



FROM HOTBED OF CONFLICT TO COLLABORATIVE FORUM

*A Brief History of the
Colorado River Water
Users Association*

MISSION:

The Colorado River Water Users Association is a non-profit, non-partisan organization providing a forum for exchanging ideas and perspectives on Colorado River use and management with the intent of developing and advocating common objectives, initiatives and solutions.

INTRODUCTION:

The Colorado River Water Users Association was born out of water agencies' opposition to the U.S.-Mexico Treaty of 1944. But CRWUA conferences quickly became forums for officials to discuss many other issues as a result of post World War II population growth as the seven basin states scrambled to ensure they secured enough water to sustain their respective economic growth and development. CRWUA conferences eventually became forums for discussing major milestones and conflicts involving Colorado River users, from the Upper Colorado Basin Compact to the famous Supreme Court case, Arizona v. California, to concerns over how to address Indian water rights. CRWUA itself changed over time, too, as the leaders of water agencies as well as state, federal and tribal officials have increasingly recognized the benefits of collaborating with one another rather than taking their battles to court. Meanwhile, CRWUA's relationship with Mexico has come full circle as association members recognize we all share the prospect of prolonged droughts and hotter, drier future and the collective need to protect and preserve our shared lifeline, the Colorado River.

WHAT MAKES CRWUA DIFFERENT

Most associations say their annual conferences offer unique educational and networking opportunities.

But over the past 75 years, the Colorado River Water Users Association (CRWUA) has transformed its annual conference into the venue of choice for top water agency managers, government officials, tribal leaders and even representatives from Mexico to do some of their most important face-to-face strategy and consensus building work involving the current and future use and management of Colorado River water.

CRWUA, in fact, is the annual gathering place of everyone who is anyone with an important role to play with Colorado River water, which supports more than 40 million people, irrigates more than 5 million acres of farmland, and sustains more than \$1.4 trillion in economic activity in the U.S. alone.¹

“There is a huge networking aspect of CRWUA,” said Brian Werner, a water historian and recently retired public information officer from the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, who served on CRWUA’s Public Affairs Committee for more than 20 years.

“People know that important people will be there. You have the Secretary of the Interior, the heads of Metropolitan Water District, of Southern Nevada Water Authority, of Denver Water and other agencies that are having side conversations. Part of the value is who is there and laying the groundwork for whatever may be. They are making policy.”

“Lots of people will say, and I believe, that the real work of CRWUA is not in the conference room. It’s in all the little side meetings that go on,” said Ted Cooke, a current CRWUA board member and

long-time Central Arizona Project official who was appointed general manager of the Phoenix-based agency in 2015.

“There have been a couple of times since I have been a general manager when I have not attended any of the (conference) sessions because I have been in other meetings doing other important stuff. Where else can you go where you have 15 minutes with the Secretary of Interior? We have even had opportunities to meet with our own constituents in Las Vegas and get things done that we just haven’t managed to do here at home in Arizona because we’re all there.”

Tom Levy, who served as general manager of Coachella Valley Water District for 16 years, remembers being astounded by the potential ramifications of CRWUA meetings when he first started attending them in the early 1980s.

“It took me a couple of years to understand everything that happened there,” Levy said. “You had the Secretary of the Interior or the Reclamation Commissioner. You had all of the big names, all of the Metropolitan Water District directors, their general manager, and they all socialized. You talked about different issues that might be going on in our state or your district. They put together good panels with good drawing names. I met Bruce Babbitt, the Secretary of Interior and former Governor of Arizona, through CRWUA, and it made it so that when I had to go complain about something, I could go and talk to him. The association gave you access to people. It also provided a forum so you could get things done to mutual benefit.”

Building personal relationships along with a better understanding of each other’s water situation gives CRWUA attendees the ability to find solutions to water problems without resorting to litigation, said Levy, who served as Secretary of CRWUA in 2000 and 2001 and on the association’s Audit Committee from 1986 to 1999.

¹ “The Economic Importance of the Colorado River to the Basin Region,” a study by Arizona State University, Dec. 18, 2014.

Top federal officials also see CRWUA meetings as a critical element in forming Colorado River policy.

“I’m really a big fan of CRWUA,” said Bruce Babbitt, who served as Secretary of the Interior from 1993 to 2001, Governor of Arizona from 1978 to 1987 and as Arizona’s Attorney General from 1975 to 1978. “I went out there almost every year as Secretary. Seen from a broad perspective, (CRWUA) has done as much as any other institution to contribute to the success of Colorado River policy. I think the results of all of this have been quite remarkable.”

