

## Photographs by Alex S. MacLean

### We all know the tale of the three pigs and their homebuilding projects.

Maybe you sang the camp song about the wise man who built his house upon the rock while the foolish man chose a nice sandy beach site. As children, we thus learned the basics about how and where to build. But, as with many lessons taught in childhood, we figured we knew a better way. Architects and engineers are perhaps most susceptible to this pattern — they are, after all, taught how to design their way around any problem.

And so, through a combination of incremental individual decisions and a shared focus on short-term gain, we have sometimes built in places that really make no sense, in ways that defy the greater forces of nature. We drive by them, perhaps we visit them on vacation, and we take advantage of their contributions to today's economy. We don't see the big picture.

But Alex MacLean does. From his plane, thousands of feet up, the details recede. Patterns emerge. Folly is revealed. "Mitigation packages" become unimportant. An internationally celebrated photographer, MacLean takes advantage of this rare vantage point, his aesthetic sensibility, and his deep knowledge of environmental issues to promote a better understanding of the American landscape and wise land-use.

The following images are drawn from MacLean's new book, *Over: The American Landscape at the Tipping Point*. Even more than his previous books, this collection of photographs has an urgency, focusing on topics such as water use, sea-level rise, waste, automobiles, and electric generation to demonstrate the vulnerability of our built environment and the fragility of the natural environment.

What's wrong with these pictures? Nothing. They tell you everything you need to know.

— Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA

**Alex S. MacLean is a photographer in Lincoln, Massachusetts. The co-author of seven books, he has had numerous solo and group exhibitions around the world and is a recipient of the Rome Prize in Landscape Architecture from the American Academy in Rome. For more information: [www.alexmaclean.com](http://www.alexmaclean.com).**

Photographs and captions adapted from *Over: The American Landscape at the Tipping Point* by Alex S. MacLean (Abrams, 2008).

All photos: © 2010 Alex S. MacLean/Landslides.



# What's Wrong With This Picture?



## **Galveston, Texas**

Built on wetlands in Galveston Bay, the new community of Harborwalk takes advantage of high waterfront property values, despite its vulnerability to sea-level rise and hurricanes.

## Homestead, Florida

Canals cut into coastal wetlands act like a giant radiator to cool water from the Turkey Point nuclear plant before it is returned to the condenser for reuse.





**Waltham, Massachusetts**

Parking lots paved with impermeable materials send runoff with surface contaminants into streams and sewers, and prevent rainfall infiltration and groundwater recharge.



**Boulder City, Nevada**

The Cascata Golf Course, outside Las Vegas, features a 418-foot waterfall. Golf courses in the Las Vegas metropolitan area account for 5 percent of the region's water use.



## Santa Rosa Island, Florida

Beach erosion on this barrier island has brought the ocean closer to a parking lot and picnic shelters that have been partially covered by shifting sands.

