Colorado River Leaders’ Perspectives

What's Ahead?

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Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy
The University of Montana
THINKING LIKE A RIVER BASIN:
Leaders’ Perspectives on Options and Opportunities in
Colorado River Management

Photo courtesy U.S. Bureau of Land Management
NOC Historical Photos

A report from the
Center for Natural Resources & Environmental Policy
The University of Montana

In cooperation with Carpe Diem West

APRIL 2011
Why This Study?

- Carpe Diem West leadership—what’s possible?
- CNREP— situation assessments
- Timing is right—drought, change, pressures
About the Report

- Qualitative assessment of leaders’ views on both challenges and solutions.
- Based on confidential interviews with 29 leaders
- Not a white paper or set of recommendations
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<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Adler, James I. Farr Chair in Law</td>
<td>Mario Lopez Perez, Engineering and Technical Standards, National Water Commission, Mexico</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anne Castle, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water and Science</td>
<td>David Modeer, General Manager, Central Arizona Project</td>
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<td>Michael Connor, Commissioner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation</td>
<td>Barry Nelson, Director, Western Water Project, Natural Resources Defense Council</td>
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<td>John Enstminger, Assistant General Manager, Southern Nevada Water Authority</td>
<td>Jennifer Pitt, Senior Analyst, Environmental Defense Fund</td>
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<td>David Getches, Dean and Raphael J. Moses Professor of Natural Resources Law, University of Colorado Law School</td>
<td>Mike Purcell, Director, Wyoming Water Development Commission</td>
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<td>Jennifer Gimbel, Director, Colorado Water Conservation Board</td>
<td>Jack Schmidt, Professor of Watershed Sciences, Utah State University</td>
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<td>Herb Guenther, Director, Arizona Department of Water Resources</td>
<td>Dennis Strong, Director, Division of Water Resources, State of Utah</td>
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<td>Taylor Hawes, Director, Colorado River Program, The Nature Conservancy</td>
<td>Tanya Trujillo, Counsel, Energy and Natural Resources Committee, U.S. Senate</td>
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<td>Robert Johnson, Former Commissioner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation</td>
<td>Pat Tyrrell, State Engineer, Wyoming</td>
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<td>Jeff Kightlinger, General Manager/CEO, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California</td>
<td>Brad Udall, Director, Western Water Assessment</td>
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<td>Eric Kuhn, General Manager, Colorado River Water Conservation District (Colorado)</td>
<td>David Wegner, Staff Director, Subcommittee on Water and Power, Committee on Natural Resources, U.S. House of Representatives</td>
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<td>John Leeper, Branch Manager, Water Management, Department of Water Resources, Division of Natural Resources, Navajo Nation</td>
<td>Eric Wilkinson, General Manager, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District</td>
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<td>John Leshy, Harry D. Sunderland Distinguished Professor of Real Property Law, University of California Hastings College of the Law</td>
<td>Tony Willardson, Executive Director, Western States Water Council</td>
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<td>Jim Lochhead, CEO/Manager, Denver Water</td>
<td>Jerry Zimmerman, Executive Director, Colorado River Board of California</td>
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<td>Estevan Lopez, Director, Interstate Stream Commission, New Mexico</td>
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Question #1

If the Colorado River continues to be managed pursuant to current laws, including the Interim Guidelines, what conditions do you foresee in 15 years?

- Water shortages
- Water security
- Interstate conflicts
“We will have to make very difficult water allocation decisions under urgent conditions in the midst of crisis.”

“We are beginning to see the limits of the resource. We’ve been operating with surpluses, but that’s coming to an end, perhaps accelerated by climate change.”
Hydrologic Conditions

The sky is not falling . . . yet

- The Colorado River is near its capacity to meet existing demands
- Conditions are likely to get less certain rather than more secure in the near term
- Less margin for shortages than assumed in 2007
Unstable footing ahead

- The consequences of a shortage would vary
- Unresolved legal issues make discussion of solutions difficult
- Specter of litigation
- Continued validity and importance of the Law of the River
- Lack of obvious leaders to articulate or promote a basin-wide vision
How to Respond?

• Strong commitment to resolving conflicts
• Leadership challenge
• Broaden participation and dialogue
• Crisis or catalyst?
“The challenge is to move beyond the letter of the law and to embrace the spirit of the law—to share water in a common river basin and to share the benefits and costs of using the water for multiple objectives.”