

CONFLUENCE

CARPE DIEM PROJECT NEWS

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Carpe Diem
WESTERN WATER & CLIMATE CHANGE
A PROJECT OF EEO/CO - PATHFINDING IN THE NEW WEST

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AN INTERVIEW WITH RICK HOLMES

Managing Scarcity



"Most of the reliable water supplies in the West are already allocated. The issue now is how scarcity is to be shared."

Q: In Southern Nevada, what major impacts is climate change having on water resources and what do you expect looking ahead?

A: Ninety percent of our water comes from the Colorado River. Climate change has created a huge expansion of uncertainty about future conditions in the Colorado Basin, and that system was already highly variable. Climate change compounds the existing variability. Current estimates tell us that we should expect 5-20% reduction in flows by 2050. Meanwhile, it is our responsibility to provide a safe and reliable water supply to two million residents, and we are expecting more. We need to be prepared for a warmer and dryer Colorado River Basin and more frequent and more severe water shortages due to climate change.

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: The drought conditions that started in 1999 were a wake up call for all water managers in the Colorado River Basin. In the years 2000-2004 we had the lowest five-year runoff in recorded history, and those measurements had been going on since early 1900s. Inflows to Lake Powell averaged 50% of normal.

facilities so we will still have the ability to deliver water at lower lake levels. A third, lower intake is now being constructed. We're working to diversify water resources and taking short-term measures such as water banking in Arizona.

Q: We're also talking this month to Steve Whitney, who looks at water issues from the perspective of the Pacific Northwest. How would you compare your issues to those of that region?

A: When you compare us to the Pacific Northwest, on the surface, we have a different water resource picture. We're dealing with water shortages, they will be dealing with issues such as sea level rise, but there are more similarities than differences. Most regions are very much concerned about the impacts of climate change. As members of the Water Utility Climate Alliance, large utilities throughout the west are working to improve the science of global climate modeling, accelerate climate-change research, and to develop climate-change adaptation strategies.

Q: The Southern Nevada Water Authority has participated actively in the Carpe Diem Project. What is the value of Carpe Diem to the SNWA?

A: Our General Manager, Pat Mulroy, has been very outspoken about the need for collaboration in dealing with water management issues. It's not new to us.

It's safe to say that most of the reliable water supplies in the West are already allocated, and as we take a look now, the issue is how scarcity is to be shared. The old model of competition will result in conflicts, competition, stalemate. We have to highlight that the important goal is to increase

Faced with rapidly declining inflow and storage in Lake Powell and Lake Mead, the Secretary of the Interior called together water managers in the seven Basin states to examine how reservoirs were managed and operated in this record-breaking drought period. By 2007, a number of new agreements were finalized for river operations, interstate water banking, apportionment of lower basin shortages, and conservation and other forms of intentionally created surplus (the Colorado River Accord of 2007).

That drought is continuing, and we are still seeing declines in Lake Mead. We're looking at a variety of new options and agreements. When and if the lake goes twenty feet below where it is now, we will hit a trigger point set by the Accord, that sets various measures in motion. If we drop to the third trigger point, we basically need to get back together and meet again.

We're spending hundreds of millions of dollars driven by climate change. We have an aggressive conservation program, and we're constructing

cooperation and collaboration. Carpe Diem is an opportunity to collaborate and address difficult climate change and water management issues in the West.

RICK HOLMES serves as Director of Environmental Resources for the Southern Nevada Water Authority. He was formerly Vice President of Community Development for Focus Property Group and has also served as Assistant County Manager for Clark County, Nevada. Rick has Bachelor of Science Degrees in Economics and in Civil Engineering, and a Masters Degree in Urban Planning from the University of Arizona. He is a past President of the National Association of County Planning Directors, and the National Association of County Administrators. Rick served for several years as Chairman of the State Advisory Board on Water Planning and Development, and he is a former member of the Desert Research Institute's Advisory Committee on Water Resources Research.

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.