

A dynamic background image showing a large splash of water against a bright blue sky. The water droplets are frozen in time, creating a sense of motion and freshness. The splash is centered and spreads outwards, with some water reaching the edges of the frame.

# **Water in the Rocky Mountain West, 2025**

Colorado Institute of Public Policy



# Water is Fundamental

A large, dynamic splash of water is the central background element, with water droplets and ripples visible. The splash is set against a light blue background, which is itself framed by a darker blue border at the top and bottom. In the top right corner, there is a smaller, more detailed inset image of water splashing, showing individual droplets and the texture of the water surface.

- ◆ Economy
- ◆ Quality of life
- ◆ Environment
- ◆ Life itself



# Conflict or Cooperation?

- ◆ How do we address:
  - scarcity
  - increasing demand
  - new uses
  - declining quality
- ◆ “Whiskey’s for drinking, water’s for fighting”
- ◆ Interstate compacts; basin negotiations



# The Water Survey

- ◆ Q-Methodology
- ◆ Only major stakeholders participate
  - Important to have major groups
  - Number in a group does not influence results
- ◆ Used in contentious policy arenas
  - Strong opinions
  - Forces prioritization



# Q-Sort Statement Array

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# Affiliations of Survey Participants

AFFILIATION	% OF PARTICIPANTS
Agriculture	33%
Municipal Water Provider	26%
Water Conservancy District	21%
Elected Official	20%
Environmental/Conservation	20%
Public Utility	18%
Recreation/tourism	16%
Other	16%
Consultant	14%
Private Enterprise	14%
Irrigation District	12%
Water Conservation District	11%
Mutual Irrigation District	7%
Engineering	6%
Legal	4%
Research/university	4%
Rural Water District	4%



# Survey 1: Beliefs and Values

- ◆ Contentious policy domains start at fighting for favorite solutions.
- ◆ Need to step back to beliefs -- to our interests.
  - Lenses by which we define the problem.
  - Problem definition determines solutions.
- ◆ Understanding beliefs is key.



# Everyone agrees...

- ◆ Water is fundamental to the economy.
- ◆ An appropriated right does not mean water will be available for use.
- ◆ Agricultural water is the prime target for water transfers to urban and recreational uses.



# Most everyone agrees...

- ◆ Money has become the driver for allocating water.
- ◆ The market is not always the appropriate method for allocating water.
- ◆ It is important to protect existing individual water rights.
- ◆ Water court decisions have been favorable to agricultural interests.
- ◆ Current water law is quite functional.



# But there are also disagreements about...

- ◆ The “use it or lose it” doctrine.
- ◆ Whether there is a disconnect between land use and water planning.
- ◆ Whether the recent drought proved the current water system works well or not.
- ◆ Whether there is plenty of water if used wisely; or
- ◆ If new water needs to be developed.
- ◆ Whether or not environmental claims have adequate legal standing.



# Six Belief Types

- ◆ Statewide Economic Growth
- ◆ Environmental Concerns
- ◆ Living within Our Limits
- ◆ Stay the Course
- ◆ Broken System
- ◆ State Rights



# Do these groups share any common beliefs?

## Statewide Economic Growth and Environmental Concerns

1. Environmental needs should have similar standing in water law;
2. Water conservation are important policies to implement;
3. Using less water does not mean our quality of life will be lowered; and
4. Markets are not always the best mechanism for allocating water.



# But what makes them different?

## Statewide Economic Growth

versus

## Environmental Concerns

Differ on whether or not land use planning and water planning are adequately connected:

- The *Statewide Economic Growth* group believes the current system is working fine.
- The *Environmental Concerns* strongly believe there is a disconnect between the two types of planning, which is detrimental to the long-term sustainability of water.



# But what can the survey do for me?

- ◆ The types provide fuel for thought.
- ◆ Most are likely to see a type that describes them best.
- ◆ Examine the beliefs of others.



# Ask yourself:

- ◆ Who am I?
- ◆ Do I know people in the other types?
- ◆ Do I see new information?
- ◆ Do I see commonalities I didn't know or consider before?
- ◆ How can this information help me/my sector/my basin as we deliberate about the future of water?



# Survey 2: Challenges

- ◆ Prioritize current and future water challenges facing the West.
- ◆ Find the relationship between beliefs about water and perceptions of problems.



# Three Types of Challenges

- ◆ Balancing Consumptive Use Needs
- ◆ Water Sustainability
- ◆ Institutional Streamlining



# Balancing Consumptive Use Needs

- Accommodate municipal growth without harming the long-term viability of agriculture.
- Solve problems through effective partnerships—local, regional, basin, federal, private, and public.
- Increase cooperation among basins and states where water is a shared resource.
- Prepare for future severe droughts.
- Balance private property rights and public interest.
- Protect water quality.



