

LORELEI CLOUD

Southern Ute Indian Tribe Vice Chair
Colorado Water Conservation Board Representative
Colorado



YOU ARE THE FIRST INDIGENOUS PERSON TO SERVE ON COLORADO'S TOP WATER BOARD, WHICH IS AN HONOR, IMMENSE RESPONSIBILITY, AND LONG OVERDUE. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS DISTINCTION, AND WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS AND IDEAS FOR REPRESENTING TRIBAL INTERESTS WITHIN THIS COMPLEX GOVERNING ENTITY?

I am honored to have been appointed to represent the San Miguel-Dolores-San Juan Basin in southwestern Colorado on the Colorado Water Conservation Board. The board's mission is to conserve, develop, protect, and manage Colorado's water for present and future generations. I am currently learning as much as I can from fellow directors, and to date, I have participated in three board meetings and two roundtable meetings.

In Ute traditions and culture, water is very important. As the first caretakers of this land, we have a duty to ensure that water is available for present and future generations. I am grateful my Tribe has a very progressive relationship with the state of Colorado, and I am encouraged by the inclusion of Tribal perspectives in conservation efforts across the state. Water is very precious to everyone and all beings that are placed on the Earth.

I believe that Tribal perspectives can add a greater level of understanding to conservation efforts. There is also a wealth of traditional ecological knowledge that can be applied. We must all be willing to hear and include Tribal perspectives, even if we do not agree with them. As leaders, we must do our best to advocate for our people, Tribes, and communities. I am excited to be in this role and to help create spaces for future generations and other Indigenous leaders to fill. I believe that by working together, we can build a better future for all generations.

WITH A PROLONGED DROUGHT AND GROWING POPULATION, COLORADO AS WELL AS OTHER STATES THAT RELY ON ITS WATER RESOURCES ARE IN A DIRE POSITION. IN YOUR NEW ROLE, HOW DO YOU PLAN TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE AND RECONCILE COMPETING INTERESTS?

In my position, my responsibility is to represent everyone in the San Miguel-Dolores-San Juan Basin, which includes the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, and 10 counties in Colorado. Right now, we are focused on the interim guidelines for the Colorado River post-2026. It is critical now more than ever to recognize the state of the Colorado River affects everyone, whether they are Tribal or non-Tribal in the Upper or Lower Basin. I hope to see more Native Americans join efforts at this level to work on these challenges.

DAMS ARE INCREASINGLY SEEN AS AN OUTDATED MODE OF WATER MANAGEMENT, WITH SOME COMMUNITIES ADVOCATING FOR THEIR REMOVAL AS A MEANS OF BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND RESTORING WILDLIFE HABITAT. WHAT ROLE DO YOU SEE THEM PLAYING MOVING FORWARD?

Dams have played a vital role in water management. However, due to unprecedented climate conditions, it is necessary to begin to innovate new methods or configure options for repurposing existing structures. The construction and maintenance of dams and reservoirs is very costly in addition to regulations and permitting. Due to current hydrology, dams alone cannot solve all the issues we face from drought; there must be an increased focus on water efficiency and conservation. Moving forward, current infrastructure would benefit greatly by being used with other water management practices, such as flood water storage and shared pools.

IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE-INDUCED ARIDIFICATION AND LOOMING WATER CUTS, THE OUTLOOK IS PARTICULARLY GRIM FOR THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS THE STATE CAN SUPPORT AG PRODUCERS AND HELP THEM ADAPT?

The agricultural industry is essential to our country, and we must support it. We can conserve water by increasing agricultural efficiency. This can be done by improving irrigation delivery, water application, and selecting season-appropriate crops that are suitable for less water consumption. Season-appropriate crops need to be tailored for different locations in Colorado and for different times of year due to the geographic diversity of the state. State extension offices, universities, and cooperatives can help provide this technical support to individual farmers.



CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW COLORADO COMMUNITIES CAN BENEFIT FROM FEDERAL FUNDING THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION ALLOCATED FOR DROUGHT RESILIENCE PROJECTS, AND WHAT SOME OF THESE PROJECTS MIGHT BE?

Funding is always critical and needed, especially in rural communities. Colorado communities need funding to repair and maintain existing infrastructure that is failing. In addition, Colorado communities need funding to develop and construct new and more efficient water delivery infrastructure to utilize their water resources during times of drought. Projects that would be eligible for federal funding through drought resilience can vary from improving irrigation diversion structures to function during times of drought, to improving the efficiency of water delivery infrastructure for both agricultural and municipal use.

WE'VE HAD ABOVE-AVERAGE SNOWFALL THIS PAST WINTER AND WETTER-THAN-USUAL CONDITIONS THIS SPRING, WHICH CAN MISLEAD THE PUBLIC INTO THINKING THE DROUGHT IS OVER. WHAT CAN LEADERS DO TO FIGHT THE MISCONCEPTION THAT A GOOD WINTER/SPRING MEANS CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE DROUGHT AREN'T STILL VERY PRESSING ISSUES?

We are very thankful for the snow and rainfall we have received, but as the summer progresses, it will continue to be very dry, very hot, and the risk of fire increases substantially. The amount of moisture we have received has helped our rivers flow and reservoirs fill, but we must also keep in mind there is a multi-decade drought still in place. Water conservation efforts must keep making progress even after a great winter. I would encourage the public to learn about how to best reduce their water consumption. The Colorado Water Conservation Board meets throughout the year across Colorado, and the meetings are open to the public. You are welcome to sign up for the emails to get updates on water issues.

