

1-1-1999

Water in the West: Challenge for the Next Century, Report to the Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission

Stephanie Pickens

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

Custom Citation

Stephanie Pickens, Government Report, Water in the West: Challenge for the Next Century, Report to the Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission, 2 U. Denv. Water L. Rev. 313 (1999).

This Government 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, dig-commons@du.edu.

water availability data. Finally, meeting institutional challenges, such as local watershed coordination initiatives, generated a wide variety of state responses. Plans directed at solving these problems included basin water resource management, watershed planning efforts, regional water plans, advisory committees, and water rights settlements.

The fifth question asked the states to discuss the effect of federal water-related programs on each state and to explain their facilitation of these programs. In general, federal and state government initiatives cooperate regarding water use. Several states noted positive impacts of the federal programs, from meeting water resource needs of rural communities, to the success of the endangered fishery recovery program. Federal programs also provide economic and recreational benefits. However, states noted areas in need of improvement. One was federal funding. States have doubled their spending in order to implement federal regulations while the federal fiscal role has diminished. States seek greater flexibility in implementing federal programs and need more federal government cooperation.

Water in the West Today provides a comprehensive overview of Western water concerns. For a topic that is both broad and daunting, *Water in the West Today* offers a simple and clear look.

Karina Serkin

WATER IN THE WEST: CHALLENGE FOR THE NEXT CENTURY, REPORT TO THE WESTERN WATER POLICY REVIEW ADVISORY COMMISSION, Springfield, VA (1998); National Technical Information Service; 387 pp.; Doc # PB 99100026, softcover.

This report was published as part of the Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission's ("Commission") efforts to review and report present and future water resource problems and to determine methods to meet future water demands. The Commission also set out to address water allocation, water quality, water planning, and flood control issues.

In Chapter One, the Commission studied current trends and the status of water resources today, including an evaluation of climate, riverflows, precipitation, availability of groundwater, and storage methods in the West. It also gathered information on the federal government's contribution to irrigation and hydroelectric power and the benefits of those contributions. Additionally, the study examined current consequences of water development, including loss of wetlands and riparian zones, disruption of fish migration, and loss of native fish species.

Chapter Two addressed research regarding current demographics in Western cities. This research included a commentary on the

resulting pressure put on water resources as the population grows. The commentary addressed changes in the Western economy and how those changes affected water use. The study noted that farming and natural resource industries have become less prevalent, while service industries are on the rise. The Commission also compared agricultural and urban water use, including the costs involved in each type of use.

Chapter Three analyzed the future of water development, with an investigation and analysis based on the changing political landscape. The study noted that the decentralization of federal agencies has resulted in their lack of authority to implement comprehensive development programs. Agencies are reluctant to compromise with each other to develop one cohesive plan. In addition, many agencies possess modest budgets and have little support, making it difficult to meet new challenges.

The Commission addressed future challenges of water management in Chapter Four. The study posited that sustainable development is the best option, but to accomplish this many factors must be considered. Some of these factors include establishing new hydrologic baselines for basins and watersheds, heightening the role of tribal water rights, and incorporating flood control and groundwater management. Sustainable water management also requires policies that include local, state, and federal government as well as other stakeholders in the decision making process. The Commission suggested forming partnerships to accomplish the task.

The study also addressed the need for recognition of nonconsumptive uses in order to protect landscapes and support wildlife. Additionally, the study suggested that a groundwater use regime, similar to surface water regulation, should be developed since many states allow groundwater to be depleted faster than the recharge rate.

In Chapter Five, the Commission stated that the diminishing water supply necessitates augmentation by desalinization, water treatment, importation, and conservation. Those who put water to a sustainable use ought to be rewarded, and an effort should be made to eliminate unsustainable uses. Water marketing should be increased and users should be encouraged to invest in water conservation. Water banking would also reduce wasteful use of excess water. Risk-based strategies must be developed for periods of drought as well. Protection of the environment and efforts to restore aquatic ecosystems and water quality are also key issues. Preservation of agricultural communities is also important, since many new economic and demographic changes are putting demands on resources that were previously available for agriculture.

The Commission also investigated the history of federal water programs and how those programs originally developed. In the past, the federal government supported hydroelectric power and irrigation for settlers and Indian tribes. The federal government is currently involved in many conservation and environmental regulation

programs, including attempts to protect forests and manage watersheds. The study reviews the roles of the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, as well as various independent water resource commissions. Those commissions reported that the federal government must promote more efficient water use and must coordinate its various agencies to cooperate in developing new forms of water resources development.

Next, the study reviewed private, tribal, federal, state, local, and special interest agencies' abilities to sustain water management in the West. Findings concluded that states are playing a larger role in water development, focusing on increasing efficiency, although groundwater management still lags behind. States also consider water quality, public health, and environmental concerns when issuing water rights by attempting to restore environmental quality to rivers, wetlands, and riparian ecosystems.

Federal water issues primarily pertain to environmental protection and assistance to tribes in defining their water rights; however, the Bureau of Reclamation still grapples with construction projects and maintenance. Currently, the Army Corps of Engineers addresses flood plain management, in addition to reviving native aquatic species, restoring wetlands, promoting flow augmentation, and protecting endangered species. Historic water development projects have been overtaken by concerns of balancing water development with enforcement of numerous environmental statutes.

Lastly, the Commission made recommendations for the future, although there is no simple solution. Endeavors should be made to seek solutions that distribute burdens and minimize social disruption. Such solutions ought to ensure sustainable uses, maintain national goals, provide incentives to achieve those goals, respect existing rights, and encourage innovation and participatory decision making. The study emphasized the need to integrate management between agencies and jurisdictions in order to improve decision making, clarify goals, and increase efficiency. Restoration of resources, ecosystems, and water quality should be a priority. Land and water management should also be integrated, as there is a growing understanding that use of one resource affects the other. Water facilities require improved management as demands increase. There is also a need to augment current resources through reuse and recycling, as well as through groundwater and drought management. Conservation is a key component, and flood management should be promoted.

The report is a valuable overview of the status of the West's water and the pressures that necessitate change in management processes. The Commission's suggestions should be actively pursued if the West hopes to maintain its current water resources.

Stephanie Pickens