

45th Annual Colorado Law
Conference on Natural Resources

TURNING HINDSIGHT INTO FORESIGHT: THE COLORADO RIVER AT A CROSSROADS

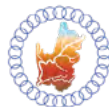
June 5-6, 2025

University of Colorado School of Law

Presented by Getches-Wilkinson Center and Water & Tribes Initiative



Getches-Wilkinson Center
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO LAW SCHOOL



Water & Tribes Initiative
Colorado River Basin

45th Annual Colorado Law Conference on Natural Resources

The Natural Resources Law Center (NRLC) was founded in 1982 and in 2013 underwent a reorganization and name change to the Getches-Wilkinson Center for Natural Resources, Energy and the Environment. The Getches-Wilkinson Center has expanded upon the legacy of the NRLC with a broader agenda, expanded convening of stakeholders, and aspirations for deeper influence in law, policy and practice.

This year marks the 45th Annual Conference on Natural Resources at Colorado Law. Over its rich history, the conference has addressed many different natural resource issues. In more recent years, the Center's summer conference has largely focused on water law and policy. The Center is proud to convene thought leaders, practitioners, and diverse stakeholders to address the most pressing issues of the day—and we want to thank our conference co-sponsors whose generous support allows us to ensure our events are accessible to all.

Conference Introduction

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.

GWC and WTI

For the third year, the Getches-Wilkinson Center (GWC) has partnered with the Water & Tribes Initiative | Colorado River Basin (WTI) to organize and convene the annual conference. WTI is a collaborative partnership designed to enhance the capacity of Tribes and to support sustainable water use through collaborative problem-solving. Read more about WTI, and find a link to its website, on page 10.

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CONTENTS

4-5	Thursday, June 5 Schedule
6-7	Friday, June 6 Schedule
8	Participate in the Dialogue
9	QR Code to Speakers' Photos & Bios
10-11	About the Event Organizers
12	Partners & Sponsors



THURSDAY, JUNE 5

7:30–8:00 **Registration Opens and Light Breakfast**

8:00–8:30 **Welcome, Introductory Remarks and Opening Prayer**

Brophy Toledo, Flower Hill Institute

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 Puebloans. 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 is a screening of the film, followed by a panel discussion.

8:30–9:00 **The Cautionary Tale of the Ancient Puebloans**

Craig Childs, Author

9:00–9:30 **Tailoring 19th & 20th Century Threads for a 21st Century Fabric**

Patty Limerick, Author and Professor of History, University of Colorado

9:30–10:00 **Audience Discussion**

10:00–10:30 **Morning Break**

10:30–11:30 **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

Jim Lochhead, Consultant (and former CEO of Denver Water)

Jennifer Pitt, National Audubon Society

Mike Connor, Consultant (and former federal official)

Bill Hasencamp, Metropolitan Water District of Southern CA

Moderator: Anne Castle, Senior Fellow Getches Wilkinson Center

(and former federal official)

THURSDAY, JUNE 5

11:30–12:00 **Audience Discussion**

12:00–1:00 **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 toward to a more sustainable future.

1:00–1:30 **Reconciling the Math of Agricultural Water Use**

Brian Richter, President, Sustainable Waters

1:30–2:00 **Resources and Opportunities for Fueling Innovation**

Peter Culp, Culp & Kelly LLP

2:00–2:30 **Audience Discussion**

2:30–3:00 **Afternoon Break**

3:00–3:30 **Exploring Irrigation Curtailment Practices as Part of Upper Basin Sustainable Ranching**

Daniel Mooney, Colorado State University

3:30–4:00 **Competition for Shrinking Water Supplies in Arizona**

Kathryn Sorensen, Kyl Center for Water Policy, Arizona State University

4:00–4:30 **Revisiting Sustainable Agricultural Practices from the First Farmers**

Roger Fragua, Flower Hill Institute

4:30–5:00 **Audience Discussion**

5:00–7:00 **Reception**

FRIDAY, JUNE 6

7:30–8:00 **Registration Opens and Light Breakfast**

8:00–8:10 **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?

