

**From your perspective as a community leader in Northern Colorado, what resonated with you from today's session? (What are your key takeaways?)**

- Water is way more complicated than anyone in our state legislature can currently grasp. I don't mean that hypercritically, it's more of an epiphany that I understand at a finer-grained level how legislative decisions will negatively impact the Town I work for than the state does. They really have no idea and appear to be concentrating on urban areas, but the urban context is having a major impact on the rural context, especially when it comes to water. Should my Town cease to grow so that other more urbanized communities can use our water so they can grow? Are the only people who will be able to afford to live here people who can pay for the high cost of our water. Water is an equity issue, and no one appears to be having that discussion at the state level.
- An interesting perspective came out of the October session as fundamental to addressing water challenges. All states do not treat water the same and that impacts how it is administered and valued. I read the book *Running Out* about how Kansas is basically functioning on the expectation that pumping for irrigation purposes will steadily dry out the Ogalla Aquifer in southwest Kansas. It is hard to see a river like the Arkansas with its headwaters in Colorado go dry as it enters Kansas and makes me thankful for Colorado's Water Law but also understanding it may not have addressed that issue either even in Colorado.
- Water law and management of water resources in our region is complicated. We have robust and very well-developed legal and administrative systems in place to manage this complex resource. This is essential and also can make any change or "out of the box thinking" challenging. Although this is a complex resource, our Mayor is an amazing example of someone who took it upon herself to teach herself what she needed to know to engage in the work. She didn't need to be a career water engineer or a water lawyer to jump in and really make a difference in terms of water policy at the state level. I found that really inspiring!
- What resonated with me after Wednesday's session was, to be honest, the amount of negativity surrounding 'how to do better' – during the opening portion of class discussion, there were many problems shared, and not really any ideas of solutions. There seems to be a major contradicting cry for government to do better AND for government to stay out. I would love to hear some solution-based conversation, as opposed to problem-based conversation. I'm not certain why this felt like such a point of focus for me this week, but it really did feel that way. And, so, I would say a key takeaway is the need to change people's perspectives a bit – highlight what's being done right & how to expand on that, where the relationship between local, state and federal government comfortably fits, how to create positive conversation around water, etc...
- There are so many aspects of water & the use of water in our society that SO many people do not know about or understand! I am on the conservation side of the "water world" and some of the things we discussed in class I have never thought about. Specifically, from the first conversation we had about the costs of water and how those costs get determined. It is VERY clearly a part of some of the people in our cohort – it seemed to be a major part of or influence on what their jobs focus on. But even I had a hard time following what they were talking about. I loved Jeni's comment about sitting on the "opposite side" of the court room during debates and the down-to-earth conversations she would have with the Republicans. I do feel like if you are going to build trust and find common ground with anyone, you need to see them as a person.

## 2023-2024 Water Literate Leaders of Northern Colorado Homework Assignment for **October 2023**

- The intensely complicated nature of water law in Northern Colorado. I also appreciated the group's perspectives on the Fort Collins Water Supply Rates issues that were discussed.
- My key takeaways from the second class are that the historical ties run deep and not easily forgotten. Politics ultimately are what influence how well or quickly new approaches to water conservation take place.
- I very much enjoyed learning more about water law as a whole from Whitney Phillips Coulter. I have been exposed to Colorado Water Law in my profession but have never had the pleasure of hearing a water lawyer talk about the field. It was so interesting to learn about the complex river diversion systems and how those are managed on a legal level. I also enjoyed learning more specifically about the Big Thompson Watershed from Jean Lever and learning more about how water quantity is managed right in our backyard. I think this information is very important for me to be able to understand and be able to communicate to my colleagues and also City of Greeley residents, when asked. It's so easy for me to sit back and say our water diversions and water resources management are so complicated here in Colorado, but learning the history and ins and outs of what it takes to manage these systems and ensure it is fair and equitable for those in right to the water was so important for me to learn about. There is a reason why these processes are so complicated, and not to mention expensive, and I am grateful to have been shown that more in depth during October's session.
- The "overview" conversation at the beginning of the day is super valuable to me - I really appreciated the chance to chat with the whole group about last month's session as well as random thoughts/water-related issues that have popped up in our communities in the past month.  
Water law is complicated! I thought I had a decent grasp on the basics of the regulations here in Colorado but I was blown away by the intricacies presented by the various speakers. The way that Colorado's water is organized (administrators, commissioners, etc) is really complex but the people in those positions are, after all, "just people". It was really cool to hear from folks who actually work in these positions and know that they are open to speaking with members of the public about what they do, and share their knowledge about the various laws and regulations they work within
- The biggest thing that stuck with me is the overall lack of water west. How do we change perspectives that the area we live in is a desert and that green grass is not the norm?
- That water law might be one of the most confusing topics on the planet! ha ha But seriously, it is simply fascinating hearing about how complex the issue of water is and how important rights are, the use of the court system to say WHO gets the usage during certain times and why. I honestly will NEVER look at water the same and that is a GOOD thing! It also was interesting to see how "ahead of the curve" the settlers of Colorado and our area were in tackling this issue, especially coming from Greeley....our folks were really pioneers on this subject and thank goodness for that! And once again seeing the need to have educated people that have some sort of understanding of this complex subject to keep the communication lines open as we must learn to work together with so many parties when it comes to this resource.
- I was struck by the amount of "infrastructure" (people and things) that go into administering our water supply. There are commissioners, districts, judges, pipelines, ditches, rivers, politicians, and on and on. All playing a role in the management of our water. It is quick striking.
- The empathic listening caused me to slow down and got me to notice that I sometimes jump to a response without "hearing" what the other person says.
- That Colorado water law is different from other parts of the country. That most states use riparian water law and Colorado's law is based on prior appropriation doctrine. This

