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Shadows On The Gulf: A Journey Through Our Last Great Wetland



Synopsis

"A sensitive and elegant amble through both a tragedy and an ecosystem. Required reading for anyone trying to understand the Gulf in its entirety." --Paul Greenberg, author of *Four Fish*

"Brimming with engaging information about a little-known region and leavened with moments of grace...Rowan Jacobsen succeeds in painting the 'sort of cubist portrait of a beautiful and sometimes contradictory region' he envisioned. And this fragmented portrait turns out to be all the more beautiful and melancholy for being accompanied by the persistent, doleful sounds of a pipe organ." --Wall Street Journal

In the spring of 2010, as we watched oil gushing unstoppably into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, many Americans turned their focus to the region for the first time, wondering how this could happen and demanding corporate and government accountability. Yet Rowan Jacobsen brings a surprising perspective to the tragedy: as bad as the spill was, it is only the latest chapter in a century-long story of destruction.

At the height of BP's dispersant madness, the amount sprayed each day merely equaled the amount of dispersant that washes down the Mississippi from the Heartland's dishwashers and washing machines. Coastal drilling has damaged the region's ecology far more than offshore drilling. And the acres of marshland ruined by oil slicks can't compare to the amount that disappears in every hurricane, due to the work of the Army Corps of Engineers. Southern Louisiana is subsiding. Even if we succeed in restoring every mile of beach and wetland from the oil spill, the entire Mississippi Delta could be lost this century, and New Orleans will sink beneath the waves, an American Atlantis.

Surveying the Gulf Coast by sailboat, skiff, car, and kayak, Jacobsen journeys from the bayous of Terrebonne Parish, where he goes on oil patrol with a Native American man whose tribe is being displaced as their island disintegrates; to the last shucking house in New Orleans's French Quarter, whose oyster supply has vanished; to the pristine barrier islands of Mississippi, where a Kafkaesque cleanup effort is underway. He discovers a little-appreciated ecological wonder of breathtaking natural beauty and rich culture struggling to hold on to the things that have always sustained it.

Shadows on the Gulf details the catastrophe creeping across the region and reveals why the damage to the Gulf will affect us all. Not only are the Gulf's wetlands the best oyster reefs and fish nurseries in the world, they also provide critical habitat to most of America's migratory songbirds and waterfowl. If the Gulf is allowed to fail, the effects will ripple across America. And fail it will, unless BP's blunder can somehow galvanize a national effort to save it.

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Customer Reviews

Shadows on the Gulf: A Journey Through Our Last Great Wetland by Rowan Jacobsen is a thorough the wetlands ofThis is the most detailed accounting of the damage done to the Gulf of Mexico (Louisiana) Wetlands by the BP Mercondo Well blow out I have come across. The only thing that is missing is the insider perspective that is also needed in a telling of this story. I worked offshore and for this Company for the last few years of my career in the Gas Industry. Yes, I agree this is a quite important work and certainly the information given by Mr. Jacobsen concerning the proposed recovery undertaken are lacking. The destructive result of the damage to the Gulf wetlands deserve a larger long term assessment by firstly the Regulatory Offices of our Federal overseeres and especially State regulatory agencies that oversee daily activities of the Oil and Gas industries, which the do so poorly and allow the monied interest of the industry do their own policing on the most part of what is done. The Industry Interests call the shots concerning the day to day watchdog activities. There have been many minor spills throughout the history of production and drilling and many have been overlooked by all but the workers out on the rusting and antiquated older production rigs, manned by untrained workers who feel their jobs are in jepardy, with any action they perform in their daily activities which can easily result in spill if equipment and operations of the Rig are aged and not well maintained.

(This review was written for LibraryThing Early Reviewers.)This, I think, is quite an important book and certainly the proposals tendered by author Jacobsen on aiding a recovery of sorts to the

massively damaged Gulf deserve a large hearing. At first I was encouraged by what he found in his opening chapters, and began to believe there was a promising resilience in the wildlife and ecosystem of our last great wetlands. However; as Rowan Jacobsen continued his tour of the region and more details were revealed, that promise seemed to evaporate. BP's Deepwater Horizon rig blow-out and futilely incompetent efforts to limit the effects of the explosion and subsequent leakage, are, Jacobsen argues, only the latest - and perhaps closing- chapters of a 100 year long disaster, and do not even measure up to be a major significance in the overall rape of the Gulf and the ongoing destruction of the regional ecology by hurricane, seepage, outfall, over-fishing, and erosion - all supported by a massive assist from the Army Corp of Engineering. The Gulf of Mexico is one of the world's most beautiful bodies of water, anywhere. It is vitally important to the world's interlinked ecosystem and provides significant contribution to the food chain of all sea and many land creatures. The resources are, of course, more than food alone and oil, gas and mineral extraction are significant factors in its overall value to our economy and infrastructure. The Mississippi River and Delta have been a national treasure for centuries. But, as Jacobson demonstrates, may within just one generation, cease to provide for its peoples, and the Delta and City of New Orleans, eroding at a rate of a football field a day, will sink into the Gulf as a 'modern day Atlantis'.

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