

Dams in the American West

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I grew up in the era of the road trip in the Pacific Northwest. One of the obligatory stops was always some big dam, often to look at the salmon and sturgeon, because my father worked for the Department of Fish and Wildlife. The irony of that didn't hit me until years later.

In the years since, I've become aware of the multitude of dams that we rely on – dry flood control structures in the desert Southwest, power and irrigation facilities in the Central Valley of California, and dams that impound drinking water all across the West.

These structures are central to the American way of life, yet we generally look at them with a tourist's eye. We rarely really see them in the fullness of their cultural, economic, and environmental impacts. Visiting these structures in person, we see an engineering marvel, an attraction or recreation site, a utility to support our lifestyle. For good and bad, dams invade our landscapes, our economy and our society. These photos are an attempt to prompt a contemporary look at the dams in all these aspects.