

*** WORKING DRAFT OF 5/13/26 ***

THE COLORADO RIVER: SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY

The Colorado River is facing unprecedented change and uncertainty. Average annual flows continue to decline, and negotiations to craft post-2026 guidelines to manage the river have repeatedly bogged down over disagreements about delivery obligations, sharing shortages and mandatory conservation. While some clarity may emerge in the coming months, the ability to sustain many existing municipal and agricultural water users is already compromised. Meanwhile, there is growing recognition that a durable resolution must also address the water rights of sovereign Tribal nations and better integrate environmental values into river management. All sovereigns, stakeholders, and sectors must work together now more than ever to find solutions for short-term needs and long-term goals.

WEDNESDAY EVENING (6/3)

6:00 – 7:30 PM **Public Event:** Screening of *The American Southwest*.
Introduced by the Producer, Len Necefer.
[This requires a separate registration to attend.](#)

THURSDAY (6/4)

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

8:00 – 8:20 **Welcome, Introductory Remark and Opening Invocation**
Chris Winter, Getches-Wilkinson Center
Daryl Vigil, Water & Tribes Initiative
Dean Lolita Buckner Inniss, Colorado Law School
Opening Invocation, TBD

8:20 – 9:45 **Session 1: Climate & Hydrology: Expectations for an Ever-Shrinking Pie.**
Growing water shortages on the Colorado River system derive from a mismatch between supplies and human demands. While water managers can proactively manage demands, natural inflows to the basin are not easily manipulated, placing a premium on understanding trends and forecasts. (Moderator: Doug Kenney, Getches-Wilkinson Center)

8:20 – 8:50 *Long-Term Trends and Near-Term Impacts: Learning from the 2026 Water Year.* Brad Udall, Colorado State University.

8:50 – 9:15 *Infrastructure Limits and Considerations.* Katrina Grantz, Bureau of Reclamation.

9:15 – 9:45 **Audience Participation**

9:45 – 10:15 **Morning Break**

10:15 – 12:00 **Session 2: Sustaining a Living River.** Respecting and protecting the ecological lifeline of the Southwest is a formidable challenge given that existing laws and policies are largely designed to divert water out of the river and consumptively use it off-stream. This panel will highlight some emerging efforts to recover and sustain the Colorado as a living river. (Moderator: Daniel Anderson, Getches-Wilkinson Center)

10:15 – 10:40 *Enhancing Instream Flows: The Shoshone Powerplant Case.* Amy Moyer, Colorado River Water Conservation District.

10:40 – 11:05 *Acknowledging the Rights of the River: The CRIT Approach.* John Bezdak, CRIT Attorney.

11:05 – 11:30 *Rebirth of Glen Canyon.* Zak Podmore, Author.

11:30 – 12:00 **Audience Participation**

12:00 – 1:00 **Lunch**

1:00 – 2:45 **Session 3: Living with Less on Farms and Ranches.** Irrigated agriculture is the largest water use in the basin, and is where most of the current and projected curtailments are aimed. Although there have been some notable innovations already, more will be required to balance the basin's water budget. This panel will highlight lessons learned from farms and ranches where adapting to less water is already underway. (Moderator: Roger Fragua, Flower Hill Institute)

1:00 – 1:25 *Innovations in Irrigated Agriculture.* Tina Shields, Imperial Irrigation District.

1:25 – 1:50 *A Legacy of Adaptation.* David DeJong, Gila River Indian Community.

1:50 – 2:15 *Upstream of the Big Reservoirs: Adapting to a Changing (and mostly Declining) Hydrograph.* Scott Campbell, The Freshwater Trust

2:15 – 2:45 **Audience Participation**

2:45 – 3:15 **Afternoon Break**

3:15 – 5:00 **Session 4. Designing Water Conservation Programs for the Future.** Large-scale water conservation is essential to future management of the Colorado River, however, these efforts raise a host of legal, political and administrative challenges. This panel will reflect on lessons learned in prior conservation efforts, and identify suggestions for the design of more comprehensive and effective future programs. (Moderator: TBD)

3:15 – 3:40 *Improving the Design and Role of Assigned Water.* Kathryn Sorensen, Kyl Center for Water Policy, Arizona State University.

3:40 – 4:05 *Crafting an Upper Basin Conservation Program.* Anne Castle, Getches-Wilkinson Center.

4:05 – 4:30 *Opportunities for Including Tribal Water in New Programs.* Celene Hawkins, The Nature Conservancy.

4:30 – 5:00 **Audience Participation**

FRIDAY (6/5)

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

8:00 – 12:00 **Session 5: Status of the Post-2026 Guidelines.** The process of developing the post-2026 operating guidelines remains an ongoing challenge. The basin's four sets of sovereigns -- including federal and state governments, Tribal nations, and Mexico -- along with multiple stakeholders have discussed a range of options to share water shortages, conserve water, and coordinate operations of Lake Powell/Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Mead/Hoover Dam. This series of panels will provide an update on the process of developing post-2026 guidelines, review the options under consideration, and reflect on the potential alternatives to a negotiated solution. (Moderator: Chris Winter, Getches-Wilkinson Center)

8:00 – 10:00 This will be a panel(s) of feds, state, and Mexican representatives. Format will be determined once the line-up is complete. Confirmed participants include JB Hamby (California), Tom Buschatzke (Arizona), John Entsminger (Nevada), and Carlos de la Parra (Mexico).

9:30 – 10:00 **Audience Participation**

10:00 – 10:30 **Morning Break**

10:30 – 11:30 *Tribal Perspectives* (Moderator: Jay Weiner, Quechan Tribe Attorney)
Chairwoman Amelia Flores, Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT)
Governor Stephen Roe Lewis, Gila River Indian Community (GRIC)

11:30 – 12:00 **Audience Participation**

12:00 – 1:00 **Lunch**

1:00 – 3:00 **Session 6: Learning from the Process: How do we Do Better in the Future?** As substantive negotiations over reservoir operations and conservation programs have languished, it's worthwhile to think about what this says about the processes and traditions being relied upon to identify the needed solutions. This panel will examine recent efforts to improve inclusivity, and proposals for making problem-solving more proactive, transparent, and holistic. (Moderator: Jason Robison, University of Wyoming)

- John Berggren, Western Resource Advocates
- Daryl Vigil, Water & Tribes Initiative
- Samantha Barncastle, Family Farm Alliance
- James Eklund, Taft Law

Audience Participation integrated into the Q&A panel

3:00

Closing Comments and Adjourn