## 2023-2024 Water Literate Leaders of Northern Colorado Homework Assignment for **October 2023**

doctrine encompasses the first structures created to move water, i.e., ditches, reservoirs, rivers & wells.

- Water commissioners set the call multiple times of day, manage river/diversions  
Lake Estes holds all the water diverted via the Adams Tunnel and the amount of water in the Lake turns over every 2.5 days  
1.9835 cfs = 1 acre foot

- We learned about the three parts of the water distribution system in northern Colorado - ditches, reservoirs and ground water. The Big 4 Ditch Companies in N. Colorado: Greeley #2, Larimer/Weld Irrigation Company, Water Supply & Storage Company and Northern Poudre.

It was interesting to learn about the role of the water referees in Colorado, their authority when mediating water disputes, etc. There are thousands of filings in Colorado water court each year. Maybe only three per year make it to the Colorado Supreme Court for a decision. The discussion of the "Great and Growing City Doctrine" was new to me. This doctrine enables municipalities to "buy water ahead" for future growth without a current beneficial use. We learned of the power of the State Engineer in water management. The session with the Water Commissioners was most interesting from both a technical (how they do it) standpoint and from the "common sense" approach to managing flows and distribution. We learned about the Chimney Hollow reservoir - it will come online in 2025 and is only for residential water supply. The discussion of the role of Estes Park Lake with CBT and Big Thompson stream flows was most interesting.

Key takeaways:

The system of water diversion, delivery and management in Colorado is highly technical, and yet takes a common-sense approach.

The power of the water referee in determining final decisions in the use, sale, and property rights of water is crucial to the management of the resource.

Seek first to understand, then seek to be understood - Stephen Covey.

- What resonated with me, and continues to boggle my mind, is how complex and convoluted water law is.
- The history of Colorado water and it's complexity; in the legal sense, the varied water rights and the distribution of water were key elements.

**What questions do you have after today's session? Any areas you want to explore further?**

- Why is resiliency not a factor in legislation that may not directly be about water, but has potentially detrimental impacts to water supplies, ie. affordable housing? Don't get me wrong, I am a huge proponent of affordable housing, but in rural communities the market is different. While our housing values are increasing due to market pressures, our community has provided various levels of affordable housing for the Denver and Boulder workforces. While we haven't added much housing in the last decade, our values have risen exorbitantly due our housing market being absorbed into the Denver metro market. We have the Colorado Springs metro area buying land with alluvial water rights in our backyard; we're in southeast Weld County where they've recently bought sections of land with our same alluvial rights (they're way down in El Paso County and they're reacting to the substantial growth demand in their region), but if they pipe off our water, where we will we get our water for the future?
- What have historically been the drivers behind trans basin transfers and how do they get approved without damaging the river basins being pulled from?
- I realized that many of the topics that came up during our conversation with Mayor Arndt were new to me which has me motivated to learn more about what is happening right now in terms of water policy and decisions and the city level. Some of my questions after that session include:  
What policies related to water are currently being drafted/revised/considered?  
What are current controversial water-related topics at the city level?  
What is 1041?  
What is WOTUS and how does this relate to Ft Collins/our region?  
Where are we in the current debate about Glade Reservoir? Is it still controversial in our community?
- After Wednesday's session, I would love to connect further with Mayor Arndt and hear her thoughts on the WOTUS decision, and how she thinks that is best remedied in Colorado.
- Based on my previous answer, I'd like to learn more about this. Why are different water users calculating the value of water differently? What variables are included in the formula? Why isn't it standard across the board? This seems to be a locally driven activity but it seems like it should be at the state or interstate level.
- I'd love to hear more about how water allocations affect minorities and have a financial impact on development and growth.
- Similar to last week, it is evident the individual users are not the issue, when it comes to water in the west. How much do laws and politics punish the end user when in fact it is not the source of the problem. I'd like to further understand how the media and the overall mindset of scarcity has corrupted the enjoyment of this natural resource.
- I have questions and curiosity centered around augmentation and how underdrains for groundwater when connected to a stormwater system are managed. We have a few underdrains in the City of Greeley where I work that are connected to surface waters, ditches, and even our stormwater system so that is a topic that piqued my interest during the October session that I need to dig into a bit more. I am now wondering if the City should be augmenting these underdrains somewhere else in the system or not.
- I would love to explore the social science side of the lower basin's over-use of water based on the CO River Compact - what is being done to educate/incentivize residents/developers in the lower basin states to use less water?  
Are there state/regional/federal rulings that are asking the lower basin states to monitor development specifically regarding water needs?

