

# ON THE BOOKSHELF

## "Westlands"

By Randi Lynn Beach  
and

## "Firelines"

By Jill Metcoff

Humans take water for granted until the supply is interrupted California is in that precarious position in the great San Joaquin Valley. Worrying about water is nothing new for the farmers of the Westlands: "the western valley can be generously described as hot and desolate". It was largely used only by cattle farmers (and avoided by most everyone else), until someone drilled a well in the right place. But the ever-expanding need for water for crops has drained too much water and the rains have not come. Hence, drought in California that threatens crops but also homes and lives. The incredible photographs of "Westlands" show the effects of lost water on the western San Joaquin Valley. Old-timers in the South remember reusing laundry water for toilets or gardens. Might not be a bad idea for today.

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Another consequence of drought and poor water management comes when housing intrudes on diminishing water resources. That can contribute to wildfires, such as those which are currently threatening so much of California. Of course, not all wildfires are man-caused; lightning is a major reason for wilderness fires, exacerbated by extremely dry conditions. And controlled burns can lead to regeneration. The landscape is always changing.