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Review: Floods, Droughts, and Climate Change

By Michael Collier and Robert H. Webb

Reviewed by [Robert D. Hook](#)

University of Idaho, USA

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Michael Collier, & Robert H. Webb. *Floods, Droughts, and Climate Change*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2002. 160 pp. ISBN 0-8165-2250-2 (paper). US\$17.95

Intended for a general readership, this book could be used as a beginning textbook in a course on climatology. It is a well-written book by authors who have a good knowledge of weather and what it does to the earth. Michael Collier and Robert Webb, who work for the US Geological Survey, have written several books about geology and hydrology. Here they bring their expertise to bear on a basic introduction to climate and the forces behind it. The straightforward, balanced presentation of information gives the reader an overview of climate and the implications of what changes in the weather and ocean temperatures can do to different areas of the earth. They provide an historical as well as a current view on climate to help the reader see the big picture.

Collier and Webb say it is important to view "concepts of flood and drought, not as isolated events, but as phenomena connected on a worldwide scale" (p. 5). They present general discussions about the various factors which affect the earth's weather patterns including effects of the sun, the earth's rotation, ocean currents, landmasses, and winds. They discuss causes and effects of these factors. As an example, El Niño, a phenomenon familiar to many, is discussed in detail along with La Niña, one of its consequences. El Niño starts with abnormally warm ocean currents off the South American coast and eventually causes weather changes in the northern hemisphere. Some of these changes can be either flood or drought in the southwestern United States and the exact opposite in the northwestern United States and the Alberta Palliser Triangle in Canada. Collier and Webb note that the total amount of rain that falls in both regions combined is about the same from year to year. The difference is whether that rain falls in the southwest or in the northwest, resulting in flood in one area and drought in the other. Although Collier and Webb explain much and answer many questions, the reader must not assume that reading this book will solve all the mysteries. In many cases the information merely points to intriguing questions.

References to each chapter are found at the end of the book, so the text flows without interruption. Twenty-five photographs and 16 line illustrations enhance the text. The photographs provide stark visual information about

what floods and droughts can do. One photo is a spectacular satellite view of Hurricane Mitch. There is an abbreviation guide at the beginning of the book and a glossary followed by a section of suggested readings.

Anyone who is interested in learning about weather patterns and how they affect his or her world can benefit by reading this book. It will be a good addition to public and academic libraries.

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