

# NICHOLAS A. POTTER

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## DOCTORAL STUDIES

expected  
2021

### ● **PhD in Economics**

Washington State University

Dissertation: "Essays in Water Economics"

#### **Committee**

**Professor Michael Brady**

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**Professor Jonathan Yoder**

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**Professor Joseph Cook**

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#### **Fields**

Environmental and Natural Resource Economics, International Economics



## WORKING PAPERS

### ● **Climate and irrigated agriculture: Evidence from cash rents (Job Market Paper)**

We use county-level cash rent prices for irrigated and nonirrigated land to evaluate the relationship between temperature and agricultural production value in the context of changing water supplies due to reduced snowpack. Cash rents reflect expectations about profits and allow for a Ricardian analysis of impacts that account for adaptation strategies by producers. In addition, cash rents are less subject to non-farm factors as described in Ortiz-Bobea (2019). While irrigation allows for a greater range of adaptation strategies through a diverse mix of high value crops, water supplies are limited by natural snowpack storage – a situation common in the western U.S. as well as parts of Europe and South America. We use cross-sectional variation in rents to estimate the effect of temperature on production value. To account for water supplies, we use a novel panel dataset to estimate water use as a function of precipitation and snow-water equivalent in each county's watershed. Our results provide insight into the extent of water supply issues facing irrigated agriculture in arid regions as temperatures increase.

## ● On the frontier of water rights: Forfeiture then and now

Forfeiture of water is an important limitation on water rights in the western United States, where the right to water is allocated according to the priority date of the right. While often criticized in the modern context for incentivizing wasteful water use and increasing transaction costs, forfeiture served important functions during the establishment of the western frontier of the United States. We develop a theoretical model of water property rights that reflects forfeiture policy in which the maintenance cost of the right involves the use of the resource itself. This has broad implications for the optimal forfeiture period, particularly in the present era of increased water demand and changing water supply. A crucial factor is the degree of abandonment of claims, which plays a role during the initial allocation of the resource but diminishes as rights are more firmly established and the value of water increases. While a longer forfeiture period may be more optimal in the present, institutional path dependency plays a role in limiting current policy responses.

## ● Property rights and the relationship between conflict and drought

Recent work investigating the effect of drought on conflict has focused on the extent to which drought affects the risk of small scale sub-national conflict between groups (Almer et al. 2017; Harrari and La Ferrara, 2017). While estimating the causal effect of drought on small scale conflict is important, understanding the mechanisms that drive that relationship can help societies manage their water resources and mitigate risk of conflict. Societies that successfully manage scarce resources may weather the storm. Half of all small-scale conflicts in our sample occur in just ten countries, suggesting that variation at the country level plays an important role in determining the risk of conflict as a response to drought. One such role may be property rights for water. Well-defined property rights can help to govern access and facilitate Coasian negotiation and legal recourse. Yet rights that exclude groups may also act to increase conflict. In this paper we examine how property rights work to mitigate drought-induced conflict in Africa and Latin America. In our primary analysis, we employ a random effects model specified to allow for property right variation at the country level while also estimating the “within” effects of drought on small scale conflict. Preliminary results suggest that while drought has an effect on the risk of conflict, variation between countries plays an important role. Some evidence exists that stronger private property rights, especially when providing for traditional ownership by indigenous peoples, reduce the likelihood of conflict.



