

TURNING HINDSIGHT INTO FORESIGHT: THE COLORADO RIVER AT A CROSSROADS

Once again, the Colorado River is at a crossroads, as the efforts to finalize the post-2026 rules push up squarely against longstanding conflicts, legal interpretations, and notions of equity and inclusivity. Complicating progress is the narrow focus on reservoir operating rules, and the tradition of pushing the thorniest issues to future discussions in largely undetermined forums and unknown schedules. In this event, we assess the current state of progress, focusing specifically on the degree to which emerging steps forward incorporate the lessons learned through past experiences.

June 5-6, 2025

University of Colorado School of Law

Presented by Getches-Wilkinson Center and Water & Tribes Initiative

THURSDAY, JUNE 5

7:30 to 8:00 Registration Opens and Light Breakfast

8:00 to 8:30 Welcome, Introductory Remarks and Opening Prayer by Brophy Toledo

Session 1: Modern Challenges Through a Historical Lens. *The Colorado River community is now laser focused on the need to adopt new operating rules by the summer of 2026. At this important inflection point in the basin, it is useful to look back, reflect on lessons learned, and turn hindsight into foresight to ensure that the actions we take now are appropriate for the ever-evolving challenges we face in the basin. The session will start by focusing on lessons learned by some of the basin's first inhabitants: the Ancient Pueblos. It will then review the history of subsequent human settlement in the basin, exploring the legal and institutional principles that shape current opportunities and constraints to achieving a more sustainable future relationship between the people and the river. The discussion concludes with a review of the agreements expiring at the end of 2026: the Interim Guidelines, Minutes 319/323 and the DCPs (drought contingency plans). Each of these frameworks have had successful elements, but each have had shortcomings. This interactive panel will highlight lessons learned, procedurally and substantively, identified by a number of people involved in those decision-making processes.*

8:30 to 9:00 The Cautionary Tale of the Ancient Pueblos.
Craig Childs, Author

9:00 to 9:30 Tailoring 19th and 20th Century Threads for a 21st Century Fabric.
Patty Limerick, Author and Professor of History, University of Colorado

9:30 to 10:00 Audience Discussion

10:00 to 10:30 Morning Break

10:30 to 11:30 Wisdom Gained from the Expiring Agreements.
Brad Udall, Colorado State University
Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis, Gila River Indian Community
Lorelei Cloud, Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Bill Hasencamp, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Jim Lochhead, Consultant (and former CEO of Denver Water)
Jennifer Pitt, National Audubon Society
Mike Connor, Consultant (and former federal official)
Moderator: Anne Castle, Getches-Wilkinson Center Senior Fellow (and former federal official)

11:30 to 12:00 Audience Discussion

12:00 to 1:00 Lunch (provided on site)

Session 2: The Aridification of Agriculture. *The contributions of agriculture to the socioeconomic fabric of the basin are significant, but the mathematic reality is that it's likely impossible to balance the regional water budget without major reductions in agricultural water consumption. This session frames the current role of agriculture in shaping the region's water budget, highlights the practical challenge of funding the inevitable transition, and identifies some on-the-ground pathways for moving forward to a more sustainable future.*

1:00 to 1:30 Reconciling the Math of Agricultural Water Use.
Brian Richter, President, Sustainable Waters

1:30 to 2:00 Resources and Opportunities to Fuel Innovation.
Peter Culp, Culp & Kelly LLP

2:00 to 2:30 Audience Discussion

2:30 to 3:00 Afternoon Break

3:00 to 3:30 Exploring Irrigation Curtailment Practices as Part of Upper Basin Sustainable Ranching.
Dan Mooney, Colorado State University

3:30 to 4:00 Competition for Shrinking Water Supplies in Arizona.
Kathryn Sorensen, Kyl Center for Water Policy, Arizona State University

4:00 to 4:30 Revisiting Sustainable Agricultural Practices from the First Farmers.
Roger Fragua, Flower Hill Institute

4:30 to 5:00 Audience Discussion

5:00 to 7:00 Reception

FRIDAY, JUNE 6

7:30 to 8:00 Registration and Light Breakfast

8:00to 8:10 Announcements and Introductory Remarks

Session 3: Updates from the Tribes. *Thirty tribes in the basin have strong interests (and legal rights) in how Colorado River management evolves. What are some of the most pressing concerns and demands?*

8:10 to 9:30 Panel Discussion
Peter Ortego, Acadian Desert Consulting
Jay Weiner, Attorney for the Quechan Tribe

*Jason Hauter, Attorney for the Gila River Indian Community
Bidtah Becker, Navajo Nation, Chief Legal Counsel
Moderator: Tahlia Bear, Western Resource Advocates*

9:30 to 10:00 Audience Discussion

10:00 to 10:30 Morning Break

Session 4: Rethinking Infrastructure: Glen Canyon Dam/Lake Powell. “What the River Knows” is a new film exploring how declining Lake Powell levels have resurfaced many environmental and cultural resources in and around Glen Canyon, and what opportunities and imperatives that might suggest for the future of Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Powell. This is the first “pre-screening” of the film, followed by a panel discussion.

10:30 to 11:10 Film Screening: *What the River Knows*

11:10 to 11:30 Remarks from the Panel
*Eric Balken, Glen Canyon Institute
President Carlene Yellowhair, San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe
Panelist TBD*

11:30 to 12:00 Audience Discussion

Session 5: Insights from the Basin States Discussion. In the spirit of moving from “hindsight to foresight,” and respecting that delicate ongoing negotiations preclude the states from publicly discussing positions in any detail, the presenters will likely provide only a brief “status update” on interstate negotiations and then transition into the primary focus on lessons/insights for moving the basin forward in coming years where water scarcity and climate uncertainty are likely to escalate further. This discussion, reliant heavily on audience questions, will be informed by discussions earlier in the event

1:00 to 1:15 The Federal Role in Interstate Negotiations
Scott Cameron, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Department of the Interior (and Acting Assistant Secretary for Water and Science)

1:15 to 1:30 Audience Discussion

1:30 to 2:00 Insights from the Basin States
Chuck Cullom, Upper Colorado River Commission
Colby Pellegrino, Southern Nevada Water Authority
Moderator: Chris Winter, Getches-Wilkinson Center

1:30 to 2:30 Audience Discussion

2:30 to 3:00

Afternoon Break

Session 6: Looking Beyond the Rule-Making. *While the crafting of new reservoir operational rules is the current focus of most attention and debate, thinking longer-term, the basin has several, more fundamental, issues that will demand thoughtful discussion and resolution, a longer-term challenge that will necessitate cultivating new ideas and leadership. In the spirit of turning hindsight into foresight, how do we move past the latest exercise in incremental, crisis management to achieve a healthy, just, and sustainable Colorado River?*

3:00 to 4:30

Facilitated Discussion (with Audience Discussion)

Terri Bissonette, Director, Tribal Leadership Programs, NWF/WTI

Eric Kuhn, Author and former GM, Colorado River District of Colorado

Elizabeth Koebele, University of Nevada, Reno

John Weisheit, Living Rivers

Moderator: John Fleck, Author, University of New Mexico