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## National Themes in Water Efficiency: Revenue Loss and Its Political Impacts on Conservation Programs

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## National Themes in Water Efficiency: Revenue Loss and Its Political Impacts on Conservation Programs

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.

Dickinson argued that the political process further complicates the problem, because unhappy water consumers are demanding reduced water prices from their political representatives. Although the cost of water continues to rise faster than any other basic utility, political officials are failing to adequately increase water rates to adjust for increased costs. Rather than incrementally increasing water rates every two to three years, political pressure has postponed adjustments based on political cycle. Aging municipal water systems are forcing officials to make drastic adjustments (often a decade's worth of budget increases all at once) in order to keep municipal systems financially viable. Dickinson explained that many political representatives must decide between yielding to their constituents' pleas to keep water prices down and alienating their constituents by raising water prices during a recession. Because consumers today do not fully understand the true cost of water, educating consumers about infrastructure costs in concert with detailed adjustment plans from municipalities should help remove some pressure from political representatives, allowing them to develop better long-term solutions.

*Andy McFadden*

### CONGRESO DE ACEQUIAS RECOGNIZING REGIONAL CHALLENGES

San Luis, Colorado

October 19-21, 2012

The Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association held the first Annual Congreso de Acequias ("Congreso") in San Luis, Colorado in October. The Congreso created a forum for water users who irrigate using the acequia method to identify strategies protective of acequias based on section 7-42-101.5 of the Colorado Revised Statutes ("Acequia Recognition Law"). The acequia irrigators in attendance were from the same four counties referred to in the statute: Conejos, Costilla, Huerfano, and Las Animas. The Congreso was open to all acequia irrigators in these counties.

An acequia is a gravity fed, earthen ditch irrigation system used to carry snowmelt and rainwater run-off from arid canyons and mountainous areas to agricultural fields. The method is prevalent in the four Colorado counties mentioned in the Acequia Recognition Law, and many parts of New Mexico. Unlike New Mexico, however, Colorado never recognized acequia irrigating as a distinct beneficial use, and Colorado's prior appropriation system does not protect acequias. The Congreso discussion topics included challenges each county faces in maintaining traditional knowledge of the land and water use within each community.

#### CONEJOS COUNTY: LAWRENCE D. GALLEGOS

Mr. Lawrence Gallegos ("L. Gallegos") introduced himself as a fifth generation acequia farmer from Taos, New Mexico. Stating that the greatest method of protecting water rights, hence protecting an acequia, is from a Congressional land grant, L. Gallegos gave a brief history of the unpatented land grant in Conejos County.