



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

26 YEARS IN THE MAKING



APRIL 28 AND 29, 2022

STEAMPLANT
Salida, Colorado



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

Risk and Resilience in the Arkansas River Basin

Thursday, April 28

7:00 - 8:00 **REGISTRATION, COFFEE & BREAKFAST**

8:00 – 9:00 **WELCOME AND KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS**

Greg Felt, Chaffee County Commissioner

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Dan Gibbs, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources

9:00 – 10:15 **SESSION 1**

COLORADO RIVER: LIFELINE FOR THE ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN

Colorado is currently investigating the feasibility of a potential Demand Management program for the state. Demand Management is the concept of temporary, voluntary, and compensated reductions in the consumptive use of water in the Colorado River Basin. In September 2021, the Colorado Water Conservation Board adopted a Decision-Making Roadmap that identifies specific elements of outstanding questions of whether or not such a program would be achievable, worthwhile, and advisable from the state’s perspective. Panelists will explain how Demand Management seeks to balance these needs in a fair and equitable manner on a statewide basis and among the seven Colorado river Basin states and ten tribes.

The session will emphasize how supplemental water from the Colorado River Basin is necessary for the Arkansas River Basin for municipal, agricultural, recreational, and environmental needs. Local water resource managers will describe the importance of transmountain diversions and their planning efforts to react to a curtailment of these diversions.

Moderator: Chris Woodka, Issues Management Coordinator, Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District

- Rebecca Mitchell, Commissioner for Colorado, Upper Colorado River Commission and Director of Colorado Water Conservation Board
- Lee Miller, Legal Counsel, Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Colorado rep on the Colorado River Water Users Association’s Resolutions Committee, advisor to the Colorado Representative to the Upper Colorado River Commission and a member of the Commission’s Legal Committee
- Alan Ward, Water Resources Manager, Pueblo Water
- Dan Tucker, Engineer, Arkansas Groundwater and Reservoir Association



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

Risk and Resilience in the Arkansas River Basin

10:15 – 10:30 **BREAK** (coffee & refreshments)

10:30 – 11:45 **SESSION 2**

WATER CONSERVATION AND STORAGE: THE UNDERAPPRECIATED CONNECTION

Former Governor Hickenlooper once stated that any conversation about water in Colorado must begin with conservation. The Colorado Water Plan sets aggressive goals for both additional storage and water conservation, yet their important connection to each other is often underappreciated. This panel will explore how additional water storage is essential for water users in realizing the benefits of conserved water and will discuss the role of water conservation programs in achieving public acceptance and permits for water storage projects.

Discussion will include key topics for the Arkansas Basin to include:

- Increased value of water storage and how the function of storage might change in light of potential reductions to Colorado River supplies.
- Use of storage by water providers as “strategic reserve” to manage water supply risks and how that could change in-light of potential supply reductions.

Moderator: Julia Gallucci, Water Conservation, Colorado Springs Utilities

- Patrick Wells, General Manager, Water Resources and Demand Management Department, Colorado Springs Utilities
- Rich Vidmar, Basin and Ecosystem Services Manager, Aurora Water
- Greg Fisher, Manager of Demand Planning, Denver Water

11:45 – 12:00 **2020 & 2022 BOB APPEL “FRIEND OF THE ARKANSAS” AWARDS**

Presented by Terry Scanga, 2020 Bob Appel Award Recipient

12:00 – 1:30 **LUNCHEON**

LUNCHEON PRESENTATION

CLIMATE CHANGE AND DROUGHT IN THE ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN

State Climatologist Russ Schumacher and Weather Guru Nolan Doesken will present on how climate change has impacted the basin’s weather and what do future weather conditions, particularly drought, look like for the basin and the state. A focus will be on increasing much needed weather data collection for CoCoRaH in the upper basin.



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

Risk and Resilience in the Arkansas River Basin

1:30 – 4:00

AFTERNOON OUTDOOR TOURS

Please register for one tour to attend

1. Arkansas River Rafting Trip

Test your limits (and your chill factor!) while rafting on the Arkansas River. Enjoy a six-mile float trip from Big Bend to the Salida boat ramp sponsored by the Arkansas River Outfitters Association. Advanced registration is required. A van shuttle, booties, and splash jackets will be provided. All participants will paddle with the guide unless an oar boat is requested. Bring quick drying clothing for on the river and a change of clothing for the Percolation and Runoff Social Event.

2. Hill Ranch Tour

In 2001, Pueblo West Metropolitan District (PWMD) purchased the water rights to the Hill Ranch between Salida and Buena Vista. In 2006, an agreement between Chaffee County and Pueblo West detailed the district's obligation to revegetate the land with native grasses and prevent the proliferation of noxious weeds as part of the dry-up process. Initial efforts to re-establish native grasses ran into problems. More than 100 years of flood irrigation created a layer of peat up to a foot thick in places. Without continued irrigation, the peat dried out, and native grasses could not take root.

