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SCIENCE NEWS

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In 1987, Alice Outwater, an environmental engineer, joined the \$6 billion Boston Harbor cleanup project to monitor the chemical content of Boston Harbor's sludge. The sludge was smelly all right, but to her surprise it was largely free of industrial contaminants. Even more surprising, reports from wastewater treatment plants across the country disclosed similar findings.

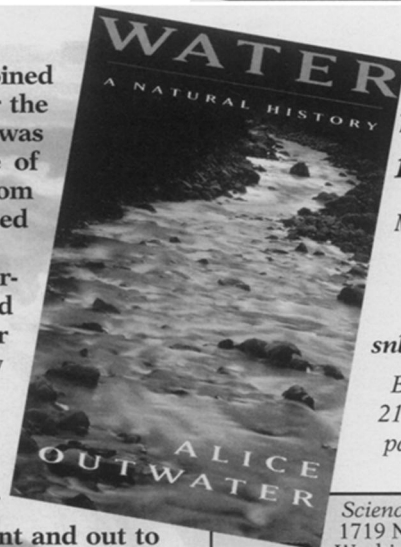
Industry may no longer be the culprit, but 30 to 40 percent of our streams and lakes remain unswimmable and unfishable. To understand what was happening, Outwater traveled back 500 years to recover a lost knowledge—how the land cleans its own water.

Water takes us back to the wardrobe records of the kings of France and the diaries of the first Western explorers. It moves from the reservoir to the toilet, from the grasslands of the Midwest to the Everglades of Florida, through the guts of a wastewater treatment plant and out to the waterways again. Step by step we come to understand what should have been obvious from the beginning: Complex ecological systems kept water remarkably clean for a long time, but as we have removed necessary components from it, we have simplified

the system to the point where it can no longer do its job. While engineering can depollute water, only these interacting ecological systems can create healthy waterways.

At the heart of this story is a vision of the land with living streams that have defined edges, public lands with hundreds of millions of beaver-built wetlands, prairie dog towns that increase the amount of rainfall that percolates to the groundwater, and forests that feed their fallen trees to the sea. *Water* is the unforgettable story of the symbiosis that existed between water, the land from which it springs, and the life the two support together. —from BasicBooks

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