Babbitt cited the adoption of the 2007 Drought Contingency Plan as one recent example. The agreement, signed at the CRWUA conference by representatives from the seven basin states and Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne, formalized rules for sharing scarce Colorado River water for the next 20 years.

“This is the most important agreement among the seven basin states since the original 1922 compact,” Kempthorne told CRWUA conference attendees, according to a Dec. 14, 2007 Associated Press report.²

CRWUA, in short, offers much more than just a conference. It provides a critical venue that helps water agency leaders, government officials, tribal leaders and other important stakeholders to communicate with each other face-to-face. CRWUA is part of the modern history of the Colorado River.

CRWUA’S EARLY YEARS

CRWUA was formed in January 1945 in Las Vegas by water agency representatives from six basin states as a result of concerns about the proposed

U.S.–Mexico Water Treaty. CRWUA sent certified copies of its January 13, 1945 resolution opposing the treaty to every senator following its inaugural meeting, but the treaty was overwhelmingly ratified by the U.S. Senate on April 18th, 1945, by a vote of 76 to 10, with only three basin state senators opposing it (Downey and Johnson from California, and McCarran from Nevada).³

Senate ratification didn’t stop CRWUA from continuing to voice its opposition to the treaty, however. During a three-day meeting in Salt Lake City in February 1946, CRWUA passed a resolution calling for attorneys from each of the seven basin states to investigate the constitutionality of the treaty.⁴ At the same meeting, Sidney Kartus of the Verde Tunnel Reclamation District in Phoenix, Arizona called the treaty “an act of international piracy” that would “put the old pirates of the Spanish Main to shame.”⁵

Others called for calm.

Northcutt Ely, the prominent water attorney who served as Assistant to Secretary of Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur from 1929 to 1933 and represented him during the negotiations for the Hoover Dam water and power contracts, told water agency leaders it was time to move on, “whether they like the treaty or not,” according to United Press wire service report from Feb. 12, 1946.⁶

“The treaty is only one factor in the comprehensive development of the river,” Ely said.

CRWUA, for its part, was always poised to take on other issues. Its first resolution from Jan. 13, 1945, called for the group, initially known as the Colorado River Water Users Conference, to continue “as a permanent organization.” The stage was thus set for CRWUA to address any issue of concern or interest to its members.

2 The Associated Press report was published Dec. 14, 2007 by the *Fort Collins Coloradoan*

3 Representatives from New Mexico were not present at the first CRWUA meeting Jan. 12–13, 1945 in Las Vegas, according to CRWUA documents

4 *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, Ogden, Utah, Feb. 14, 1946

5 United Press report published in the *Nevada State Journal*, Reno, Nevada, Feb. 13, 1946

6 *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, Ventura, California, Feb. 12, 1946

CRWUA evolved from a hotbed of controversy to become the venue of choice for productive Colorado River discussions

While CRWUA initially focused its wrath on the 1944 U.S.-Mexico Water Treaty, California officials were subsequently accused of using a CRWUA meeting to divide the upper basin states as they laid the groundwork for the Upper Colorado Basin Compact.

“California is doing everything it can to oppose the upper basin compact with the object of getting more water than it is entitled to under the Colorado River compact,” Colorado Governor Lee Knous told *The Associated Press* in a Feb. 6, 1948 report following a CRWUA meeting in Salt Lake City.⁷

At that time, *The Ogden Standard-Examiner* in Ogden, Utah described CRWUA as “one of two rival organizations representing states along the Colorado River.”⁸ The other was the Colorado Basin States Committee, which originally had 14 members, two from each basin state. But California and Nevada withdrew from the group in 1945 — the year of CRWUA’s founding — due to disagreements over state rights to Colorado River water.⁹

While CRWUA today is known for fostering relationship building as a way to avoid litigation, CRWUA passed a resolution in February 1948 calling on Congress to approve a bill that would ask the U.S. Supreme Court to decide how to allocate the waters of the Colorado River between the seven basin states.¹⁰ The bill never came to a vote. But representatives of five states — Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico and Arizona —

subsequently met at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, New Mexico on Oct. 11, 1948 to sign the Upper Colorado River Basin Compact.¹¹

Ongoing conflict between California and Arizona remained unresolved, however. In 1952, Arizona filed suit against California in the Supreme Court to settle their respective water rights claims. *Arizona v. California* wound up becoming the longest running case in Supreme Court history. When the Supreme Court issued its ruling in 1963, it resolved critical questions involving Colorado River allocations for Arizona, California and Nevada in addition to reserving to each state the exclusive use of the waters of their own tributaries before they co-mingle with the Colorado River.

