

## Fountain Creek: Big Lessons from a Little River

**Jim O'Donnell**

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In his intriguing book *Fountain Creek*, Jim O'Donnell follows a neglected Colorado waterway, discussing the complex challenges involved in restoring it.

Fountain Creek begins near Pike's Peak and winds south through Colorado Springs and Pueblo. Categorized as "impaired," it often floods with runoff and carries E. coli, selenium, mercury, pesticides, Hepatitis A, broken glass and discarded needles, and other pollutants. Noting that nearly a million people live within the watershed, O'Donnell describes the strip malls, rail lines, overpasses, and countless "dystopian" encampments for unhoused people along its banks. But his book also makes note of the diverse wildlife found in and nearby the waterway, including snowy egrets, bobcats, and trout, juxtaposing images of urban detritus with the resilience of nature: an osprey perches on an electrical pole, and hooded mergansers bob "in the froth alongside a plastic shopping bag, bits of blue plastic, and an old Gatorade bottle."

O'Donnell is a gifted storyteller; his endeavor to "bear witness" and find "the truth of something" is approachable and absorbing. The book's wide-ranging discussions cover the legacy of Indigenous civilizations; the complexities of free-market capitalism; water supply issues; political issues like the 2023 Supreme Court decision that stripped federal protections for ephemeral rivers and streams; climate change; and a history of the explorer Zebulon Pike. The unique individuals associated with the watershed are honored, too, including O'Donnell's friend Summer, "a forest bather, a bird watcher, an artist of feathers, sticks, insects, and leaves" who helps identify the "true source" of the fountain behind a Safeway in Woodland Park. Elsewhere, an unhoused man in Pueblo who calls himself East Side Jesus spouts passages from Revelation and warns of alien spacecraft.

A fascinating exploration of an urban watershed in Colorado, *Fountain Creek* addresses ecological and sociological issues that resonate across communities.

KRISTEN RABE (November / December 2024)

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