



## Kathy Chandler-Henry

Eagle County Commissioner, Colorado  
First elected 2014



**FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, TWO WOMEN INCLUDING YOURSELF ARE LEADING THE COLORADO RIVER WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT IN THE EFFORT TO PROTECT WEST SLOPE WATER. HOW DOES THIS DISTINCTION FEEL?**

I am so honored to be a part of the long tradition of Western Slope water leadership. The district represents water users on the Western Slope, but also has influence throughout the state and the entire Colorado River Basin. Agriculture, recreation, the ecosystem and industry all rely on the Colorado River. I'm excited to be serving with Marti Whitmore who represents Ouray County and is such a water expert, and all the other directors throughout our 15-county district with their years of experience. The staff at the river district is exceptional and take the lead across the state and region. It's a challenging and important time to serve.

**AS DISTRICT VICE PRESIDENT, WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR YOUR TERM ON THE BOARD?**

Having a strong position as protectors of water resources in the Colorado River Basin is more important now than ever before. Because of climate change, persistent drought, high temperatures, population growth and development, the demands on Colorado River water continue to increase. In the West, we know there is no such thing as "new supply," yet we also know that programs such as demand management have to be carefully crafted not to have negative impacts on agriculture. The mission of the river district is "to lead in the protection, conservation, use, and development of the water resources of the Colorado River basin for the welfare of the district, and to safeguard to Colorado all waters of the Colorado River to which the state is entitled." That's my

goal, too - to enhance the strength of the Western Slope and its water users, knowing that direction also provides strength and resilience for the entire state.

### IS THERE A SPECIFIC, WATER-RELATED POLICY, RULE OR IDEA YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IMPLEMENTED AT THE LOCAL, STATE AND/OR NATIONAL LEVEL?

I think it's critical that we do a better job of connecting land use and water planning. The

### AGRICULTURE IS A CRITICAL PART OF THE WEST SLOPE'S ECONOMY, AND ALSO THE BIGGEST WATER USER. HOW DO WE ENSURE THAT FARMERS AND RANCHERS SUSTAIN THEIR BUSINESS, AND ALSO ENSURE WATER IS USED AS EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE?

What is sometimes forgotten in the discussions of ag water use is the critical ecosystem services provided by these lands and waters. Wetlands, migration corridors, wildlife habitat, open spaces and scenic vistas are part of the benefits of agriculture, in addition to the food that is produced. Without ag, the iconic western landscape would be no more. Farmers and ranchers have more often than not been at the forefront of water efficiencies and conservation practices. We need to make sure we can support those efforts and at the same time we are looking at declining water resources throughout the state and region. Economic impacts of water policies are felt throughout the state by all sectors, and the economy of the entire state depends on western ag lands as well as water-based recreation industries.

### CLIMATE CHANGE, DROUGHT AND ITS CONSEQUENT EFFECTS ON WATER RESOURCES ARE WEST-WIDE ISSUES. WHAT ARE SOME COMMUNITY-LEVEL ACTIONS AND POLICIES LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN IMPLEMENT TO HELP CREATE A MORE SUSTAINABLE WATER FUTURE?

See No. 3 above. It's all about connecting land use and water planning.

### A RECENT STUDY FROM UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY FOUND THAT INTERIOR WEST STATES RELYING ON COLORADO RIVER WATER WILL HAVE TO DRASTICALLY CUT USAGE TO CONTEND WITH THE WATER SHORTAGE CRISIS. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS STUDY, AND WHAT CAN BE DONE IN COLORADO TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM?

I think it's all hands on deck, in Colorado and throughout the West. Conservation organizations, groups such as the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), Water Roundtables, State Water Plans and, of course, the Colorado River District, have to be at the table together to solve these issues. The river district has commissioned work such as the Colorado River Risk Study, and, along with the studies from Utah State and others, it's time to identify and challenge longheld assumptions about water quantity and usage.

### AMERICAN INDIAN TRIBES HAVE CLAIMS TO ABOUT 20 PERCENT OF COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER, AND THEY WILL HAVE A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN SHAPING THE SOUTHWEST'S WATER FUTURE. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE NEGOTIATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS IN MANAGEMENT DECISIONS?

My first introduction to the multiple nation complexities of the Colorado River was at a Colorado River Water Users Association meeting several years ago, with the tribes, Mexico, and the U.S. all at the negotiating table,



along with the Colorado River Basin states. Recognizing sovereign rights along with the fact that all uses are interdependent is not an easy task. Learning more about the “big river” issues is a priority for me.