# Water Sustainability

The background of the slide features a dynamic, high-speed photograph of water splashing and creating bubbles. The water is a vibrant blue, and the splashes are captured in mid-air, creating a sense of movement and freshness. The bubbles are small and numerous, adding texture to the overall image. The lighting is bright, highlighting the clarity and movement of the water.

- Maintain water quantity and quality while the population continues to grow.
- Incorporate conservation and efficiency in existing water user operations.
- Integrate water supply for consumptive use, environmental use, and recreational use.



# Institutional Streamlining

- Develop institutional responses to political and legal barriers for better management of water.
- Address federal regulations that are impediments to solving state problems.
- Streamline the water development process.
- Solve problems through effective partnerships—local, regional, basin, federal, private, and public.
- Prepare for future droughts.
- Incorporate conservation and efficiency in existing water user operations.



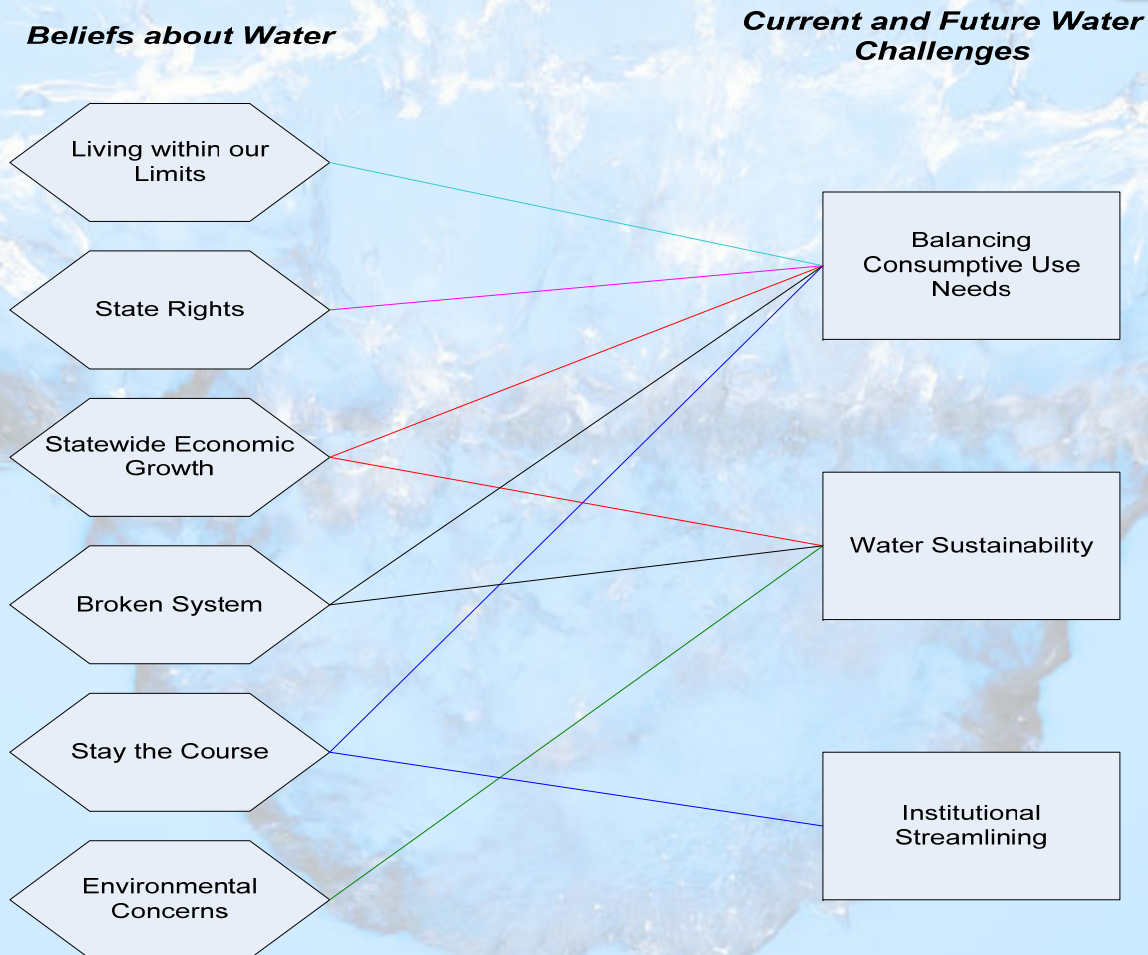
# New Understandings

The background of the slide features a dynamic image of water splashing, with droplets and ripples visible against a blue backdrop. The splashes are most prominent in the upper right and lower right areas, creating a sense of movement and freshness.

