



**CARPE DIEM WEST**  
*Our water – Finding solutions together*

## Healthy Headwaters' Tenth Leadership Convening Eugene, Oregon October 16, 2015

On October 16, 2015, Carpe Diem West convened over 80 scientists, policy makers, water managers, and leaders from NGOs, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector. We met in Eugene, Oregon this year, home of the Eugene Water & Electric Board.

The room was charged with can-do agendas, success stories, and not a few shared laughs. After lunch, Dan Whelan, from U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley's office, joined us to help present the inaugural Carpe Diem West *Healthy Headwaters Innovation Awards* to Karl Morgenstern and the Eugene Water & Electric Board, in recognition of their work on the McKenzie Watershed Voluntary Incentives Program (VIP).

We talked seriously about beavers – and we joked about them, too. We did the same with beer, and to a lesser extent chocolate and integrals. Despite another year of extreme drought and catastrophic fires, the mood in Eugene was as indomitable as the American West itself. This group seems driven to make things work no matter how bad it gets, and to see straight through political jockeying to pragmatic, no-nonsense solutions.

Here are a few themes that stood out:

### **The public is getting it. Let's build on that.**

Dr. Joe Casola, deputy director of the Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington, pointed out that the past year looked a lot like current climate projections of the 2080s. Temperatures this year reached mid-21st-century levels, and snowpack levels looked like the end



**“One of the things I got out of the day is the theme of entrepreneurialism. It's the idea of bringing diverse and diffuse resources together to solve a particular problem through the creation of a new product or service. We have to think beyond the rate payer base. That's something I'll be thinking about applying to other problems that we face.”**

Commissioner Steve Mital  
President, Board of Directors  
Eugene Water & Electric Board

of the century. The extreme drought was a blessing in many ways, because it forced the public to wake up and acknowledge the ramifications.

As a result, we've seen a major uptick in multilateral approaches and a sea change in the way the media talks about climate change. Belinda Griswold, senior program director at Resource Media, said she doubts a return to more normal rainfall will cause public attitudes to revert to pre-drought complacency. Her advice: Stay focused. Extreme weather events will continue to occur, so be prepared for them with talking points that connect the dots to climate change and emphasize the need for continued action.

### Our decisions today matter. Monitor and take action.

Dominique Bachelet, senior climate scientist at the Conservation Biology Institute, paired a look at the ways we've "messed up our nest" with examples of how we still have it in our power to monitor, adapt, and mitigate the effects of climate change. Her sense of urgency sounded a refrain among many participants. "The time to start planning was probably yesterday," said Joe Casola. But older systems present opportunities you don't have if you're managing a newer system. Think things through systematically with a vulnerability assessment – or use existing assessments that have been done in your watershed.

Talk turned to the ecological benefits of beavers for buffering climatic transitions, and using their effect on hydrology as a model for green infrastructure. The conversation offered an example of how incredibly diverse solutions can be. "No matter where you are," said Carpe Diem West's Dr. Holly Hartmann, "there's a place for you."



**“Our decisions and what we do are as important as climate change.**

**Dominique Bachelet  
Senior Climate Scientist  
Conservation Biology Institute**



## Focus on shared values to build trust, rather than forcing change.

The best solutions grow organically at the local level – a non-regulatory response to drought and other events. When you threaten people’s lifestyles, they respond negatively – but show them how they can work together to benefit the values they hold dear, and it’s incredible what you can accomplish.

Telling an effective shared values story means speaking in ways that resonate with diverse points of view, and that kind of communication starts with basic listening skills. The McKenzie Watershed Voluntary Incentives Program, for example, rewards long-term stewardship of riparian areas with financial incentives to landowners. “We recognized that ag was something we wanted to keep, so we started working with farmers on what they needed,” said Morgenstern. “Letting them drive what’s meaningful for them.”

Charlie Ester, manager of water resource operations at the Salt River Project in Arizona, told another inspiring story about getting people to transcend political differences and work together. The key for SRP was to avoid putting climate change at the center of the message about the need for forest restoration. Temperatures are rising, and forests are burning down as a result. Everyone can agree on those two basic facts and the effects they have on shared concerns, such as water availability, public health and safety, and the environment. Skirting the climate change issue allows people to focus on common knowledge and shared values, rather than political differences.

**“Uncertainty rules. We’re never going to have the perfect answer. You just have to make the decision that’s the best one with the information that you have.**

Charlie Ester  
Water Resource Operations  
Manager  
Salt River Project



**“It’s so important that we have these local leaders come together in a collaborative atmosphere to get work done in the lower watersheds. We need to be at the table to help them get that work done.**

Tracy Beck  
Willamette Forest Supervisor  
US Forest Service

## No-nonsense, pragmatic approaches win.

“Let’s build a program that actually works – not one we hope works,” said Morgenstern at one point. That attitude points to a host of tactics offering common-sense ways to get things done and pull people together. Sound simple? Never discount the hard work involved, but here are a few examples:

### ***Tell the story with credible science.***

In the Fall of 2013, Laura Briefer, deputy director of the Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities, co-authored a climate vulnerability study with hydrologists and climate scientists at Western Water Assessment. Because of its broad appeal, that study was picked up by the media and helped spark a number of local and regional initiatives, including the first Utah state water plan to include a section on climate change. Her example shows us how water managers can go beyond their traditional roles to help shift the conversation around water and climate change.

