

An aerial photograph of a lush green landscape featuring a winding river that meanders through terraced rice fields. The fields are arranged in curved, concentric patterns, creating a complex, organic shape. The river is a dark, narrow channel that flows through the center of the terraces. The overall scene is vibrant and verdant, with various shades of green and some small structures visible in the distance.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE EIGHTEEN

By Laurie Moberg, Managing Editor

On local and global scales, concerns about our water systems emerge from many directions. We read stories of contaminants compromising hydrologies and water ecologies, of farm runoff in the Midwest creating an expansive hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico. We view shocking images of the effects of a decades-long drought diminishing the flow of the Colorado River. Hazardous drinking water conditions and deteriorating infrastructures like those in Flint, Michigan inspire distrust in resource management methods and make evident how inequalities and injustices are part of everyday entanglements with water. The present conditions of water—and

our relationships to it—provoke an endless set of questions about what our future with water may look like.

This issue approaches the question of the future of water from a different angle by exploring practices that move us toward desirable futures with water. Rather than focusing on the challenges of amount or quality of water, we asked authors to be visionary, to imagine the future they want with water and the possibilities of making it a reality. Specifically, we offered a single organizing question for the issue: What knowledges, practices, and perspectives do we need in order to create the



Irrigation canal. Image by Ivan Bandura.

water futures we imagine and want? The articles in this issue present work that draws on history and art, community engagement and community-based practices, Indigenous epistemologies and analysis of satellite data. Collectively, the articles point us toward provocative and creative examples of the water futures people are already striving to create.

Elan Pochedley addresses this central question by demonstrating that as settler colonialism removed people from land, these practices compromised relationships between people and more-than-human others including waterways and mnomen. Pochedley explores water futures through the potentialities of restorative cartography, asserting that “the historic presences of the Potawatomi and mnomen, once mapped, provide an image of what has been and what could be once more.”

Trinity Ek walks us through the history of Bassett Creek in north Minneapolis, demonstrating that to understand water futures, we must understand water histories. Focusing on the issues of environmental injustice that led the creek to be hidden underground, Ek suggests that considerations for the creek’s future have the potential to disrupt rather than reproduce systems of inequality. Scot McFarlane similarly points to river histories as contested, complex, and critical tools as we confront environmental and social challenges now and into the future.

Other articles describe community practices that inspire commitment to shared water futures. Moira Villiard, in an interview about her “animated video collage” installation, *Madweyaashkaa: Waves Can Be Heard*, speaks to the power of public art as creating connections—to other people, but also to water, to nature more broadly,

and to ancestors. Sayanangshu Modak illustrates the value of community-managed irrigation systems in India for future water policy. The issue also includes a review by David Morrison of the exhibit, *Why Canoes? Capacious Vessels and Indigenous Futures of Minnesota’s Peoples and Places*, which centers the craft of canoe building among several groups of Indigenous peoples in Minnesota as part of shaping Indigenous futures and relationships to place.

To provide another perspective on exploring practices that move us toward desirable futures with water, we republish an article that analyzes how saltwater incursion is affecting coastal forests and argues that this evidence of climate change and sea-level rise leaves us with a choice for our futures: fight the seemingly insurmountable ecological changes or strategically adapt. And the two options may not be mutually exclusive.

Finally, we include a series of short responses to the issue’s organizing question: What knowledges, practices, and perspectives do we need in order to create the water futures we imagine and want? While we share insights from researchers, community partners, community practitioners, and leaders in this issue, we also invite you to share your perspective. We hope to include reader stories in a future issue of *Open Rivers*.

The pieces in this issue demonstrate how people are creating water futures across disciplines, sectors, media, and geographies. They also compel us to consider not only the pressing water issues of the moment, but the histories that brought us to this point, and the possibilities of what our relationships with water should, could, and will be into the future. Enjoy.

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About the Author

Laurie Moberg is the managing editor for *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community* and the project manager for the Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative at the University of Minnesota. She earned her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Minnesota in 2018. Her doctoral research investigates recurrent episodes of flooding on rivers in Thailand and queries how the ecological, social, and cosmological entanglements between people and the material world are reimagined and reconfigured in the aftermath of disasters. In her work at the University of Minnesota, Laurie brings her ethnographic sensibilities, attention to story, and interest in human-nonhuman relations to questions of water and absented narratives closer to home.