- ◆ Finding common ground across belief types.
- ◆ Discovering connections between beliefs and challenges.



# Relationship between Beliefs and Challenges







**The End**

.... or Just the Beginning



The background of the slide is a vibrant blue with a dynamic water splash effect. A large, central splash of white and light blue water is the focal point, with smaller splashes visible in the top right and bottom right corners. The text is overlaid on the central splash.

# **Description of Six Types of Beliefs**



# **“Statewide Economic Growth”**

- ◆ ***All sectors of the economy need water.***
- ◆ Economic growth depends on water.
- ◆ Ecosystems and species need water.
- ◆ Recreation and environment should have water rights.
- ◆ **Current land use & water planning are working fine.**
- ◆ Water conservation and restrictions important.
- ◆ Less water will not lower quality of life.



# **“Environmental Concerns”**

- ◆ Ecosystems and species need water.
- ◆ **Water quality as important as water rights.**
- ◆ Less water does not lower quality of life.
- ◆ Money drives the allocation of water.
- ◆ Environment and recreation have little legal recognition
- ◆ **Land use and water planning are not connected.**
- ◆ Conservation must be pursued.
- ◆ No major new sources of water left to develop.
- ◆ Politics is the barrier to solving water problems.



# **“Living within our Limits”**

- ◆ West slope is fighting water transfers to East slope.
- ◆ Population growth drives the need for more water.
- ◆ Money drives the allocation of water.
- ◆ Current water law recognizes all water interests.
- ◆ Plenty of water if used wisely.
- ◆ No significant new sources of water to develop.



# **“Stay the Course”**

- ◆ Consumptive and non-consumptive uses are not in conflict.
- ◆ Agricultural water transfers alone cannot solve urban water needs.
- ◆ Use it/lose “doctrine” does not encourage waste.
- ◆ Interstate compacts important to secure Colorado’s supply.
- ◆ Federal government should not interfere with state water allocations.
- ◆ Conservation cannot substitute for new storage projects.
- ◆ Significant new water is available.



# **“Broken System”**

- ◆ Quality of life depends on water.
- ◆ Water quality is as important as water rights.
- ◆ Drought proved the system is broken.
- ◆ “Use it or lose it” creates wasteful water practices.
- ◆ Conservation alone will not solve our water shortages.
- ◆ Consumptive and non-consumptive uses should not be in conflict.
- ◆ Money is driving the allocation of water.



# “State Rights”

- ◆ Money drives allocation of water.
- ◆ Disconnect between land use and water planning.
- ◆ West slope is not in conflict with the East slope.
- ◆ Interstate compacts not in Colorado’s best interests.
- ◆ Federal government should not interfere with state water allocations.
- ◆ Lack of water will not slow economic growth or population growth.
- ◆ Water in agriculture is not inefficient.
- ◆ Recreation and environment deserve water rights.
- ◆ Water recycling effective conservation strategy.
- ◆ No major new sources of water to develop.



The background of the slide is a vibrant blue with a dynamic water splash effect. A large, central splash of water is depicted in a lighter blue and white, creating a sense of movement and energy. The splash is framed by a thin white border. In the top right corner, there is a smaller, more detailed inset image of water splashing, showing individual droplets and ripples. The overall composition is clean and modern, with a focus on the water theme.

# **Description of Three Types of Challenges**



# **“Balancing Consumptive Use Needs”**

- ◆ Accommodate urban growth without harming agriculture.
- ◆ Increase cooperation among basins and states.
- ◆ Protect agricultural economy and way of life.
- ◆ Prepare for future severe droughts.
- ◆ Solve problems through effective partnerships.
- ◆ Balance private property rights and public interest.
- ◆ Protect water quality.



# “Water Quality”

- ◆ Maintain water quantity and quality.
- ◆ Connect land use and water planning.
- ◆ Address water quality and water together.
- ◆ Protect quality of surface and groundwater.
- ◆ Incorporate water quality protection in water allocations.
- ◆ Incorporate conservation & efficiency in existing water uses.
- ◆ Meet all water needs:
  - consumptive
  - environmental
  - recreational



# **“Institutional Streamlining”**

- ◆ Institutional responses to political and legal barriers.
- ◆ Federal regulations that impede solving state problems.
- ◆ Streamline water development process.
- ◆ Effective partnerships to solve problems.
- ◆ Prepare for future droughts.
- ◆ Balance groundwater shortages with surface water demands.
- ◆ Conservation & efficiency in existing water user operations.