### ***Solve more than one problem at a time.***

When communicating costs, Griswold recommends talking about wise investments. Forest restoration solves more than one problem at a time, after all, which ties into what Briefer calls her “no-regrets climate adaptation” approach: Act in ways that reduce costs and provide across-the-board benefits for outdoor recreation, public water services, and long-term ecosystem preservation. Getting a big bang for your buck isn’t pie-in-the-sky, when you’re talking about green infrastructure – it’s par for the course.



“It’s great to see some models of how we can build coalitions to support the work of, in our case, landowners in upstream watersheds, and ensure that their contributions to healthy watersheds and clean water can be compensated, understood, communicated, and enhanced.”

Kathleen Williams  
Associate Director  
Western Landowners Alliance

***Water is no respecter of political boundaries. We shouldn't be, either.***

Bruce Roll, of Clean Water Services in Hillsboro, Oregon, recommends looking across entire landscapes to integrate work so that it makes sense holistically, rather than trying to fit it into the bureaucratic models you've been given. "Break down the silos and you can get some phenomenal results." How would Mother Nature create an easement if she were in charge? That approach has saved Roll's organization millions of dollars.

***Local stakeholders have skin in the game. Work with that.***

Before the EWEB's VIP program began, common assumptions held that landowner resistance was the main problem in the McKenzie Watershed. Morgenstern's work proved those assumptions incorrect. Local landowners felt responsible for being good stewards of their watershed.

Pam Wiley, of the Meyer Memorial Trust's Willamette River Initiative, offered a funder's perspective. "Don't reinvent the wheel," she said. "Local organizations have been around for a long time." Rather than starting over, bring those people together and identify the solution gaps.

**Think outside outside-the-box.**

Climate change is a multi-faceted problem with ecological, social, and economic consequences. As Wiley says, "There's a lot we don't know about the future and the impact of what we're doing." Tackling it effectively requires working in ways that may make us uncomfortable. Wiley recommends being completely transparent about the risks and uncertainties, even when – and perhaps especially when – asking for money.

**“There are ways of making big wow with existing money.**

**Bruce Roll  
Watershed Management Director  
Clean Water Services**



**“We had Northern Arizona University do a random survey in town for us ... explaining the issues to about 600 people. What would they be willing to pay to maintain this investment over time? They were willing to pay, on average, nine times what we would need.**

**Paul Summerfelt  
Wildland Fire Management Officer  
City of Flagstaff**

Effective solutions to water and climate change problems require good organizational skills, strong partnerships, good science – and an unapologetically experimental mindset. Today, we see the beginnings of what’s really possible when water works partner with private corporations. The opportunity goes well beyond logos on websites and t-shirts.

The “Tap to Top” video produced by SanTan Brewing and the Salt River Project offers one example of what can happen when water becomes a unifying theme. Salt River Project and the National Forest Foundation have been very successful raising money from Phoenix area businesses – to the tune of \$2 million in the first year. Key to that success has been using those partners as part of their communication strategy, and offering a diverse menu of ways that private companies can get involved.

**“It’s getting to the point where we almost don’t have to pitch it anymore – our partners are pitching it for us.”**

**Marcus Selig  
Southern Rockies  
Regional Director  
National Forest Foundation**

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## Next Steps

For a “pilot project” the McKenzie River VIP program is remarkably well cooked. Its roll-out in 2016 promises to take Healthy Headwaters work to a whole new level, and we can all be proud of that. Not to be outdone, the Northern Arizona Forest Fund has six more projects slated for 2016, touching every national forest in Arizona.

Opportunities are mounting in the area of watershed protection, and success breeds success. We were excited to hear that Paul Summerfelt, of the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (which raised an unprecedented \$10 million through a bond election in 2012) combined his trip to Eugene with a meeting in Ashland, Oregon, to discuss a program similar to the one in Flagstaff.

Carpe Diem West is proud to play a role in facilitating such connections and helping to build a more resilient water future for communities in the American West. Through our new Watershed Investment Program, we continue to go more granular, building resources and facilitating mutual aid at a regional level. Three cheers and thank you to all the rock stars on our Healthy Headwaters Leadership Team who share their experience and expertise so generously.

The full agenda, attendee biographies, speaker presentations and background material are available [online](#).

[About Carpe Diem West](#) | [About Healthy Headwaters Program](#) | [About Watershed Investment Network](#)