8:10–9:30 *Peter Ortego, Acadian Desert Consulting
Jay Weiner, Attorney for the Quechan Tribe
Jason Hauter, Attorney for the Gila River Indian Community
Bidtah Becker, Chief Legal Counsel, Navajo Nation Office of the
President and Vice-President
Moderator: Tahlia Bear, Western Resource Advocates*

9:30–10:00 **Audience Discussion**

10:00–10:30 **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 an initial “pre-screening” of the film, followed by a panel discussion.

10:30–11:10 **Film Screening**

11:10–11:30 *Eric Balken, Glen Canyon Institute
President Carlene Yellowhair, San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe
Panelist TBD*

11:30–12:00 **Audience Discussion**



FRIDAY, JUNE 6

Session 5: Perspectives from Federal and State Officials

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.

1:00–1:15 **Insights from Federal Officials**

*Scott Cameron, acting Assistant Secretary for Water and Science,
US Department of the Interior*

1:15–1:30 **Audience Discussion**

1:30–2:00 **Insights from the Basin States**

*Chuck Cullom, Upper Colorado River Commission
Colby Pellegrino, Southern Nevada Water Authority
Moderator: Chris Winter, Executive Director, Getches-Wilkinson Center*

2:00–2:30 **Audience Discussion**

2:30–3:00 **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?

3:00–4:30 **Facilitated Discussion (with Audience Participation)**

*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*

4:30 **Closing Remarks and Adjourn**

Participate in the Dialogue

UCB Guest Wireless

1. Select UCB Guest as your wireless network.
2. Open a web browser and go to www.colorado.edu.
You will be automatically redirected to a registration page.
3. Review the Guest Wireless Policy.
4. Click on the Agree button.
5. You are now free to use UCB Guest Wireless for basic Internet activity for 24 hours.

Slido

We will be utilizing Slido to manage questions during our facilitated discussions. This online platform will be used for both remote and in person attendees. To submit questions during the conference, follow these steps:

1. Go to [Slido.com](https://www.slido.com) on a phone or computer.
2. Type in Event Code: 2184424
OR scan this QR Code.
3. Go to Q&A.
4. Write questions/share comments.
5. Up vote the questions/comments you like.



See the Speakers' Photos & Bios



About the Event Organizers



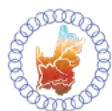
Getches-Wilkinson Center for Natural Resources, Energy, and the Environment

GWC advances the truly sustainable management and conservation of natural resources, with a focus on the American West, by:

- Influencing natural resources law and policy, including issues of water, land, climate change, and the rights of Tribes and Indigenous Peoples; and
- Educating, inspiring and mentoring the next generation of committed lawyers and advocates devoted to justice and equity.

The name comes from the contributions of two iconic figures in the law school's environmental law history, David Getches and Charles Wilkinson.

www.colorado.edu/center/gwc/



Water & Tribes Initiative
Colorado River Basin

Water & Tribes Initiative

The Water & Tribes Initiative | Colorado River Basin (WTI) is a collaborative partnership designed to enhance tribal capacity and support sustainable water use through collaboration. Over the past seven years, it has emerged as a trusted facilitator and connector, bringing together Tribal and other leaders in the Colorado River Basin to build relationships, exchange information, and support collaborative action. WTI is guided by a broad-based Leadership Team that includes representatives from Tribes, states, irrigated agriculture, conservation groups, university experts, and others. The Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy, a program of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, serves as the fiscal agent and administrative home for WTI.

www.waterandtribes.org

About the Event Organizers



University of Colorado Law School

Established in 1892, the University of Colorado Law School is one of the top public law schools in the United States. Colorado Law School's diverse student body is selected from among the statistically best applicants from every corner of the nation representing over 100 undergraduate institutions, and its highly published faculty is dedicated to interacting with students both inside and outside the classroom. The school's state-of-the-art green building is located at the base of the Rocky Mountains in beautiful Boulder, Colorado. With about 500 students and a low student to faculty ratio, Colorado Law School is a thriving academic community where the study of law is embraced to create leaders who recognize the civic responsibilities essential to the legal profession.



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