

Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Water of the Eastern U.S.
Discussion questions for class and for book clubs

1) How did it come to be that one of the wettest states in the nation, with an average 55 inches rainfall a year, has water-supply problems?

2) Do you think Florida is in a “water crisis”? How do we compare to other parts of our country, or the planet?

3) In “Red State, Green State,” the chapter on the politics of the environment, elected officials in both major parties are all for environmental protection until it bumps up against economic development. What are some current examples? Some argue that environmental protection impedes economic development and others say it can help drive it. What are your thoughts?

4) Why do economists argue it’s important for users to pay the true cost of water-infrastructure projects, rather than government subsidizing water-supply costs?

5) How is it that people are willing to pay extraordinarily high prices for water in a plastic bottle, yet few value the water that comes from their tap?

6) Barnett writes in *Mirage* that the bottled-water industry uses only a drop in the bucket – about 10 million gallons a day – of Florida’s groundwater. What are other issues surrounding water bottling? What are your thoughts about the industry?

7) In the 19th Century, Major John Wesley Powell declared that states east of the 100th Meridian were so blessed with water that we would never even have to irrigate. What assumptions are we making today that might seem equally far-fetched 50 or 100 years from now? How can we wisely plan our water future when scientific predictions about climate change are so uncertain?

8) Florida officials say we must find an additional 2 billion gallons of water a day to meet future growth; thus the need for billions of dollars worth of new alternative water-supply projects. What are the best arguments for and against this “supply-side” management strategy?

9) The latest figures in *Mirage* show that in 2000, Floridians used an average 174 gallons of water per person per day. Since the book was published, that number is down to 157 statewide. Some local communities have gotten per-capita consumption below 100 gallons per person per day. What do these trends show about the future? What are the areas in which we could save the most water? Talk about the difference that 50 gallons per person per day could make in a state that 18 million people call home.

10) Some people say that Floridians don’t feel a sense of ownership and pride in their state like people in, say, Texas, because so many of us come from somewhere else. Do you think this is true? How might it hurt us as a state? How can we change this?

Cynthia Barnett’s book, *Mirage*, is being featured as part of One Region/One Book and the Florida’s Eden Water Awareness Campaign. For more information visit www.FloridasEden.org