Dr. Paul Flack, Water Resource Manager, Resource Based International and Matthew Coen, PWMD foreman for the Hill Ranch, will lead the tour, which will highlight ongoing efforts to return the land to a natural state. The 1,400-acre project requires intensive soil restoration work – exposing mineralized soil and incorporating the peat with mycorrhizae and organic nutrients so that native grasses can germinate and survive. The project also benefits from the presence of elk and pronghorn herds, whose hooves help to break up the peat.

The Pueblo West District water manager and board members will also be available to answer questions and discuss the project from a municipal water management perspective.

3. Risk and Resilience on a Historic, 6th-Generation Working Ranch

Take a glance into the Arkansas River Valley's rich and historical agricultural roots, and how the Hutchinson Ranch, a 6th generation working ranch, has navigated risk and resilience over the course of 150 years. The tour will be led by



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

Risk and Resilience in the Arkansas River Basin

Art Hutchinson, 5th generation Chaffee County rancher who grew up on the historic Hutchinson Ranch, Andrea Earley Coen, Executive Director of Guidestone Colorado, and Amanda Laban, Guidestone's Land Link Director.

The tour will begin with an overview of agriculture in the region and Guidestone's work to support vibrant agriculture into the future, followed by a presentation and discussion regarding ways in which the Hutchinson Family is building resilience for their ranch operation. Topics will include irrigation, water and forest health initiatives, funding stream diversification, and creative partnership development. This tour will begin at the Hutchinson Homestead & Learning Center and include a walk (or drive dependent on weather) to the Hutchinson Ranch Event Barn and Guidestone's Mill on the Hutchinson Ranch.

5:00 p.m. – UNTIL THE LIGHTS GO OUT!

PERCOLATION AND RUNOFF – SOCIAL EVENT

Location: Steamplant Plaza

SPONSORED BY ARKANSAS RIVER OUTFITTERS ASSOCIATION

Plan on joining for us for a delicious dinner and drinks social event for only \$20. You won't find a better deal in Salida and this is one of the most fun parts of our annual Water Forum. An event you do not want to miss! The Percolation and Runoff social networking event was designed to raise money for our college scholarship fund. ARBWF has designated that all proceeds from this event go towards supporting the scholarship fund. Please register to attend.



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

Risk and Resilience in the Arkansas River Basin

Friday, April 29

7:30 – 8:00 **REGISTRATION, COFFEE & BREAKFAST**

8:00 – 9:00 **INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME**

Terry Scanga, General Manager, Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Chris Sturm, Watershed Program Director, Colorado Water Conservation Board

9:00 – 10:15 **SESSION 3**

WILDFIRE: MITIGATION & RESTORATION IN THE ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN

Fire and the State of Colorado's water are inseparable. As wildfire becomes more prevalent and drought persists, we must examine how we prepare & respond to the consequences of destructive fires. In 2020, 1% of our state's land burned in wildfires, which translates to over 1,000 miles of creeks located in burned watersheds. As fire & flooding are tied together, we must be proactive in our approach to wildfire and how we respond post-fire. Lastly, we must examine how post-fire impacted rivers and streams negatively influences our state's hydraulics, hydrology, water quantity, and water quality.

Join us for a conversation with experts who work in the field of forestry, geomorphology, and post-fire recovery. We will explore innovative approaches to wildfire preparedness, mitigation, and recovery. Our panel will provide perspective on new techniques and technologies that are being utilized in the Arkansas River Basin to prepare, protect, and recover from wildfire.

Moderator: Jonathan Paklaian, Executive Director, Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative

- Andy Lerch, Forester, Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative
- Michael Blazewicz, Round River Design
- Luke Javernick, Executive Director, River Science
- Katie Jagt, Watershed Science and Design

10:15 – 10:30 **BREAK** (coffee & refreshments)



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

Risk and Resilience in the Arkansas River Basin

10:30 – 11:45 **SESSION 4**

“LEAVE IT TO BEAVER” - HOW BEAVER COMPLEXES IMPROVE RESILIENCE TO WILDFIRE AND DROUGHT

Colorado and the West face unprecedented drought conditions, increasingly severe wildfires, and water scarcity driven by climate change and widespread aridification. These changes threaten our local and regional water supplies, our food supply, our economies, and our wildlife. This session will cover Dr. Fairfax’s most recent research on beavers, droughts, and megafires.

Watersheds are our primary water infrastructure and beaver wetlands play a critical role in increasing the resiliency of the watersheds and water supplies. Dr. Marshall will discuss wetland restoration opportunities in the headwaters of the Arkansas basin to increase resilience to drought, fires, and flooding. The Moderator will then talk about the collaborate efforts happening across Colorado to increase the health of Colorado’s headwaters.

