



## Political Economy of Rivers

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**R**IVERS, like other common property resources, are prone to the tragedy of the commons. Decisions that lead to such tragedies are made from different points, individual as well as institutional, but mostly political.

From the standpoint of ecological economics, rivers function both as source and sink. To be able to perform and sustain that role, rivers must maintain their carrying capacity and exceeding such capacity means death of the river system.

Rivers are not rivers if they don't flow. They link mountains to seas and traverse varied ecosystems, from uplands to lowlands, into the coasts and oceans. Let alone the fact that ancient, even modern, civilizations have been built around river systems.

Many of our rivers still flow but they are dying, if not yet biologically dead already. Their capacity as source has been seriously depleted. As sink they

have absorbed more than enough shit to continue as universal solvent.

Decisions made at any point, from upstream to downstream, collectively affect the whole system. Obviously, small ones, like throwing a bag of plastic, have smaller effects. Big ones, like damming the river, have far-reaching consequences.

Like the decisions that caused river depletion and pollution, decisions that will restore the healthy functioning of our river systems are both personal and political.

Education is central to change, especially education about how we see and value nature. And to bring about quick results, it must be an education oriented to action.

Politicians, should they so decide, can make the big quick changes in the right direction. They must do no less if we want our rivers to be clean again and to keep on flowing.