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## Drought Planning Perspectives: A Snapshot on Action and Intent

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## Drought Planning Perspectives: A Snapshot on Action and Intent

Doesken then described CCC's system of agricultural weather stations, which provide temperature and precipitation data across the state. He noted that providing a constant water supply through variable drought years presents a very difficult challenge for municipalities hoping to encourage water users to become more willing and flexible in their water uses. Municipalities often attempt to appropriately reflect the reality of surrounding environmental conditions with their own water use, but this does not often translate to the end users and households using less water. Utilities continue to encounter the challenge of meeting increased water demand during droughts with depressed water supplies. Doesken expressed a desire for those in attendance to consider the lessons learned in 2002 and 2012 in their approaches to water supply and demand in future droughts.

*Ashley Jackson*

#### DROUGHT PLANNING PERSPECTIVES: A SNAPSHOT ON ACTION AND INTENT

Peter Mayer of Aquacraft, Inc. moderated the multi-city panel discussion on drought planning and prompted the panelists with questions about actions their respective cities are taking to prepare for another dry winter.

Taryn Finnessey, Colorado Water Conservation Board ("CWCB") drought climate-change technical specialist, opened up the discussion by describing CWCB's current Drought Mitigation and Response Plan ("Drought Plan"), which was approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in January 2011. Finnessey explained that the Drought Plan tracks drought impacts across Colorado and seeks to better manage drought from the state perspective by compartmentalizing regions of the state and providing flexible and individualized responses to each affected region. The Drought Plan also employs a drought task force consisting of executive directors from the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Department of Local Affairs, and Department of Agriculture, to brainstorm and implement drought response and mitigation strategies.

Russ Sands from Boulder's Water Quality and Environmental Services spoke next and noted that cities must have emergency plans to respond effectively to drought. He outlined several important components to a drought emergency response: (i) creating a unified message; (ii) effectively disseminating information to the public through media like brochures or yard signs; (iii) pursuing public education within the first seventy-two hours after declaring a drought emergency, as this time is often the most effective to disseminate a message; and (iv) creating an achievable drought plan that realistically manages expectations. Sands also noted that cities must be prepared to act the moment after declaring a drought emergency. When a city instead tries to assemble all these pieces subsequent to declaring an emergency, Sands indicated the plan will likely fail.

Lucas Mouttet, Water Conservation Coordinator for Fort Collins Utilities, discussed recent issues caused by the High Park fire and the consequences of a fire occurring in a city's watershed during a drought. He spoke about the importance of a flexible drought plan to accommodate these tangential issues

and the resulting contaminated water. Mouttet also explained that, although many neighboring cities employed water restrictions during the drought, Fort Collins avoided employing citywide water restrictions this year because its particular water plan employs alternative water sources. Additionally, Fort Collins has developed multiple water use plans to account for the various water condition scenarios that may occur in 2013.

Ruth Quade with the City of Greeley spoke about the recently codified Greeley Water Drought Plan. She stressed that the focus of drought plans must be to get the message of wise water use to customers. She described the use of social media and the Internet as important outreach components to implement utility drought plans. Such outlets help keep the public informed during the drought, especially when water restrictions change throughout the year. She also acknowledged potential problems with awareness among specialty population groups, such as Spanish-speaking and elderly customers, who may not otherwise be informed of restrictions in their community. She stressed that utilities do not want to punish customers or their landscapers for breaking restrictions about which they were ignorant.

Last to present was Linn Brooks with the Eagle River Water and Sanitation District, who spoke about the importance of planning early for a drought and effectively communicating the drought plan to the public. Brooks stated that utilities should acknowledge the reality of current operations by setting objectives and priorities and communicating them both internally and to the customers. At the same time, Brooks emphasized that utilities must balance such known elements with the unlikely ones in order to be fully prepared during a drought. An assessment of potential drought impacts, such as fire or other water supply emergencies, is a necessary first step. Brooks also emphasized the fact that during a drought demand is high, yet supply is limited. Brooks noted that flexible operation of water systems may narrow the supply and demand gap because flexible system operation maximizes available stream flows.

When the moderator asked whether Colorado is more prepared today than in 2001, all participants on the panel agreed that Colorado is more prepared today, due, in part, to a statewide mitigation plan that incorporates lessons learned from the 2002 drought.

*Ashley Jackson  
Andy McFadden*

#### NATIONAL THEMES IN WATER EFFICIENCY: REVENUE LOSS AND ITS POLITICAL IMPACTS ON CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Mary Ann Dickinson, founder and CEO of the Alliance for Water Efficiency, presented the final talk of the conference and discussed, from a national perspective, water utilities' inadvertent revenue loss due to successful water conservation measures. Dickinson explained decreased water usage caused by water conservation, reduction of new construction projects, and increased home foreclosures have all combined to reduce overall water sales and revenue. The decrease in water consumption is catching many municipalities off-guard and has forced many to increase the price of water and cut most discretionary costs, such as water conservation programs.