But former Arizona Governor and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt said the many years of litigation leading up to the 1963 Supreme Court decision also made it clear that everyone with an interest in Colorado River water needed to make a better effort to avoid fighting each other in court.

“(Litigation) created gridlock, and that sort of motivated us all to talk to each other,” Babbitt said, noting that lawsuits were forcing judges to make decisions on issues outside their areas of expertise.

“In the wake of *Arizona v. California*, all of the states gradually began to understand that we could resolve all of these many issues. But we had to resolve them by staying out of the courts and coming together to find consensus solutions. CRWUA became that place where we would all come together,” Babbitt said.

CRWUA was a logical venue for such discussions.

⁷ The Associated Press report was published in the *Fort Collins Coloradoan* on Feb. 6, 1948

⁸ *The Ogden Standard-Examiner* in Ogden, Utah, Jan. 29, 1948

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ An Associated Press report on this topic was published in the Jan. 31, 1948 edition of the *Arizona Daily Star* in Tucson, Arizona

¹¹ The compact allocated Colorado River water as follows: 51.75 percent for Colorado; 11.25 percent for New Mexico; 23 percent for Utah; and 14 percent for Wyoming, plus 50,000 acre-feet of water per year to Arizona to compensate for the small amount of Arizona that is inside the upper basin, according to an Oct. 10, 1948 Associated Press report in the *Albuquerque Journal*

While CRWUA meetings generated contentious and politically charged headlines in its earliest days, the association's annual meetings evolved to become respected forums for water agency representatives and government officials to discuss the status of critical Colorado River infrastructure projects, such as Glen Canyon Dam and the creation of Lake Powell (completed in 1963), Flaming Gorge Reservoir, Wyoming's largest reservoir, which is on the Wyoming-Utah border (completed in 1964), and the Central Arizona Project, which was begun in 1973 and substantially completed by 1994.

CRWUA eventually emerged as the nation's primary venue for top officials from water agencies, government agencies, tribal authorities and Mexico to make their most important announcements not only regarding new water infrastructure, but important new policies, legislation, negotiations, agreements, legal settlements and other initiatives involving the Colorado River.

"Certainly, there was contention that was going on. But it was always productive contention. People used their interactions in the hallways to work through issues," said Estevan López, who attended almost every CRWUA meeting since 2003, initially as Director of New Mexico's Interstate Streams Commission, and from 2014 to 2017 as Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

"Reclamation had a really robust role in all things Colorado River," López said. "(CRWUA) provided an opportunity to engage with all of the stakeholders, the water agencies, the states, the Indian tribes, and the environmental constituencies."

López added that whenever there was a big initiative involving the Colorado River, the relevant parties would work together, seeing the annual CRWUA meetings as the time when they wanted to be able to announce progress on whatever issue they were addressing. "CRWUA has become an

annual venue where new initiatives are going to be announced and progress is going to be reported," he said.

López also noted that the resolutions that CRWUA adopts each year serve as important "building blocks for finding common ground." CRWUA has adopted resolutions involving everything from the Endangered Species Act to Drought Contingency Planning to the Clean Water Act and Colorado River Salinity Control.

CRWUA's annual meetings have also become a venue of choice for government and academic experts in Colorado River history, water policy and related topics to present their research and to pose provocative questions to meeting attendees.

Of course, some speakers at CRWUA meetings have suggested politically explosive solutions to the chronic water shortages in the West, such as tapping the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest, an idea explored by Congress as part of the Lower Colorado River Basin Project Act.

Reclamation Commissioner Floyd E. Dominy told CRWUA conference attendees in December 1965 that he believed the "statesmanship" of the political leaders of the Columbia and Colorado River basins "will cross basin boundaries so that the 'haves' can share with the 'have-nots' with both reaping extensive water dividends," according to a Dec. 4, 1965 Associated Press report.

