



Colorado River Leaders' Perspectives *What's Ahead?*

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**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

The background of the slide is a wide-angle photograph of a river valley. The river flows through the center, with a bridge visible in the distance. The surrounding landscape is characterized by layered, reddish-brown rock formations and a mix of green vegetation and dry earth. The sky is filled with dramatic, blue and white clouds.

- 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

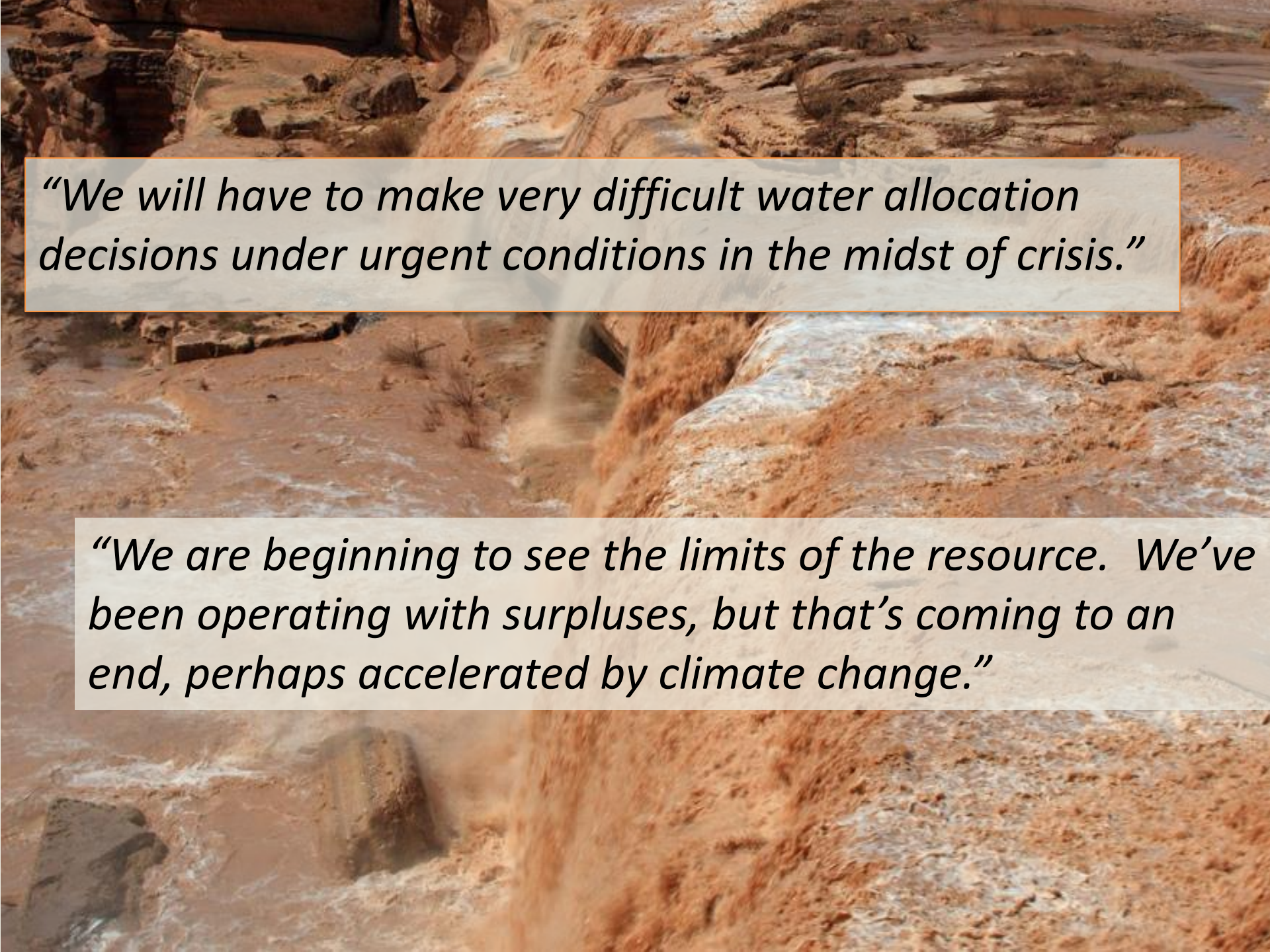
Interviewees

Robert Adler , James I. Farr Chair in Law, University of Utah College of Law	Mario Lopez Perez , Engineering and Technical Standards, National Water Commission, Mexico
Anne Castle , Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water and Science	David Modeer , General Manager, Central Arizona Project
Michael Connor , Commissioner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation	Barry Nelson , Director, Western Water Project, Natural Resources Defense Council
John Enstminger , Assistant General Manager, Southern Nevada Water Authority	Jennifer Pitt , Senior Analyst, Environmental Defense Fund
David Getches , Dean and Raphael J. Moses Professor of Natural Resources Law, University of Colorado Law School	Mike Purcell , Director, Wyoming Water Development Commission
Jennifer Gimbel , Director, Colorado Water Conservation Board	Jack Schmidt , Professor of Watershed Sciences, Utah State University
Herb Guenther , Director, Arizona Department of Water Resources	Dennis Strong , Director, Division of Water Resources, State of Utah
Taylor Hawes , Director, Colorado River Program, The Nature Conservancy	Tanya Trujillo , Counsel, Energy and Natural Resources Committee, U.S. Senate
Robert Johnson , Former Commissioner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation	Pat Tyrrell , State Engineer, Wyoming
Jeff Kightlinger , General Manager/CEO, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California	Brad Udall , Director, Western Water Assessment
Eric Kuhn , General Manager, Colorado River Water Conservation District (Colorado)	David Wegner , Staff Director, Subcommittee on Water and Power, Committee on Natural Resources, U.S. House of Representatives
John Leeper , Branch Manager, Water Management, Department of Water Resources, Division of Natural Resources, Navajo Nation	Eric Wilkinson , General Manager, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District
John Leshy , Harry D. Sunderland Distinguished Professor of Real Property Law, University of California Hastings College of the Law	Tony Willardson , Executive Director, Western States Water Council
Jim Lochhead , CEO/Manager, Denver Water	Jerry Zimmerman , Executive Director, Colorado River Board of California
Estevan Lopez , Director, Interstate Stream Commission, New Mexico	

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

A photograph of a river with very muddy, brown water flowing over rocks and a dam structure. The water is turbulent and carries a large amount of sediment. The surrounding landscape is rocky and appears to be in a semi-arid or mountainous region.

“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

Political Landscape

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.”