

Watermark: Film by Edward Burtynsky and Jennifer Baichwal
Reviewed by Noreen Dertinger

**“Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.”**

— Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Water accounts for more than half of our body weight. It is an essential part of our lives. We must constantly replenish the water in our bodies. We drink, cook with and bathe in water. People worldwide use water for religious and recreational purposes. The film *Watermark* shows in informative and captivating footage the relationship between humans and water. It is the third part of Edward Burtynsky’s Water project, the other parts being the book *Water* and a major photographic exhibition.

Burtynsky has captured stunning footage from ten countries exploring the question of how humans have affected water and how a rapidly changing water environment has shaped the human destiny. Viewers will see how water-related projects have displaced and impacted people — including some eye-opening examples of how we pollute it — and discover how climate change is impacting water, mostly not for the better.

The impact agriculture has on water is astonishing. Agriculture has changed the surface of the planet. Land that was not meant to be farmed is being farmed. “Seventy per cent of human use of water is agriculture, and if we think of a singular activity that has changed the surface of the planet, it’s farming.” In some areas, the withdrawal of water exceeds its recharge capacity. The Ogallala Aquifer in the western third of Kansas is an example of this.

Contamination of water sources is a worldwide problem. *Watermark* shows footage of a leather tannery in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Not only is tanning leather water-intensive, but it also sends massive amounts of contamination directly into water sources that eventually reach the sea. Chemicals are used in every stage of tanning. Every stage of the process uses 1,000 to 2,000 litres of water. The waste water goes back into the water supply. People drink and bathe in this water and eat the fish caught in it. What impact is this having on their health? How extensive is the impact on the environment? We need to find solutions now, not later.

In China, we are shown the construction site of the biggest arch dam in the world — the Xiluodu. It is six times the size of the Hoover Dam on the border of Arizona and Nevada, U.S. One of the impacts the Hoover Dam project had was to decimate populations of native fish downstream from the dam. Today the Colorado River no longer reaches the ocean. Will the Xiluodu Dam have a similar impact, or worse, in China?

Canadian footage includes some of the watersheds of northern British Columbia, such as the Stikine River. This watershed covers an area of approximately 52,000 square kilometres (20,000 sq mi). This area is traditional Tahltan First Nation territory. Native Oscar Dennis talks

about how he and his brother were taught to live with the land and how things have changed over time. The Stikine watershed is under threat from various mining and other projects.

Climate change is also explored through interviews with some scientists drilling and studying ice cores, drilled 2 kilometres deep, in Greenland. Through the study of these ice cores, it is possible to determine the history of climate change over thousands of years. This provides important clues how climate change is impacting the environment in current times.

Watermark is a must-see film for viewers of all ages. It provides a global overview of some of the issues and threats affecting the world's water resources. This is something we must all be concerned about because it affects our very existence.

An accompanying educational guide for use in schools and community programs worldwide can be found at <http://burtynsky-water.com/watermark/education/>. This guide provides links to many informative websites and provides a starting point for educational projects. A trailer of the film is available at <http://burtynsky-water.com/watermark/trailer/>. You are encouraged to follow up on the issues conveyed, utilize the accompanying educational resources and take action on the thought-provoking and important messages learned from *Watermark* before it is too late.

Everybody is encouraged to see this film.