"The mention of importing water to the Southwest from the Columbia River raises fears among people of the Northwest. I certainly don't blame them for that," Dominy said. "But I think the two regions can negotiate and compromise."¹²

The idea proved to be so combustible, however, that Pacific Northwest legislators subsequently modified the legislation to prohibit any federal study of water importations from the Columbia River without the approval of all of the Governors of the affected states.¹³

12 The Associated Press report was published on the Dec. 4, 1965 by the *Reno Gazette-Journal* in Reno, Nevada

13 Villa, Clifford J., "California Dreaming: Water Transfers from the Pacific Northwest," Jan. 1, 1993, pp. 1005-1006

Politics, of course, permeates everything involving management of the Colorado River because so many lives and livelihoods depend on river water. But over the decades, CRWUA has increasingly opened its doors to stakeholders with widely varied viewpoints regarding the use and management of Colorado River water.

Jennifer Pitt, director of the National Audubon Society's Colorado River Program, said she has been impressed with CRWUA's increasing willingness to include environmental voices on the conference's annual discussion panels.

"The environmental community aims to improve everyone's understanding of how the Colorado River works and what the river needs in terms of environmental protection," she said, adding, "CRWUA meetings have been critically important venues. We see opportunities to improve management of the river on a collaborative basis."

CRWUA's relationships with Native American Indian tribes and with Mexico have also evolved over the years and become far more inclusive and productive than they have ever been before.

Native American tribes eventually gain seats on CRWUA's Board of Trustees

While the Colorado River Compact of 1922 acknowledged the existence of Native American rights to Colorado River water, the compact did not make specific allocations to any of the tribes. That question wouldn't begin to be addressed until 1963, when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Arizona v. California*.

In *Arizona v. California*, the Supreme Court granted water rights within each state's apportionment to five tribes along the lower Colorado River: the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe,

the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Quechan Indian Tribe of the Fort Yuma Reservation and the Cocopah Indian Community. The rights of other tribes were yet to be quantified, however.

CRWUA members knew there were unresolved questions involving Indian water rights, however. J.A. Riggins, counsel for the Salt River Valley Water Users Association, warned CRWUA members in 1955, 1956 and 1957, that Indian water rights "threatened" the water rights of non-Indian Colorado River users.¹⁴

While CRWUA was initially slow to address questions involving Indian water rights, the association invited Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter MacDonald to speak at the group's November 1972 meeting in Las Vegas.

MacDonald used the meeting to talk about Indian water rights and to underscore the idea "that we are all going to have to live together, sharing an inadequate water resource," according to a Nov. 29, 1972 report in *The Gallup Independent* in Gallup, New Mexico.

MacDonald added, "It has taken real adversity to bring us together, even to discuss our differences. We all know that a serious water shortage is on the horizon."

Twenty years later, 10 federally recognized tribes with federal Indian reserved water rights in the Colorado River or its tributaries formed the Ten Tribes Partnership in an effort to participate with the seven basin states in negotiations relating to the Colorado River.

In 1996, the Partnership applied for membership in CRWUA and was initially allowed to have one representative on CRWUA's board of trustees. But after the tribes protested, they were allowed to have three trustees, just like each of the seven basin states. "Thereafter we became full-fledged members. We had voting privileges on the board," said George Arthur, a former Navajo Nation council

¹⁴ A printed copy of Riggins' Dec. 5, 1957 address to CRWUA, in which he references his previous speeches to the group in 1955 and 1956, is included in the library archives of the University of Arizona

delegate who served a two-year term as president of CRWUA in 2012 and 2013.

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell congratulated Arthur on becoming the first American Indian president of CRWUA during her remarks at the association's annual conference on Dec. 13, 2013. "For tribes in the Colorado River Basin, we recognize the river as the essential foundation for your physical, your economic, and your cultural subsistence. It's critical that we work together to address all the threats to the adequacy of the supplies and the river itself," she said.

Tribal relations with CRWUA have improved significantly as a result of the Partnership's involvement with CRWUA. "The relationships improved a lot, and the respect that the association has for the tribes has improved," Arthur said.

Indeed, for nearly a decade, CRWUA has hosted numerous seminars and panel discussions involving tribal issues. CRWUA has also provided a critical forum for tribes because they often have no other comparable forums in which they can meet face-to-face with water agency leaders as well as state and federal officials to discuss issues of mutual concern involving the Colorado River, said Daryl Vigil, the Partnership's current interim executive director.

"I think CRWUA is a very, very important organization for the Ten Tribes Partnership," said Vigil, who also serves as water administrator for the Jicarilla Apache Nation in Dulce, New Mexico. "It's not the perfect place. But we're making it work and we're making it the best it can be."

Arthur said tribes previously resorted to litigation when they felt nobody was listening to them. "Oftentimes, we went to court to be heard," he said.

