

# CONFLUENCE

## CARPE DIEM PROJECT NEWS

DECEMBER 2009: NORTHWEST BY SOUTHWEST



**Carpe Diem**  
WESTERN WATER & CLIMATE CHANGE  
A PROJECT OF Ecolo - PATHFINDING IN THE NEW WEST

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AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE WHITNEY

### Reform is Inevitable



"The fact that our system of water management leads to dry riverbeds every summer tells me something's not right."

**Q: In the Pacific Northwest, what major impacts is climate change having on water resources, and what do you expect looking ahead?**

**A:** First of all, the Pacific Northwest is a very diverse region, with areas lying east of the Cascade Range affected somewhat differently than areas to the West. In general though, climate change models suggest that the region will likely see annual precipitation rates remain about the same, or perhaps increase a bit in coming decades. That's the good news. The bad news is that this precipitation will arrive in the form of rain, not snow, and what snow we do get will be subject to more frequent rain-on-snow events. Not only will this exacerbate the late winter and spring flooding we've been seeing more regularly, it will lead to reduced summer flows in our rivers and streams. For a region struggling with how to meet human water needs while saving our endangered salmon runs, that's a big problem.

**Q: What made you realize that this situation was new and that existing water management practices and policies were not going to be adequate to meet it?**

**A:** Let's be honest, even with a stable climate, existing water management practices and policies would not be adequate. Ten years ago, I served on the board of an organization that threatened to sue

changes in the form and timing of our precipitation. This distinction becomes less important during the summer months, when both regions will struggle to meet human consumptive demands for water while also meeting societal demands to conserve healthy aquatic ecosystems. I think we will find common cause as we recognize that the future availability of abundant and reliable water resources will be dependent on our success in restoring and protecting the vitality and resiliency of our watersheds — especially headwaters areas largely managed in the West by the US Forest Service. Mother Nature provides a broad range of ecosystem services, none more important than water.

**Q: The Bullitt Foundation was the first financial investor in CDP two and half years ago and has continued to fund the Project. Can you tell us what draws this continued support?**

**A:** In 2006, staff from a couple of dozen private foundations met with leading water policy experts from across the country to learn about water issues and the range of potential responses. Among other things, we concluded existing initiatives were insufficient, the water conversation lacked breadth, long-standing assumptions needed re-examination, and a broader array of stakeholders deserved a seat at the table.

The Carpe Diem Project directly responds to these observations with its impressive network of participants, its ability to convene key players in a constructive and collaborative setting, its efforts to ensure that a broad range of interests and perspectives are heard, and its insistence that the very best science inform the project. Investing in

agricultural water users under the Endangered Species Act for drying up salmon streams and leaving listed fish to die in isolated pools. The photographic evidence was incontrovertible. As a result, the water users asked for a meeting, negotiations ensued, and the threatened lawsuit was never filed. But the simple fact that our system of water management leads to dry riverbeds every summer, all across the West, leads me to conclude something's not right. In light of climate change impacts, ever-increasing population growth, heavy demands on water resources from energy production, and other factors, I believe reform is inevitable.

**Q: We're also talking to Rick Holmes of the Southern Nevada Water Authority this month. How do you think problems in that region differ from yours, and what similarities would you expect?**

**A:** Assuming the climate models are accurate, the Southwest will need to deal with real reductions in annual precipitation, while here in the Pacific Northwest we may primarily be grappling with

the Carpe Diem process requires a leap of faith — by its very nature the project's outcomes cannot be predetermined. But if one is serious about wanting to invest in smart people working to find a sustainable path forward, it's a leap well worth taking.

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*STEVE WHITNEY is Program Officer for The Bullitt Foundation and Chair of the Consultative Group on Biological Diversity. He spent fourteen years with The Wilderness Society as director of its National Parks Program, Northwest Regional Director, and Deputy Vice President for Regional Conservation. He has worked in Washington D.C. as a public lands activist and lobbyist. He has also served as a natural resource specialist with the National Parks Conservation Association, as Legislative Aide to Representative Leon Panetta, and as a board member of several non-profit organizations including Earth Ministry, Washington Environmental Council, and the Cascade Youth Symphony.*

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The **Carpe Diem - Western Water & Climate Change Project** is a network of experts and decision makers dedicated to addressing the unprecedented challenge that the impacts of climate change on water resources pose for the western United States. The Project is housed at **Exloco**, a nonprofit organization with expertise in spotlighting critical issues and facilitating strategic thinking.