

TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy
March 22, 2016

[I Hate You, Alfalfa!](#)

Last week, we told you about Seth Siegel, a visiting author who will be at **Tulane Law School on April 12 at 5 pm**. Mr. Siegel will be discussing his book, "[Let There Be Water](#)," the story of Israel's transformation "from a parched land into a water superpower." Through innovation and cooperation, the arid nation has stayed ahead of the curve and built not only a water surplus but a thriving agricultural sector that will help ensure Israel's food security for years to come.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stands as a stark contrast. While Israel has invested in developing resources within its own borders, [Saudi companies](#) have taken a more globalized tact. In January, Saudi Arabia's largest dairy, Almarai Co., [bought up 14,000 acres in California and Arizona](#) to grow alfalfa for cattle feed. This has fanned the flames of a longstanding dispute over the proper allocation of scarce resources. The American Southwest is, as we've mentioned here before, fairly arid itself, and alfalfa is a thirsty crop not grown for human consumption.

But what California and Arizona lack in water, they make up for in an abundance of water *law*. Almarai's land in La Paz County, AZ is exempt from groundwater restrictions imposed elsewhere in the state, and their tract in Palo Verde, CA has high seniority under California's prior appropriation regime. The resources may be scarce, but the rights are well-protected. That stability makes the land attractive to a country that already uses 90% of its own water on agriculture, and depends on other parts of the world to feed its nearly 30 million people.

Rig-to-Reef Beef, in Brief

Off the coast of California, oil rigs dot the horizon from Carlsbad to Carpinteria. For many, they are a reminder of the terrible [Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969](#), a galvanizing moment in the early days of the environmental movement. To some members of that old guard, anything less than removal is tantamount to defeat in a half-Century long battle against the oil industry. Others, however, point to the fact that below the surface, the deteriorating rigs are incubators for [diverse and valuable ecosystems](#).

In the middle of this debate is the rig-to-reef program, often pitting environmentalists against one another. Under the rig-to-reef program, the rig owner caps an unproductive well and either removes the top 85 feet of the structure or leaves it

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:

[River Rally](#)

Mobile, AL

May 20-23, 2016

[State of the Coast 2016](#)

New Orleans, LA

June 1-3, 2016

[Summit on Coastal and Estuarine Restoration](#)

New Orleans, LA

December 10-15, 2016

Water jobs:

[Clean Water Advocate](#)

Environment America

[Staff Attorney](#)

Tennessee Clean Water Network

Knoxville, TN

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submerged. The cost savings, a big windfall for the rig owner, are partly offset by the requirement that the owner donate half the savings to a state coastal restoration fund. [Proponents see this as a win-win](#), a cost-effective alternative to complete removal that retains the accumulated biota, "[among the most productive marine fish habitats globally](#)."

On the other hand, opponents bristle at the idea that the oil companies are not only evading their full clean-up responsibilities but, by turning ownership over to the state, would also be evading future liability. They also point out that the submerged debris poses a navigation and safety hazard. From an ecological perspective, the artificial reefs can host invasive species. So localized biodiversity is improved, but potentially at the expense of the larger ecological integrity of the coast.

The debate may come to a head soon, as sustained low oil prices may force many operational rigs into retirement. If that's the case, a resolution should be within reach, both sides only want what's best for the coast.

[Ahoy, Polloi!](#)

In Athenian democracy, the people were directly involved in decision making, not represented by elected politicians. Every (male, landowning) citizen voted on legislation and executive bills in an open assembly. In Italy right now, the [Five Star Political Movement](#) seeks to use the internet to return every day governance to the masses. But are the masses, especially the faceless masses of the World Wide Web, really the best shepherds of society? Sometimes the demos makes mistakes. Case in point, in the most important US election of this millennium, voters via text fumbled the election of Reuben Studdard as American Idol over [Clay Aiken](#). No amount of [apologizing in 2004](#) made up for the fact that the masses [got it wrong](#). Sometimes, however, they get it oh so right.

In the United Kingdom, the Natural Environmental Resource Council (NERC) is set to launch a nearly \$300 million polar exploration and research ship, a world-class floating laboratory. To name this state-of-the-art ship, the NERC [turned to the internet](#). As British Universities and Science minister Jo Johnson said "can you imagine one of the world's biggest research labs travelling to the Antarctic with your suggested name proudly emblazoned on the side?" The internet responded by rejecting august names like *Shackleton* and *Falcon*, and selecting, by a wide margin, [Boaty McBoatface](#)! Other front runners include *Boatimus Prime*, *I Like Big Boats and I Cannot Lie*, and *Notthetitanic*. Power to the people.

Turkey Point Leaking Tritium

A nuclear power plant in Florida is leaking polluted water into Biscayne Bay, threatening drinking water supplies in southern Florida. A [study](#) conducted by Miami-Dade County confirmed that the Turkey Point facility's cooling canals, built on the porous limestone that underlies much of the region, are leaking tritium, a radioactive isotope. The plants location between Biscayne Bay and Everglades National Park led many to fear the possible impacts and oppose its construction nearly 40 years ago. It remains to be seen the extent of the impact on the ecosystem and the drinking supply, but scientists anticipate a [spike in turtle ninjitsu enrollment](#).