## PUBLICATIONS

2019

### ● **rnassqs: An R package to access agricultural data via the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA-NASS) ‘Quick Stats’ API**

Journal of Open Source Software, 4(43), 1880, <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.01880>



## SOFTWARE

2019

### ● **rnassqs: Access the NASS QuickStats API**

R package. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=rnassqs>, doi: 10.5281/zenodo.2662520

2019

### ● **vcovConley: Conley spatially-adjusted standard errors**

R package. <https://github.com/potterzot/vcovConley>

### ● **Contributions to other software:**

- [ropensci/rnoaa](#): R interface to many NOAA data APIs
- [ghgvcr](#): R implementation of the Greenhouse Gas Value Calculator



## CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

- 2020 • **"Reproducible geoprocessing of agricultural, climate, and land use data at scale with R"**  
The Workshop in Environmental Economics and Data Science (TWEEDS), Portland, OR
- 2020 • **"Do property rights institutions mitigate drought-induced conflict?"**  
Agricultural and Applied Economics Association Annual Meeting, Kansas City, MO
- 2020 • **"Limitations on water rights in the West: The economic logic of forfeiture"**  
Western Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meeting, Online
- 2019 • **"On the frontier of water rights: Beneficial use and relinquishment in settling the Columbia River Basin"**  
Universities Council on Water Resources Annual Meeting, Snowbird, UT
- 2018 • **"Climate impacts on agricultural productivity in the fruitful rim"**  
Northwest Climate Conference, Boise, ID
- 2018 • **"Using climate analogues to obtain a causal estimate of the impact of climate on agricultural productivity"**  
Agricultural and Applied Economics Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C.



## PROFESSIONAL TALKS

- April 2020 • **"Using data.table for fast processing of large datasets"**  
R Working Group, Washington State University\*
- April 2019 • **"On the frontier of water rights: Beneficial use and relinquishment in the wild west and now"**  
Environmental Economics Lunch, Washington State University
- November 2018 • **"A bayesian model of crop choice using STAN."**  
R Working Group, Washington State University
- October 2018 • **"Can crop switching mitigate the effect of climate on agricultural productivity in the fruitful rim?"**  
School of Economic Sciences Seminar, Washington State University
- February 2018 • **"Hierarchical regression modeling with STAN"**  
R Working Group, Washington State University
- March 2017 • **"Causal bayesian estimates of minimum wage impacts"**  
R Working Group, Washington University
- November 2017 • **"A matching approach to estimating the impact of climate on agricultural productivity"**  
R Working Group, Washington State University



## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Fall 2018 • **Instructor, Fundamentals of Microeconomics**  
211 students, rated 4.2 out of 5

2020  
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2018

● **Instructor, Software and Data Carpentry Workshops**

- Maine Medical Center, Portland, ME, April 2019
- Southwest Indian Polytechnical Institute, Albuquerque, NM, September 2019
- Washington State University, Pullman, WA. February 2018, October 2018, April 2019, October 2019



## RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

present  
|  
2018

● **Research Assistant, Water for Agriculture**

Washington State University

- Professors Jonathan Yoder and Joseph Cook

2018  
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2017

● **Research Assistant, Farmer Participation in Conservation Programs**

Washington State University

- Professors Hayley Chouinard, Michael Brady, Phillip Wandschneider

2017  
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2016

● **Research Assistant, Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources**

Washington State University

2015  
|  
2012

● **Research Assistant, Measure to Manage**

Washington State University

2012  
|  
2011

● **Research Assistant, Moving to Opportunity Project**

National Bureau of Economic Research

2011  
|  
2008

● **Business Development Volunteer, Guinea and Niger**

United States Peace Corps

2008  
|  
2006

● **Research Scientist, Bureau of Business and Economic Research**

University of New Mexico



## PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

2019

● **President, School of Economic Sciences Graduate Student Association**

Washington State University

2018

● **Vice-President, School of Economic Sciences Graduate Student Association**

Washington State University

● **Referee Services**

- Journal of Open Source Software (JOSS), 2019
- Agricultural and Applied Economic Association submitted abstracts, 2017, 2018



## PRIOR EDUCATION

- 2005 ● **M.S. in Applied Mathematics**  
University of Massachusetts - Amherst
- 2002 ● **B.A. in Economics**  
Hampshire College



## AWARDS

- 2018 ● **Student Scholarship, StanCon 2018**
- 2017 ● **Tesfaye Girma Deboch Graduate Fellowship, Washington State University**