



Recovering a Lost River: Removing Dams, Rewilding Salmon, Revitalizing Communities

Steven Hawley

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A powerful argument for why dam removal makes good scientific, economic, and environmental sense—and requires our urgent attention

The Snake River, flowing through the Northwest, was once one of the world's greatest salmon rivers. As recently as a hundred years ago, it retained some of its historic bounty with seven million fish coming home to spawn there. Now, due to damming for hydroelectricity over the past fifty years, the salmon population has dropped close to extinction. Efforts at salmon recovery, through fish ladders, hatcheries, and even trucking them over the dams, have failed.

Hawley argues that the solution for the Snake River lies in dam removal, pitting the power authority and Army Corps of Engineers against a collection of conservationists, farmers, commercial and recreational fishermen, and the Nez Perce tribe. He also demonstrates the interconnectedness of the river's health to Orca whales in Puget Sound, local economies, fresh water rights, and energy independence.

This regional battle has garnered national interest, and is part of a widespread river-restoration movement that stretches from Maine's Kennebec to California's Klamath. In one instance, Butte Creek salmon rebounded from a paltry fourteen fish to twenty thousand within just a few years of rewilding their river, showing the incredible resiliency of nature when given the slightest chance. In this timely book, Hawley shows how river restoration, with dam removal as its centerpiece, is not only virtuous ecological practice, but a growing social and economic enterprise.



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