

The background of the cover is a photograph of a river. In the foreground, there are tall, thin reeds with some brown seed heads, partially submerged in the water. The water is a deep blue, reflecting the sky. In the distance, there is a line of trees and a clear blue sky. The overall mood is serene and natural.

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LAYERS

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE 24 | LAYERS

By Laurie Moberg, Editor

The cover image for this issue is a meditation on layers. In its two-dimensional form, it reveals dark but reflective water, distinct aquatic vegetation, an autumnal shoreline, and powerlines stretching across the deepening blue in the sky. The image reveals the layers of the visible place (the water, plants, and sky), but also evokes the layers that are invisible: the geological history that formed the riverbed; the flora, fauna, and suspended materials hidden beneath the surface to the water; the human places and practices conjured by the powerlines and the presence of a photographer; and the social histories and

relationships that shape and are shaped by this place. This peaceful landscape carries an abundance of meanings, layered in amongst the reeds and water and beauty. The serene moment caught here reminds us that this place is not static, but is part of dynamic systems that can be disrupted by a change in any of the social and ecological conditions.

This image and the articles in this issue provide opportunities to see both beauty and complexity in the layers of our social and ecological worlds. From the seemingly distinct strata of



Reeds and shoreline. Photo by Renzo D'souza on Unsplash.

millennia-old rock formations to the rings of a growing tree, layers are a part of our ecologies. This issue illustrates that like the layers of water imperfectly separated by density, our social practices are also layered with blurring at the edges. The articles gathered here compel us to consider both places and practices as layered.

Several articles reveal layered relationships with places that may otherwise remain hidden. Examining the social and ecological histories that have shaped the San Joaquin Valley in California, Vivian Underhill aims to reverse processes of “colonial unknowing”: the intentional absence of memories about ancestral lakes and the Indigenous peoples who are deeply connected to them. In the aftermath of flooding across the Valley, however, the lakes reemerged, and with them, the layers of history and human connection that have so long been suppressed. Similarly drawing attention to often disregarded Indigenous relationships to place, Isabel Huot-Link invites us to bear witness to the #StopLine3 resistance movement in northern Minnesota. Acknowledging the vitality and vitalness of Indigenous-led resistance for shaping a hopeful future for all, Huot-Link, a settler herself, encourages us to see the potential in being unsettled. Ian A. Wright’s republished review draws our attention to the elusive ecologies and stories of the Yarra River in Henry Saddler’s *A Clear Flowing Yarra*. Written with what Wright calls “contrasting layers” the book moves between chapters on native fauna and chapters on how people engage with the river.

Yet layers are not always obscured, but instead emerge at the intersections of social and geological systems. Some of the articles in this issue focus on this intersection, on how the geology of a place shapes and is shaped by social practices over time. Patrick Nunnally walks us through environmental history of a stretch of the Mississippi River as it runs through what is now St. Paul, Minnesota. Nunnally explains the geological forces, Indigenous relations, settler practices,

and ecological restoration plans as the complex and overlapping layers that define that place. In his Geographies column, Jay Bell explores the formation the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake, guiding readers through the geological processes that are part of this watery place.

A final set of articles explores the layers of impacts generated through research and teaching. I offer a reflection on community-engaged research practices demonstrated through a collection of articles previously published in *Open Rivers*. The article speaks both to the effects of work driven by public concern and the benefits of this work as it is shared with a broad audience as public scholarship. Amber Cameron and John Craven introduce the University of Minnesota Public Engagement Footprint, which illustrates a similar public impact. A visual, digital tool for mapping community-engaged projects connected to the University, the Footprint draws attention to individual projects as well as the value of the map as a more comprehensive resource. The Teaching and Practice column presents the work of several undergraduate students who participated in a seminar focusing on the Twin Cities stretch of the Mississippi River. The article includes both their reflections on the creative projects they assembled in the course and links to the projects themselves. While the projects engage the stories and histories of local places, the reflections demonstrate the processes of building connections through place-based learning.

Taken together, the articles in this issue evoke the social and ecological layers of particular places and practices. At the same time, they also offer provocation to consider how these layers emerge as places, people, and practices change. Recognizing the complex and numerous layers embedded in the landscape and socialscape may be enough to inspire us to reconsider our relationships with each other, reconfigure how we engage with a place, or imagine the possibilities of the future.

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About the Author

Laurie Moberg is the editor for *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community*, a digital journal of public scholarship published at the University of Minnesota (UMN) by the Institute for Advanced Study and UMN Libraries Publishing. She earned her Ph.D. in anthropology from UMN in 2018. Her doctoral research investigates recurrent episodes of flooding on rivers in Thailand and queries how the ecological, social, and cosmological entanglements between people and the material world are reimagined and reconfigured in the aftermath of disasters. In her current work, she approaches public scholarship as a critical strategy for expanding whose stories are heard, for shaping our public conversations, and for forming solutions for our shared ecological challenges.