Our Story of Water

Maya Waka Wapan (Chippewa) River

Every river and lake and stream has a story to tell. In Lakota the Maya Wapan River means “remarkable river with steep places”. Located in western Minnesota, for several decades the landscape surrounding the river has been economically dependent on producing corn and soybeans for commodity market. The river's ecosystem measures 2,080 acres.

Home

She is home for countless forms of life—including native and migrating waterfowl, amphibians, mammals, fish and soil, microbes and a source of water for people.

She flows 150 miles and empties into the waters of the Minnesota River and ultimately into the Gulf of Mexico.
Byproducts of Industrial Farming

However since the introduction of industrial-scale farming, the life of the river has been transformed.

In the 1990’s, she became the subject of a study called The Chippewa River Watershed Project.

The substances named here have been monitored and collected for nearly two decades. All of them are the byproducts of industrial farming. Efforts have been made to reduce the amount of pesticide and fertilizer applied to cropland, but these efforts have not reduced the levels of contamination.

Is She Still a River?

With all of these toxic substances in her waters, is she still a river?

Can a contaminated ecosystem continue to offer a home? If not, then how did this happen?
Downstream the Story Continues

The Chippewa River study reveals the impact of industrial farming for that river, but the results are similar for soil and water wherever the industry operates. As we follow the river downstream, the story continues. The Gulf of Mexico has been identified as one of the world’s largest ‘dead zones’. Decades of contaminants applied to crops upstream collect in the gulf. No life can be sustained in the gulf’s waters.

How Did this Happen?

How did a river system so full of promise and life become a repository for chemicals?

The condition of the river was not inevitable.

It is not the result of simple carelessness by a few thoughtless people.

It is the byproduct of a publicly subsidized food economy.
Water Story: Aquifers

An aquifer is an underground source of water contained in permeable rocks.

One of the world's largest aquifers is the Ogallala located in the Great Plains. It underlies an area of approximately 174,000 sq. mi) in portions of eight states.¹

Today, the Ogallala Aquifer is being depleted at an annual volume equivalent to 18 Colorado Rivers. More than 90 percent of the water pumped is used to irrigate millions of acres of industrial farms growing corn and soy used to feed cattle and hogs that are confined in enormous feedlots. This industry is highly dependent on irrigation of crops from the aquifer’s water source.

Aquifers can be replenished by rainfall. But rainfall cannot keep up with the rate of extraction by industrial use. If this industry continues to extract water at the current rate, this source of water will vanish in 30 years. The entire region is economically dependent on extraction of the aquifer’s water.

70% of the world’s freshwater is used for industrial agriculture.

¹ South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, And Texas
Contaminated Water and Vanishing Aquifers

Contamination of water systems and depletion of water sources are the direct consequence of an industrial approach to agriculture.

40% of our nation’s waterways fail to meet even minimum requirements of state and federal clean water laws.

How Did This Happen?

Depletion of the aquifer was not inevitable.

It is not the result of simple carelessness.

It is the byproduct of a publicly subsidized food economy that depends on practices that contaminate and deplete waters sources.
These practices are *legal*.

Water sustains life. But she is *not* protected by our laws.

Take heart.

Water can be restored when *industrial* agriculture is eliminated and replaced by *regenerative* agriculture. With public investments directed to regenerative systems, we can revive ecosystems and provide abundant sources of healthy food.

For more about the Ogallala Aquifer see: [waterencyclopedia.com/Oc-Po/Ogallala-Aquifer.html#ixzz4ahqm2si3](http://waterencyclopedia.com/Oc-Po/Ogallala-Aquifer.html#ixzz4ahqm2si3).