Week 1

TUESDAY, AUGUST 25
STARTS AT 12:00 PM

What’s on Your Ballot?

U.S. Senate Race

We will open the conference with Democratic and Republican candidates for the U.S. Senate. Both Sen. Gardner and Gov. Hickenlooper will address issues such as water infrastructure funding, basin-wide drought management, and the enlargement of reservoirs to increase storage capacity. Session panelists will share their perspectives on this race and what the water community can expect going into the November election.

Senate Race Candidates:

- Senator Cory Gardner
- Governor John Hickenlooper

Moderator: Floyd Ciruli, Ciruli & Associates

Panelists:

- Rick Ridder, RBI Strategies and Research
- Cinnamon Watson, Catalyst Public Affairs

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE - STARTS AT 3:00 PM

Federal Legislative Process Training - August 25

Advocacy is an important part of the work of the Colorado Water Congress and our water community. Whether or not you are directly involved in federal advocacy, understanding how Congress is organized to work on water-related matters will be of help as we report on the progress of federal legislation. Attending this workshop will deepen your awareness of key Congressional committees, where water bills typically get assigned, who key Committee staff members are, and how positions have to work together to get legislation passed.

Outcome: Our panel will guide your learning about each step in the Congressional legislative process from constituency remarks to drafting legislation, redlining through examining input from stakeholders, and the steps of getting water legislation passed and signed.

Moderator: Ian Lyle, National Water Resources Association

Panelists:

- Carlee Brown, U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources; Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
- Lane Dickson, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
- Dustin Sherer, Senator Gardner’s Office
Week 1 Continued

THURSDAY, AUGUST 27
STARTS AT 12:00 PM

What’s on Your Ballot?

U.S. Congressional Race

We will hear from the Democratic and Republican candidates for the 3rd Congressional District. Topics include how would Rep. Mitsch-Bush use her state legislative experience in Washington D.C., if elected? How would Lauren Boebert, as a first-time legislator, enhance partnerships to strengthen water security for Colorado? Session panelists will share their perspectives on this race and what the water community can expect going into the November election.

Congressional Race Candidates:
• Representative Diane Mitsch-Bush
• Lauren Boebert

Moderator: Joey Bunch, Colorado Politics
Panelists:
• Dick Wadhams, former Colorado GOP State Chair
• Zoey DeWolf

The Gallagher Amendment passed in 1982 in response to voters’ concerns about rising residential property taxes as a result of the state’s rapid population growth in the 1970’s. At that time, residential property in Colorado made up about 45% of total property value in the state, with other classes of property such as commercial property, agriculture land, vacant land, industrial property and public utilities making up the other 55%. The Gallagher Amendment proposed to freeze that ratio of the total value of residential property (45%) to the total value of non-residential property (55%). The net effect has been a forced reduction in the property tax “assessment rate” on residential property from 21% in 1982 to 7.15% in 2020.* Repeal of the Gallagher Amendment will be on voter’s ballots in November.

At the same time, the Colorado River Water Conservation District will have a measure on the ballot to increase their mill levy. If the $5 million/year measure passes, it will help with the decline in revenue due to both Gallagher and TABOR. The River District will have a source of funding to be applied to partnerships with water users and priority projects.

Outcome: Our panel will guide your learning about each step in the Congressional legislative process from constituency remarks to drafting legislation, redlining through examining input from stakeholders, and the steps of getting water legislation passed and signed.

*Special thanks to Building A Better Colorado for this description
Week 2

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1
STARTS AT 12:00 PM

Life on Corona Street

Has the pandemic exposed gaps in our thinking about water-related financial and policy matters? How are budgets holding up for mission critical water programs at the federal, state, and local levels? What new risks should we be preparing for? Are there remedies going forward? Panelists will share their thoughts as to how the pandemic has impacted their budgets, programs, and organizations.

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE - STARTS AT 3:00 PM

The Future of Forests
Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative - September 1

At our Annual Convention in January, we served the appetizer (a first report) on the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI). Join us for the next course served virtually. The RMRI is a diverse group of partners from Colorado, including land management agencies, water users, the recreation community, conservation organizations and more. Partners identified important landscapes, shared values, and potential strategies where a collective effort would begin working first to make a transformational change on the landscape for the health and resiliency of our forests and safety of our communities.

Last December, RMRI selected Southwest Colorado as the first place where it wanted to focus those collective efforts. The Southwest project area encompasses 750,000 acres of San Juan National Forest and private lands. Focused on communities and corridors, it includes the towns of Cortez, Mancos, Dolores, Durango, and Bayfield and stretches 120 miles along Colorado Highway 160. RMRI is also supporting forest restoration activities in the Upper Arkansas and Upper South Platte watersheds.

Outcome: There is a lot of important work going on across Colorado, on federal, state and private forest lands. Forest health and stewardship are shared responsibilities, requiring investment from all Coloradans. There are many ways to support the RMRI and local forest/watershed health efforts. Think about how you can invest in Colorado, your forest, your watershed, and your community, by investing your time, talent or treasure. Plan on attending to learn about the “RMRI Effect.”

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Climate and Water Supply

In general, Colorado water supply conditions continue to move toward drier conditions. According to the State’s Water Supply Index, last year at this time every major river basin was above to well above normal. Currently, only the South Platte and Arkansas Basins remain at normal. Statewide reservoir storage over the past year has declined from over 600,000 acre-feet above normal to about 400,000 acre-feet below normal. Our panelists will discuss what the weather patterns mean for Colorado’s water users and how conditions are setting up for next year’s water supply.

