



HEALTHY HEADWATERS

Strategic Plan - 2012

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I. Overview

Carpe Diem West, a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization, was started in 2007 by a group of western water leaders acting on a shared belief that the climate crisis requires everyone in the field to think in new ways. It emerged from the realization that western water issues were already complex and divisive, and that the profound changes climate scientists predict for the American West will only increase the pressure on the region's limited water supplies. Carpe Diem West's founders concluded that the existing culture of conflict and compartmentalized thinking is simply inadequate to deal with these new challenges, and that new ways to address western water issues were needed.

Carpe Diem West approaches the [wicked problems](#) of western water and climate change by building a neutral forum and vehicle for action in which smart, innovative thinkers from various sectors can come together to discuss ideas, generate shared policy ideas, and develop ways to implement those ideas. The organization's most valuable asset is an extensive and broad-based Network of professionals from different parts of the water world - federal, state, and tribal governments and utilities, industry, conservationists, and the scientific community. By drawing on the deep expertise and collective knowledge of this Network, Carpe Diem West is able to leverage a tremendous amount of work and influence in the fields of Western water and climate change, despite its modest budget and staff.

Carpe Diem West's current program work is organized into three lead programs - *Healthy Headwaters*, *Colorado River Futures*, and the *Carpe Diem West Academy*, plus a new addition -the *Horizons Program*, which monitors and assesses emerging developments in the field.

Over the past two years, Network members have formed the Healthy Headwaters Working Group, the entity that leads and guides this work. As with the other Carpe Diem West programs, the process is not driven by the need to build consensus; rather, our goal is to create an active forum where leaders from all sides can roll up their sleeves and collectively get to work.

II. Healthy Headwaters Programs, Strategies and Objectives

A. The wicked problem – what we are tackling

Communities across the West are facing a serious threat to their water security:

- The vital headwaters that supply over half the American West's drinking water are vulnerable to a host of threats driven by climate change, including wildfire, invasive species, reduced snowpack, altered timing of runoff, and increased pollution.
- Budget cuts are limiting the ability of federal and state land management agencies to meet the challenge of restoring resiliency to headwaters systems
- Urban water consumers are largely unaware of where their water comes from, much less that their water security is at risk from climate change; this makes it difficult to engage their support for solutions
- Water utilities are facing their own set of challenges - including a huge backlog of infrastructure costs and increased customer resistance to rate increases - that can complicate their efforts to invest in headwaters protection

B. End Game

In communities across the West, broad-based partnerships of utilities, agencies, NGOs, elected leaders and other stakeholders are implementing evidence-and science-based strategies to create and maintain resilient headwaters systems over the long term, with the support of federal and state policies and sustainable revenue streams from federal and state governments, water utilities, and the private sector.

C. Theory of Change – or what's needed to tackle the wicked problem

- Policy changes and funding are required to create resilient headwaters.
- A broad range of sectors share a common interest in protecting headwaters: federal land agencies, conservationists, water utilities, local governments, and others.
- By highlighting examples of successful headwaters work across the West, we can link these sectors together and organize them into an effective movement based on the core message of "water security."
- This alliance will have the political clout to re-frame land management policy and budgets around the theme of restoring and protecting headwaters to create water security.

D. Core Strategies

- Build and sustain a strong and diverse alliance of water utilities, public land managers, scientists, conservationists, and others who are united around a common goal of headwaters protection
- Tell the stories of successful headwaters protection partnerships in an effective way
- Develop a shared policy and science agenda that supports headwaters protection and brings it to scale across the West

E. Current objectives

- Create a sign-on Healthy Headwaters Alliance based on a common platform document.
- Work with the US Forest Service to set priorities for headwaters protection through the Watershed Condition Framework program.
- Create a replicable model for headwaters partnerships through the work of our “flagship communities” (Salt Lake, Eugene, Denver/Front Range, Santa Fe, and the Mokelumne, and others TBD).
- Develop examples of how innovative financing techniques including bond measures, EPA revolving funds, and various Forest Service budget programs can be used to focus resources on headwaters protection.
- Set the standard for using watershed valuation and avoided cost analysis as tools for engaging the public and water utilities and leveraging investment from them.
- Working with the Colorado River Futures and Carpe Diem West Academy programs, frame issues related to widespread beetle-killed forests in the headwaters: what are the likely long-term trajectories of these forest types, and how will those changes affect the hydrology?
- Use the Carpe Diem West Academy as a forum and portal for developing and spreading innovation and best practices, beginning with watershed valuation and avoided cost analysis.
- Engage additional sectors in the Healthy Headwaters Alliance, including land use planners, the sustainable community movement, the business community, and the American Lung Association (use the Phoenix meeting as a leverage point).

F. Communications strategies & core audiences

- Overall strategy: educate core audiences of elected officials, water utilities, businesses, and ratepayers about the need to develop and fund policies to protect and restore resilient headwaters systems; emphasize that protecting headwaters is both the right thing to do and a way of saving money in the long run.

- Highlight the stories of successful headwaters partnerships - beginning with our flagship communities - through news stories, op-eds, the CDW website, and direct communication.
- Organize a “Capitol Hill Day” of one-on-one meetings to educate members of Congress and staff about the benefits of existing watershed programs (economic, environmental, and water security), as well as the need for new initiatives.
- Use the Healthy Headwaters Alliance to focus media attention on headwaters protection, capitalizing on the “strange bedfellows” angle.
- Organize groups of Western mayors and water utilities to serve as effective voices for headwaters protection
- Create a policy brief, based on examples and data and from the CDW Network, making the case for headwaters protection as a means to avoid the costs of treatment plants and other gray infrastructure.

For more information:

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