

Aspen Global Change Institute
Learning from Regions: A Comparative Appraisal of Climate, Water, and Human
Interactions in the Colorado and Columbia River Systems

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Trends and Projections, Actors and Actions

Legal Aspects. "Water Management on the Rio Grande: Endangered Species Act
Litigation, Economic Development, Santa Fe Summers, Juarez Drinking Water
and a Small Border War"

Quick sketches of water management under drought

I. Introduction

Political response: crisis between society's desire for water and the
available supply is in forefront of news

Political response is to deny need for conservation. Thus, measures to
create water through removal of phreatophytes, cloud seeding, etc. are being
advanced. National actors are critical- will federal subsidies be found for
desalinization, salt cedar removal, and like measures.

Questions that are appearing in my work, that I'd like to see us explore.
One, is water an appropriate organizing principle for policy analysis? It
seems to be one to those who work in it, but the geography of the West
suggests that economic activity is unrelated to the abundance of water. Put
another way, the centers of profit are not in the fields where water is
used.

A related question, therefore, is what policies are appropriate towards
irrigated agriculture in the West. Intensive use of water for agriculture is
only about a century old, but most political figures speak of agriculture as
sacrosanct (the national policies towards agriculture have destroyed small
farms, but that's another story). I have yet to find serious conversations
about this topic. As academics, we must recognize that irrigated agriculture
may have a very time remaining, and that its loss would transform water
management overnight in the West. What would the other consequences be?
What
research should we be conducting into these questions?

Both of these questions concern the social and political world. Most
gatherings that are dominated by scientists fall short in their

comprehension of this world, referring to "politics" as though it were an unknowable black box. We need to breach this gap if we are to understand any aspect of how change is occurring in our society. The topic of this conference, the workings of adaptive management, is squarely within the political world.

II. Endangered Species Act Litigation, Economic Development, Santa Fe Summers, Juarez Drinking Water and a Small Border War

The severe drought has revealed the inadequacies of water management in New Mexico, leading to crises across the state. Drought's onset is unexpected, but over time water management policies will respond. I would predict that these policies will ensure that municipal water supplies are provided, but that rivers and streams will be adversely affected, farming and ranching will shrink, and that rural water users will be under continuing stress. The New Mexico/Texas/Mexican border region (the Paso del Norte) faces an uncertain future, because of the lack of adequate institutions to respond to water crises.