



ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN WATER FORUM

ARBWF 30 Years On

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The Arkansas River Basin Water Forum Board of Directors want to take this opportunity to make sure we celebrate 30 years of these meetings - yes, the first one was in the last century - the last millennium, even! - WAY BACK IN 1995.

As we all know, 30 years isn't that long in WATER time - when you think how long it takes to get a project permitted, for instance - but it is a significant amount of human time. I imagine not many of you reading this were at that first Ark Basin Water Forum, for instance. And, if you reflect on the many happenings in your own life over the past 30 years – that's a good bit of time.

So, on an anniversary date or birthday or any of these landmark occasions, I find it interesting to look back and ask, "What has changed over the years, and what has stayed the same?"

For one thing, a lot of today's water issues bear strong similarities to the way things were in 1995.

As we were then, we're constantly aware, in our over-appropriated basin, of the scarcity of water and the fact that we are at the mercy of Mother Nature as to how much she will give us to work with year to year, or even season to season. We're still faced with the challenge of sharing that limited and varying supply among many different critical needs across the basin - agricultural, municipal, recreational and environmental. AND - we still work hard to figure out how to keep all these users healthy and *somewhat* happy, and still acknowledge, as always, that the use of STORAGE is a big part of that answer. "Same as it ever was, same as it ever was," as David Byrne would say.

BUT - water life and water work in our basin are NOT really the same as in 1995.

For one thing, there was not a lot of talk in our basin about Colorado River issues



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back then, whereas we are all now highly concerned with how those issues will be handled. Even the public outside our water geek community is seeing a lot of media coverage of Colorado River challenges and beginning to understand the effect operations on the Colorado can have on us here in the Arkansas. And, although we had always experienced some level of wildland fires in parts of the Ark basin, I doubt if anyone in '95 could have predicted the massive increase in size and frequency of these fires, and the increased risk they present to our water supplies.

But not all the change in 30 years has been on the gloom and doom side . . .

Back then, and pun fully intended, the Arkansas Valley Conduit was merely a pipe dream! Now, work is actually underway to get pipe in the ground and complete that ambitious piece of the Fry Ark project.

There was not yet a Colorado Water Plan to provide a framework to address the state's water challenges, nor were there basin roundtables in place, bringing together people from the broadest possible range of water uses to finance and build projects to develop and protect our water resources.

During its 30-year lifespan, the Arkansas River Basin Water Forum has adapted to changing issues and changing times – not only continuously improving the quality of the sessions offered, but also increasing networking opportunities for attendees, adding informational site tours in each city we visit, and establishing college scholarships for students pursuing water studies.

And not that many years ago, the scrappy little group of people that seemed to just came together out of nowhere each spring to put on a little show called the Arkansas River Basin Water Forum actually created a 501c3 organization with bylaws and a budget and a Board of Directors, hoping to steadily build a better and better Forum each year, which they have done.

So here we are, celebrating thirty years of this Forum. The theme of that first edition was “A River of Dreams and Realities,” and we are reusing that theme this year, saying, “*Still* A River of Dreams and Realities,” as we continue to deal with the



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realities we are faced with while dreaming up better ways to meet our water challenges in the future.

And – I think it’s quite fitting that we do this in a city known as The Home of Heroes. Because, while that designation appropriately refers to the Medal of Honor awardees whose statues stand right outside this hall, the Forum itself has been a home to so many heroes in our water world – most notably, the Bob Appel Friend of the Arkansas honorees listed on the Forum website - but there have been many others over the years. In fact, I consider all of you in this hall right now to be rather heroic as you come together - some of the sharpest minds and bravest hearts in the basin – and apply your many talents to the purpose of protecting our precious water resources.

So - I’d like to raise a glass - of WATER, of course - to the thirty-year history and most promising future of the Arkansas River Basin Water Forum!