Moderator: Jackie Corday, JD, Corday Natural Resources Consulting

- Fay Hartman, American Rivers, Colorado River Basin Director
- Dr. Emily Fairfax, Assistant Professor CA State University
- Dr. Sarah Marshall, CNHP Wetland Ecologist and Ecohydrologist

11:45 – 12:00 **CLOSING REMARKS**

Paul Fanning, Legislative Appointee to the Arkansas River Basin Roundtable

12:00 – 1:30 **LUNCHEON**

LUNCHEON PRESENTATIONS

1. Recognition of the ARBWF 2021 Scholarship Recipients:

- Kate Hale, University of Colorado – Boulder
- Heaven McKinley, Colorado School of Mines
- Paradis Hosseini Ghasemabadian, Colorado State University – Fort Collins

2. ARCC Board President Andy Neinas will introduce the newly founded Arkansas River Conservation Cooperative and will describe the goals of the new non-profit.



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

Risk and Resilience in the Arkansas River Basin

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AFTERNOON OUTDOOR TOURS

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1. Lake Ranch Property Tour

Departing from the Steam Plant, Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District (UAWCD) staff and tour participants will proceed to Poncha Springs and the Lake Ranch Property on the northwest side of Salida. Tour participants will gain insight into the work the Town of Poncha Springs has done to update their water infrastructure. Attendees have an opportunity to increase their knowledge of Integrated Water Management on the South Arkansas by learning how different entities can work together through the augmentation of Poncha Springs wells and raw water accounting. A brief overview of UAWCD's blanket augmentation plan, water system, and storage reservoirs will also be explained.

At the Lake Ranch Property site participants will have the opportunity to hear from a local rancher about the movement of water from the ditch into the field, exploring the headgate, head stabilization pond, and gravity-fed sprinkler and how these structures operate together and allow water to move from one place to another by way of irrigation. Participants will also gain an awareness of Lease Fallowing and all the various aspects and studies in this multi-use project including hydropower and alluvial storage. Part of the tour will include a glimpse into one of UAWCD's newest projects of developing a Conservation Garden and how it ties into education about water conservation and usage.

2. Bike Tour to the Mt. Shavano Fish Hatchery

On this tour we will travel by bike along the banks of the Arkansas River to the Mt. Shavano Fish Hatchery where tour attendees learn about hatchery operations from Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff. One of the largest trout units in the state, CPW's Mt. Shavano Hatchery annually produces 420,000 Whirling

Disease Negative catchable trout, and about 2.6 million sub-catchable trout and kokanee salmon. Rainbow trout, Snake River cutthroat, cutthroat/rainbow crosses, as well as kokanee salmon are raised at the unit. Mt Shavano Hatchery personnel also operate the nearby Mt. Ouray Hatchery and Salida Isolation Unit.

The ARBWF has rented a limited supply (first come, first served) of **eleven** Cruiser bikes from Subculture Cyclery and all participants will be required to



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

Risk and Resilience in the Arkansas River Basin

submit rider information and sign a waiver in advance. Helmets (provided for rentals) are required, and the tour will be limited to **20** biking participants. You are welcome to bring your own bike. The 4-mile round trip route is a mix of pavement and gravel, suitable for riders of all abilities. There will be stops along the way to highlight points of interest and facts about Salida's rich history. Get outside, get moving, and head to the hatchery the Salida way - on a bike!

If you are unable to participate by bike you can still join the hatchery tour by driving there in person. Directions will be available at the registration table.

3. Tour of Monarch Forest and Watershed Health Project

The Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative (ARWC) will host a tour of recent steep-slope fuels mitigation efforts on Monarch Pass that utilized novel harvest technologies to provide watershed protection for the South Arkansas River. Large-scale and high-severity fires pose substantial risks to watershed health from the debris flow and sediment that inundate streams and rivers post-fire.

The forests near Monarch Pass have been impacted by a recent spruce beetle outbreak, causing mortality to nearly 90% of the overstory spruce. The high mortality rate results in elevated fire risk due to heavy fuel loading. A fire occurring within thick beetle kill threatens the integrity of headwaters of the South Arkansas River and could have severe consequences for downstream water users. These stakeholders include the municipal water supplies for the Town Poncha Springs and City of Salida, agricultural producers, and recreational users along the main stem of the Arkansas River.

To address these fuels concerns, ARWC and the US Forest Service partnered to remove dead and dying trees using tethered cut-to-length equipment to treat 466 acres on up to 60% slopes. Most of the funding support for the project, came from the water community and local communities. These harvest methods serve as a model to provide an economical treatment option for addressing fuels on steep slopes and enhance forest and watershed health in the Arkansas River Basin and beyond. This demonstration project serves as a successful example to water and land managers for developing similar collaborative projects throughout the state. Please join us for this fun, outdoor opportunity to discuss and learn.



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