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Integrated Environmental History of Watersheds

Water is crucial to life and is considered by many experts to be the “oil of the twenty-first century—the precious commodity that determines the wealth of nations (*Fortune Magazine*, May 2001). My project focuses on the relationship between ecosystem services and human needs within a historical comparative context of two international watersheds to understand the hydro-social cycle relative to climate change. The hydro-social cycle considers both the physical flow of water (run-off, precipitation, groundwater, evaporation) and the social manipulation of water via institutions, culture, infrastructure, and policy. A historical examination of the geography of water situates science and nature in place to better understand the legacy landscapes that humans and nature have shaped. Understanding the influence of historical legacies from the middle of the nineteenth century to present will assist in informing management and adaptation strategies for the future. Two international watersheds are selected for a historical-geographical analysis: the Danube River basin and the Colorado River basin. These rivers span the continents of North America and Europe, respectively. They are critical to the development of cities, industry, and commerce, as well as to providing an environment for diverse ecosystems.