Now, with the relationships they are building through CRWUA, tribes no longer see litigation as their only option to address questions involving their Colorado River rights.

Arthur added that the relationship building that takes place at CRWUA meetings is ultimately more productive than litigation. "CRWUA wasn't the format to bring legal debates and arguments to the table. It was a format for how we could eliminate legal arguments and keep legal arguments to a minimum," he said.

CRWUA, for its part, adopted a resolution in 2019 noting that "settlement of Indian water rights claims through negotiations with all affected parties offers a more efficient, less costly means of resolving these disputes."

While CRWUA has made significant strides in recent years to improve its relationships and communication with tribes, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has also worked to help Colorado River users to have a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities involving Indian water rights by working with tribes to produce the Colorado River Basin Ten Tribes Partnership Tribal Water Study.

The 2018 study, details of which have been presented at CRWUA meetings, documents how Partnership tribes currently use their water and provides four different development scenarios in which tribal water could be used. The study highlights a variety of voluntary use options, including water transfers, leases, water banking, exchanges, and deferral and forbearance agreements, which offer opportunities for Partnership Tribes as well as other communities to develop mutually beneficial uses of tribal water.¹⁵

"Certainly, treating recognition of Indian reserved water rights as a high priority can lead to solutions in the Basin in a time when water is scarce and the Basin as a whole is faced with serious imbalances in supply and demand," the study said, adding, "The Partnership Tribes are also hopeful that the Tribal Water Study will provide an opportunity for them to be included in regional water planning

¹⁵ The study also notes the Partnership Tribes have reserved water rights, including unresolved claims, to divert nearly 2.8 million acre-feet from the Colorado River and its tributaries

in order to facilitate tribal water development, minimize conflict, and improve overall reliability of the Colorado River System.”¹⁶

“The tribes have a very large block of water rights on the Colorado River,” said former Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Estevan López. “I think everybody has come to the realization that if we’re going to manage water and not have nonstop litigation, they have to be brought into the discussion.”

CRWUA’s improving relations with Mexico

While CRWUA was born out of opposition to the U.S.-Mexico Water Treaty of 1944, CRWUA has since reversed itself, adopting resolutions that are not only strongly supportive of the 1944 treaty, but of recent international agreements or “minutes” that expand the areas of cooperation and collaboration involving the Colorado River.

As a result of these agreements, the U.S. and Mexico are not only sharing the available waters of the Colorado River, but sharing the pain of the water shortages resulting from extended drought and climate change while working collaboratively to promote water conservation in the Mexicali Valley as well as the restoration of wetlands in the Colorado River Delta.

“There has been a concerted effort to bring Mexico into the discussion and figure out how they could be part of a more holistic management of the river,” said Estevan López, former Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Mexico, for its part, has benefited from relationship-building opportunities afforded by CRWUA, much like U.S. water agencies and government officials.

“The paths of dialogue, of cooperation and of negotiation will always be better than conflict,” said Roberto Salmón Castelo, who served as Mexico’s top representative on the International Boundary and Water Commission from 2009 to 2020. “In this respect, I feel that CRWUA establishes a safe space for the exchange of ideas and for informal talks on ‘neutral ground’ that can sometimes help facilitate the discussion and resolution of issues.”

Salmón added, “Since the U.S.-Mexico Colorado River Joint Cooperative Process was begun in 2008, relations between our two countries have gradually improved along with a growing atmosphere of mutual respect with regard to these issues. This led to the recent signing of five agreements through the International Boundary and Water Commission.”

In recent years, representatives from the Comisión Nacional de Agua (CONAGUA), Mexico’s top water agency, have also participated in CRWUA’s “Federal Friday” meetings and discussions.

Chuck Cullom, Colorado River Programs Manager for the Central Arizona Project, said the increased collaboration between the U.S. and Mexico is benefitting both countries.

“My observation is that people who work in the water industry are by and large trying to be public servants. That’s true on both sides of the border,” Cullom said, adding, “There is a common interest in supporting the communities we serve. It’s easy to recognize that in our counterparts. The things that scare us are also the same: water scarcity.”

Fear of having to make do with less water is prompting water agency managers in both countries to manage their respective water resources as efficiently as they can.

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell told CRWUA conference attendees in 2013 that agreements between the U.S. and Mexico help both countries to address our common water challenges.

