth, but few have read the work of Benjamin Fong Chao, a scientist with NASA, who reported sensing the effect of big dams on our planet's rotation. Even if dam building doesn't send our planet spinning out of orbit, the economic fact remains that the average dam silts up quickly with respect to its construction and maintenance costs.



I'm not sure why people insist on buying economic boondoggles and environmental disasters, but it doesn't have to be this way. We could follow the example of the Gremlin Bank and invest locally in small-scale technology. Increased investment in residential and commercial water-harvesting systems would create good jobs as they heal the land and provide people with the most valuable of resources.

Picture three houses for sale on the same city block. One's a desolate moonscape, while the second features a parched lawn and scrawny trees. The third incorporates swales, mulch, French drains, a cistern, and a greywater system. It boasts proud xeric blooms and plenty of shade, wind protection, and privacy — even the occasional handful of golden currants. With water rates going up, which would you buy?

Interested in learning more? There's a loose group of people looking into ways of incentivizing water harvesting at the local level. Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information.

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