Scenario Planning Training - September 3

“Scenario thinking is both a process and a posture. It is the process through which scenarios are developed and then used to inform decision making... At its most powerful, scenarios help people and organizations find strength of purpose and strategic direction in the face of daunting, chaotic, and even frightening circumstances.”

Scenario planning may be the wave of the future in developing water supply strategies.

Outcome: Greg Fisher will guide attendees through Denver Water’s approach to using scenario planning that incorporates climate variability in water supply planning.

* From Heinrich Vogel, Why Scenarios?
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8
STARTS AT 12:00 PM

3 Reasons to Focus on Lake Powell
The Bureau of Reclamation just released the Colorado River Basin 2020 August 2020 24-Month Study showing April to July runoff to be 52% of average. What will this mean for Colorado in the near-term? We will also get an update on the Bureau’s formal review to evaluate the effectiveness of the 2007 Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The Draft EIS for the Lake Powell Pipeline and has now been released. The pipeline would be 140 miles long and, at full development, deliver 86,000 af/yr to ten Southern Utah communities.

Invasive adult mussel populations are increasing rapidly in Lake Powell. CO Parks and Wildlife has decontaminated 15,000 boats with mussels attached including many coming from Powell.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10
STARTS AT 12:00 PM

Upper and Lower Basin Perspectives on Top Colorado River Matters
Attorney General Phil Weiser will open this session with his viewpoint on Colorado River issues. Following his remarks will be a free-ranging discussion on what is on the minds of key water entities in the Colorado River Basin. How are Drought Contingency Planning programs playing out in the Upper and Lower Colorado River Basins?

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE - STARTS AT 3:00 PM

Technical Overview of Bureau’s Preliminary Draft Report on the 2007 Interim Guidelines - September 8
Since 2008, Lake Powell and Lake Mead have been operated in accordance with the Record of Decision for the Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The 2007 Interim Guidelines will remain in effect through December 31, 2025 – through preparation of the 2026 Annual Operating Plan. The Bureau is conducting a retrospective review of past operations and actions under the 2007 Interim Guidelines. Through this review, Reclamation intends to build a solid technical foundation that informs future consideration of operations and brings partners, stakeholders and the public to common understanding of past operations and their effectiveness. It is anticipated the review will be completed by the end of 2020.

Outcome: This workshop will be a more technical companion to the main program earlier in the day. Attendees will learn more about how the Colorado River operations and planning are done. Plentiful opportunity will be provided for dialogue.

Colorado River Basin Water Administration - September 10
Staff from the Colorado Division of Water Resources will discuss three topics on river administration:
Installation of measuring devices in Division 6
How the Abandonment List is prepared. Communications with the water right owners, formal and informal, after the list is published
What is a river call and how is it set?

REGISTER NOW
Next Steps for the Colorado Water Plan

The CWCB has been updating the underlying technical analysis and coordinating with basins to update local plans to set the groundwork for the Water Plan Update - due for completion in 2022. This session will offer a glimpse into the Water Plan’s evolution and describe the Water Plan update process. Along with CWCB staff and the CWCB contract team (led by Brown & Caldwell) stakeholder representatives from across Colorado will share their hopes for the Water Plan update and discuss how the Water Plan can continue to serve as a living document that supports Colorado’s values and future water needs.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15
STARTS AT 12:00 PM

Is WOTUS Really That Important?

The 50th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act is just around the corner. So why, after all this time, are we still fussing over just what “Water” we need to ensure is “Clean”? Is the uncertainty due to fuzzy original goals, recent advancements in science, greater environmental awareness, or something else? The Navigable Waters Protection Rule of 2020 may be our current quandary, but should we expect the Waters of the U.S. Definition Train to arrive at the station in time for the 100th Anniversary of the CWA? Is the ambiguity really an impediment to the water community getting our work done? Panelists will shed some light on why/whether WOTUS should receive so much of our attention.
Advocating for Equity - September 17

The Water Congress Board has begun discussions on diversity, inclusiveness, and equity as connected to water policy in Colorado. This workshop will be an open discussion on the question of whether we really have a level playing field when it comes to water issues. There are many different directions that the dialogue could take including: safe drinking water issues and Latino communities, how we can better incorporate underserved groups into statewide policy decisions, ability to pay, human dimensions of natural resources, and Native American representation in water matters.

Outcome: Attendees should expect an open discussion of the issues as well as to begin thinking about the participation of Colorado’s water community in the broader dialogue that is now in the public sphere.

Groundwater in the San Luis Valley
San Luis Valley farmers work hard to manage groundwater levels. Then in 2020, another dry year. Is drought undermining the great accomplishments to replenish groundwater in Rio Grande? How is the basin coping this year?

Tackling Tough Questions
When data tells us we must change what we are doing, but facts on the ground say it’s too important to stop: what do we do? The Ogallala Aquifer is the world’s largest groundwater system, but aquifer withdrawals dwarf the flow of the Colorado River. Farmers, ranchers, scientists, community organizations and policymakers must work together to implement strategies to extend aquifer life. But how?

Milk River Project
Meriwether Lewis described the Milk River: “the water of this river possesses a peculiar whiteness, being about the colour of a cup of tea with the admixture of a tablespoonful of milk. From the colour of its water, we called it Milk River.” About 100 years ago, construction began on the Milk River Project to furnish irrigation water for 120,000 acres. Project storage is operated by the Bureau of Reclamation and distribution systems are operated by irrigation districts. Unfortunately, funding for maintenance has been scarce. We will hear the story of how a valuable project has become a victim of the aging infrastructure dilemma.