¹⁶ Colorado River Basin Ten Tribes Partnership Tribal Water Study, December 2018, pp.7-3 and 7-4

“With Minute 319 in place, we know we have fair and predictable plans to address reduced supplies between the two countries, and we’ve avoided simply waiting for crisis and conflict,” she said.

CRWUA, for its part, has passed resolutions endorsing the 1944 U.S.-Mexico Water Treaty as well as recent efforts to expand cooperation between the two countries.

Salmón believes continued international cooperation is critical moving forward.

“I believe that one of the greatest challenges, perhaps the biggest challenge, is facing the effects of prolonged drought in the Colorado River basin,” Salmón said. “This is going to require the participation, dialogue, cooperation, creativity and effort of every water user in the basin, of officials at every level of government, of legislators, of academics, scientists, communicators and other interested stakeholders, including Mexico. This is a situation that binds us together since we are all affected.”

CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE

When Ron Thompson came to St. George, Utah to practice law in 1974, Washington County had 13,000 people.

“Today, we’re pushing 200,000,” said Thompson, who spent nearly 40 years working as legal counsel and later general manager of the Washington County Water Conservancy District in St. George, which plans to build a pipeline from Lake Powell to augment the county’s water supplies.

While Washington County’s 20-fold increase in population over the past five decades is extreme, it’s nevertheless a powerful example of the increasing demands being placed on Colorado River supplies as the population in Western states continues to grow.

“As this area becomes drier, it’s going to be more challenging,” Thompson said.

Indeed, the prospect of extended droughts and climate change are confronting water utilities not just in the Colorado River basin, but across the country, said Ted Cooke, general manager of Central Arizona Project, which is a member of the Water Utility Climate Alliance, an organization that is examining science-based strategies to help water utilities adapt to the many realities posed by climate change.

“CRWUA, for the next five years, will be the place where climate change and its impact on the water supply will certainly be among the top handful of topics that need to be discussed,” Cooke said, noting that hallway conversations during the conference will also increase in importance as the Drought Contingency Plans and Minute 323 expire in 2026.

CRWUA President John Entsminger, who also serves as general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority in Las Vegas, said the association and its members will continue to play historically critical roles in managing the Colorado River.

“While we’ve made great strides over the past 75 years, our commitment to collaboratively developing and implementing innovative solutions to protect the river and those that depend on it remain paramount,” he said, adding, “Look at what we have accomplished, especially over the last two decades. By being good neighbors and coming together to address Colorado River challenges, monumental agreements, such as the Drought Contingency Plans and Mexico Minutes, have been executed. We have undertaken basin conservation projects and initiatives that have protected lake levels despite historically low precipitation and increasing temperatures.”

Entsminger recalled how the Scripps Institution in San Diego predicted in 2010 that Lake Mead would likely go dry by 2021. “While the report ignored several critical factors, it drew international attention to the scope of the problem of the current, decades-long drought and climate change.”

What Scripps failed to anticipate, however, was how Colorado River–dependent agencies would respond. “We have undertaken basin conservation projects and initiatives that have protected lake levels despite historically low precipitation and increasing temperatures,” Entsminger said.

It’s no easy task.

“Solutions to western water challenges are not easily forged,” Entsminger said. “They take years of working together from individuals who are committed to outcomes. Thankfully, we have those individuals as members of CRWUA who continue to support one another and the collaborative resolution of basin issues. I look forward to when we can gather again so that we can continue this vital work together.”

While CRWUA had to cancel its annual conference this year because of the COVID–19 pandemic, former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt said he was happy to see that dates for CRWUA’s next conferences have already been scheduled for Dec. 13–15, 2021 and Dec. 14–16, 2022.

“This is the time of year when we all instinctively return to Las Vegas, like a migratory herd. It’s clear that we have a huge task ahead of us. But this is the place to begin working,” Babbitt said.

Jay Malinowski, a former chief of operations for Metropolitan Water District in Los Angeles who served on CRWUA’s Public Affairs Committee for many years, said CRWUA conferences will continue to be critical venues for newcomers to the water industry as they gain an understanding of the many challenges facing water managers throughout the Colorado River basin.

“If you are a new person in any kind of management in a water district affected by the Colorado River, there is no better place you can go than CRWUA’s annual meeting,” he said. “The association is as valuable now as it’s ever been.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Jeff Crider is an award–winning writer and author of several water agency history books. His 2018 book, *The Story of Coachella Valley Water District*, won a writing award from the California Association of Public Information Officers. His great grandfather, Andrew Matus, was a dynamiter involved in the construction of Hoover Dam.*