

9-1-2014

## Discussion Points: Conservation, Reuse, Collaboration

Liz Kutch

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/wlr>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

---

### Custom Citation

Liz Kutch, Conference Report, Discussion Points: Conservation, Reuse, Collaboration, 18 U. Denv. Water L. Rev. 185 (2014).

This Conference Report is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Denver Sturm College of Law at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Water Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact [jennifer.cox@du.edu](mailto:jennifer.cox@du.edu), [dig-commons@du.edu](mailto:dig-commons@du.edu).

---

## Discussion Points: Conservation, Reuse, Collaboration

it is easy to identify problems, it is not nearly as easy to find solutions. He drew a laugh from the audience by comparing “Free Tibet” bumper stickers to the Save the Fraser (River) campaign—it is easier to say it than to actually do it. Newberry reiterated that he thought the 1041 permitting process was beneficial because it identified issues and did not overly streamline the process. In his opinion, the process requires people at the grassroots level who understand what the rivers need in order to help save them.

Lochhead ended the discussions by suggesting that, if this experiment in partnering fails, we could end up in a state of gridlock.

*Kevin Boyle*

### DISCUSSION POINTS: CONSERVATION, REUSE, COLLABORATION

Conservation, reuse, and collaboration were prominent themes woven through this summer’s Colorado Water Congress conference. From August 20 to 22, 2014, political leaders and prominent members of the water community traveled to Snowmass Village, Colorado, to discuss pressing water issues. As droughts continue to plague the West, this year’s speakers commented on how both the government and citizens are responding to the changing climate.

On Thursday morning the Water Congress welcomed Melissa Meeker, Executive Director of the WateReuse Association & Research Foundation, to the stage to discuss water sustainability and the importance of reuse in water supply portfolios. Based out of Alexandria, Virginia, WateReuse is a nonprofit organization that works to promote sustainable water sources through education, research, and advocacy. Using California as an example, Meeker noted that there is a chronic imbalance of supply and demand. In states that have water shortages, balancing water demands with the limited resource poses an ongoing challenge. Population growth and droughts are driving the discussion of reuse. Meeker pointed out three main areas required in making water reuse part of our reality. First, she noted, leadership is key. States need strong advocacy to create flexible policies and provide funding for reuse projects. Second, more research is needed in the area to come up with answers to critical questions. Finally, Meeker stressed the importance of education and outreach so the public understands the reason behind the creativity with water projects. She explained that nothing can terminate a project like public outcry.

Changing the public perception to view treated water as a water source people will want to use will require both education and branding. As Meeker mentioned, “every drop of water we consume or use has already been used . . . . Water reuse does not involve drinking directly out of your toilet.” Rather, she explained, it involves taking wastewater and running it through various treatment processes for specific purposes. Getting this message across will aid the spread of water reuse. After conducting a public perception research project, she found that labeling water as certified and describing the process of reuse made participants more receptive to using treated water.

WateReuse is taking steps to educate the public about water sustainability. On September 28, 2014, it hosted a media workshop as well as a gala to educate the press and public about water reuse. The gala, which took place in New

Orleans, Louisiana, served only food and beverages that were touched by re-used water, including the wine. As we see a shift in our climate, Meeker advised, the time is now to embrace reuse as a critical water resource.

Later in the day, Jim Yannotta, Aqueduct Manager of the Los Angeles Department of Water, also spoke about the role of conservation and water reuse in the midst of droughts. Stormwater capture has become a priority technique to utilize rain before it reaches the oceans, Yannotta noted. Los Angeles County is working on large-scale projects, such as improving dams, to store more water. But in addition, the county is encouraging individual users to utilize stormwater barrels and cisterns to capture water for personal uses, such as irrigation. Despite its population growth, Los Angeles's conservation efforts have stabilized its water use. Los Angeles is one of the top two or three conserving cities, but Yannotta urged it must do more, especially with regard to landscaping. He applauded the state for using treated recycled water for activities such as golf, but noted that California does not allow for the direct reuse of recycled wastewater. Rather, it only allows for indirect potable reuse.

Although reusing water can benefit drought communities, subsequent speakers raised concerns about costs. For instance, Jason Mumm, Director of Financial, Commercial and Risk Services for MWH Global, spoke about the hidden costs associated with reuse. MWH Global is an enterprise based out of Broomfield, Colorado that focuses on wet infrastructure construction and engineering projects. When reuse starts, the decrease in water flow going into the waste stream will concentrate the wastewater that runs directly into the treatment facility. Subsequently, that water will cost more to treat. While Mumm acknowledges that conservation is beneficial, he wants people to take into account the hidden costs.

While reuse and conservation may ameliorate water issues, without cooperation, water shortages may give rise to allocation and control issues. As Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper eloquently stated: "Water can either divide us or unite us, and in the end, it is our choice." The Governor compared Colorado to California and noted that Colorado is in a position to avoid some of the water use conflicts California is facing. He mentioned that with the Colorado Water Plan, we are "calculated and conservative" and are able to accomplish more working together than separately. He further elucidated the great cooperation occurring in Colorado. When the recent floods damaged infrastructure, the water community was a leader in collaboration efforts. In a matter of months, it raised around twenty-two million dollars in grants to help restore the state.

Pat Mulroy, Senior Fellow for Climate Adaptation and Environmental Policy for Brookings Mountain West and former general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, also stressed the importance of partnership and responsibility within the water community. Mulroy explained that on the Colorado River people are not only citizens of a state but also citizens of a basin. She noted that partnership is necessary so that the citizens of the basin can "continue to forge their own destiny." Collaboration is also crucial to ensure that Lake Mead, a water source for Nevada, California, and Arizona, as well as Mexico, does not fall below a certain level.

Mulroy highlighted issues in California's Bay Delta Area to show the con-

sequences of failing to work together. The result of not cooperating, she explained, is that people in the Westlands Water District are experiencing fifty to sixty percent unemployment rates. Additionally, food banks are not able to provide for the unemployed farmworkers. According to Mulroy, the struggle is based in a discussion “nested in fear, suspicions, and the unwillingness to see that in this uncertain future, as more people move to the West, as our climate is changing, our only hope for sustainability, and our only hope for certainty . . . is through strategic partnerships.”

In contrast, despite the diminishing levels of Lake Mead, when Nevada’s partners wished to utilize their reserves Nevada remained silent. Because of water shortages, California and Mexico needed the water banked in Lake Mead. Nevada did not fight this request because it knew that one day it might also have to call upon some of its reserves. Mulroy explained, “As long as we continue the journey we started in the [19]90s, where we listen as much as we talk, where we give as much as we take, where we try to make the whole work, we will avoid that future which none of us want to face: a future of empty reservoirs, a future of community without a water supply, [a future] of rich farmland not being in production.” As the changing climate threatens those living in the West, the duty to conserve and work together falls to every individual. As Taryn Finnessey, Climate Change Risk Management Specialist for the Colorado Water Conservation Board, pointed out, by 2050, climate models are projecting a two-and-one-half degree to five degree Fahrenheit increase in temperature in Colorado. Finding ways to conserve, reuse, and store water is necessary to maintain an adequate supply as the temperature rises.

*Liz Kutch*