

Our world is water and, so are we. An essential component of life on our planet, water powers the environment's engine, impacting climate and helping to shape and sculpt the landscape. Humans and animals rely on water for health, hydration, food supplies and hygiene.

But, water's impact on humans is much more than just biological and environmental. Water is an important element in American culture. We are attracted to water as a source of peace and contemplation. Water carves out a place in our memories of where we live and we play. We cherish our connections to nature, particularly the sights, the sounds, and the sense of place we feel at the water's edge. Many faiths revere water as a sacred symbol. Authors and artists are inspired by the duality of water – a substance so seemingly soft and graceful that is yet a powerful and nearly unstoppable force.

Water also plays a practical role in American society. The availability of water had a significant impact on settlement and migration patterns. Access to water and control of water resources are a central part of political and economic planning. Human creativity and resourcefulness provide new ways of renewing and refreshing water resources and renewing respect for the natural environment.

Americans are connected to water in ways they may not always realize. And, since water is a shared resource, water connects everyone. *Water/Ways* reveals the central nature of water in our lives by exploring a number of important questions:

- How do Americans use water? How is water represented in our society? In what ways do we use water as a symbol?
- How does water unite communities? How does conflict over water emerge and how do communities resolve it?
- How does water affect the way we live, work, worship, create and play?
- How do we care for water and sustain it for the future?