

TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
January 9, 2019

We're Hiring!

The Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy is in the market for our next postgraduate research fellow to start up in August! If you're graduating from law school (JD or LLM) in Spring 2019 or already graduated in 2018, and you're interested in joining us here at the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy, then check out [this job posting](#) and send your resume on in!

Out With The New, In With The Old

Two communities in the Andes have started using [hydraulic systems](#) that are hundreds of years old to irrigate to their wetlands and grasslands. The land is primarily used for grazing livestock, and has been negatively impacted by (plot twist!) livestock grazing- along with glacial melt and irregular rainfall. Over the last few decades, Peru alone has lost over 40% of its ice, one of its main water sources. This lack of water, [caused by climate change](#), has shrunk the country's wetlands.

The hydraulic systems that have been rehabilitated are a network of lakes, reservoirs, and canals, some of which are estimated to be at least 1,200 years old. Basically, the whole thing slows down the flow of water, either from rain or melting glaciers, and accumulates sediment. The end result is that the increased sediment levels improve the soil overall. It took two years to restore everything back to the point where it would function; restoration included cleaning up and clearing out debris, as well as the installation of pipes alongside the original stone piping in some places. So far, the restoration has been a success, and the canals are carrying significant amounts of water, even in the dry season.

[You Get A Tunnel! You Get a Tunnel! You Get A Tunnel!](#)

In an effort to deal with urban flooding ([wonder what that's like?](#)), Chicago has built [109 miles of massive tunnels](#) underneath the city's metro area that channels stormwater out of the streets. The tunnels are all connected to three reservoirs, the latter of which are not yet finished. The project started roughly 50 years ago, and similar projects are underway in cities all over the world.

Urban flooding initially became a problem in Chicago because the city has a [combined sewer system](#), which basically means that the stormwater runoff and sewer systems are combined. So, when it rains heavily and stormwater inundates the combined system, sewage ends up [backing up into people's homes](#) (usually their basements). That's where the tunnels come in. The tunnels are connected to a pumping station that pumps water out of the reservoirs and tunnels and into a water treatment plant. Some say the new tunnel system has been a

The **Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy** is a program of the Tulane University Law School.

The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and stewardship of water.

Coming up:

[CPRA Board Meeting](#)

January 16, 2019
Baton Rouge, LA

[Gulf Hypoxia Task Force Meeting](#)

January 29, 2019
Baton Rouge, LA

[Coastal Law CLE](#)

March 14-15, 2019
New Orleans, LA

Tulane Environmental Law Summit

March 22 & 23, 2019
New Orleans, LA

Water jobs:

[Senior Research Fellow](#)

Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
New Orleans, LA

[Gulf Program Manager](#)

SouthWings
New Orleans, LA

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success, but critics have argued that it is not enough, and that significant amounts of polluted runoff are [still reaching the Chicago River](#). Given the fact [that climate change is making weather more extreme](#), the new system also may not be able to handle the increased volume of stormwater runoff that is now routinely generated by storms. And, some say the city hasn't done enough to create or incentivize the adoption of [green infrastructure](#), which can also offset and mitigate the impacts of stormwater runoff.

With Neighbors Like That, Who Needs Enemies?

Several groups are now fighting to have some [levees along the Mississippi lowered](#) (north of St. Louis, not down south where who knows how many billions of dollars of investment rely on big ol' levees). It all started in 2016, when the Corps found that many levees along the Mississippi River were significantly higher than is allowed under federal law. The thought is that many levee districts raised the levees prior to anticipated floods, but then never lowered them afterwards. Therefore, a conservation group in Missouri has asked FEMA to rescind the flood insurance coverage of some Mississippi River-adjacent landowners if they refuse to lower their levees. The idea is that by keeping their levees too high, these noncompliant levee districts will actually [cause flooding for their neighbors](#). And, by increasing the heights of only some of the levees, any neighboring farmland also ends up being saturated for longer than normal, which can destroy crops. Levee district officials [insist](#) their levees are the proper height. Maybe they levees are like [Fletch](#), and it all depends on how you measure their height.

And The Golden Globe for Poor Environmental Practices Goes to . . .

A model carrying a tray of Fiji water bottles [photobombed](#) lots of celebrities at the Golden Globes this weekend, prompting plenty of [memes](#) and BuzzFeed articles. The whole thing was a paid promotion for Fiji, which is known for stunts like this.

Golden Globes aside, Fiji Water not simply a bottle of deliciousness on a silver platter. It – and the rest of the bottled water industry—is a big business that is pretty much about taking water from one place and sending it to somewhere else where it can command top dollar. Fiji's apparent monopoly on hydrating Golden Globers is tied to its [near monopoly](#) on an aquifer in Fiji which has triggered [criticism](#) that it is depriving residents of a source of clean water. That matters because of Fiji's history of outbreaks of typhoid, which is caused by lack of access to safe water. It's estimated that about [53%](#) of [the population](#) of Fiji also does not have access to clean, potable water, although up to date data is [hard to come by](#). To get to Hollywood, Fiji Water plastic bottles are first shipped from China to Fiji, where they're filled on site at a plant that runs on diesel-generated electricity. Then, the filled water bottles are transported to the Pacific Coast of the United States, and subsequently shipped by truck all over the country. Not exactly a low carbon footprint or low waste option when one considers how few bottles actually get recycled. Does this mean Fiji Water is horrible? That is not really the point. The more important point is that all bottled water is [terrible for the environment](#)—as are almost all other major water sources when you think about it--- but that we when we make choices about where to get our water those choices come with costs that need to be thought about. So maybe drinking water from half way across the planet isn't as glamorous as it seemed on the red carpet—even though it is always very refreshing.