## 2023-2024 Water Literate Leaders of Northern Colorado Homework Assignment for **October 2023**

How do we move forward if the upper basin states end up needing our "allotment" of water?

- My biggest question after this session concerns native water rights. From my perspective, I would like to know if there are alternate waters the Town of Severance could use moving forward.
- Any areas you want to explore further? Given that the subject of water law is so complex and diverse, as an average joe that is trying to stay informed and maybe become involved in more leadership opportunities in their communities one day, if we had limited knowledge....what might be an experts suggestion to that person about what top 3 things would that person really want to know/study up on? I know this topic is never ending but how could a local leader who doesn't have the largest knowledge of background on the subject try to pick out the most basic facts/topics to know to be able to help lead AND teach others? Again, realizing a person leading would want to always try to know as much as possible but what are a few main points that would really help that leader to know and help others to understand? I know a person would want to always continue learning but maybe tackling it from the most "common" things to know and then diving deeper from there?
- I am fascinated by the legal aspects of this administrating, and how changes in use (from Ag to Municipal) will challenge the systems that have been put in place. What happens when water is getting diverted early in the system? What happens when the city's are competing against the developers themselves for water?
- I'd like to explore water law further. Especially as it relates to groundwater. In NOCO we interact with surface water more frequently.
- What doctrine or water law will be followed on the reallocation of the Colorado River discussion in 2026? How does one become qualified to be a 'water commissioner'? I'd like more information on the "Great and growing cities doctrine" and how cities can buy water for future generations. How does it get around the "beneficial use" clause?
- I have questions about the logistics of how you buy water to augment water you're diverting from the river. Is this all handled through the courts? Or is there a market outside the courts that users can access?  
Why don't other arid states pay the amount we do for water? Are there changes we should consider here that would bring down the cost?
- How do we build more storage that is efficient and effective in a shorter period of time? It seems like it takes 20-30 years to get a project fully completed. How is Colorado water governance fair and how is it unfair? What can northern Colorado do to keep the Denver Metro area away from northern Colorado water?
- Regarding water law – I have questions about ditches / canals / drainage ditches and how they factor into water rights, who has to maintain them, what to do if you are a landowner that has a ditch crossing your property, etc. Seems as if there is a lot of things the ditch or reservoir company can do, but with it also being personal property, I imagine there are things they still need to communicate and coordinate with the land owner.
- No questions now; I am just digesting what I learned.

**Are there any components of what you learned today that are applicable for your current position or profession?**

- I have so much more education to do about potential legislative impacts on our Town's water resources both now and, in the future; we need someone to actively and emphatically listen to us.
- Johnstown's water comes from the Big Thompson River basin so the presentation with Jean Lever was extremely informative and should be a 101 course for anyone entering the industry in this basin.  
I really appreciated the session on Empathic Listening and have been actively trying to engage my listening skills and trying to reign in my pension for weighing in ahead of the completion of the conversation.  
I enjoyed the overview approach of taking a water right and following it through the legal process to the management of decrees by the State Engineers office. These are all items my department handles with minimal 101 knowledge as to why or how something is decreed or administered.
- Honestly, everything we covered today is applicable to my current position. This is exactly the background I was missing - the overview of water law in Colorado and particularly the summary of water administration in Northern Colorado. I really appreciated hearing from Jean Lever and found the information she covered the most directly useful to me. Although I have been working in and around the Big Thompson for more than a year, I did not understand until today's session the interplay between CBT water and native water in the Big Thompson river and the role of the Water Commissioner in managing the river flows.  
Thank you so much for that session!
- All of the history we learned in Wednesday's session is extremely applicable in my current role. As someone who only recently made my way from the East Coast, gaining the historical knowledge of Colorado water issues is so valuable. Before moving to Colorado, water was not an area of focus (or thought, really) for me, and I have found it a fascinating topic since starting my current position. Learning how the West got to where they are with water helps to further my knowledge and interest on the subject, and allows me necessary information to have better understanding and conversation.
- Empathetic listening – this is something I have used FOREVER, before I even knew what it was. If you want to get a landowner to trust you, you need to listen to what their concerns are in order to find common ground to get to solutions.  
Michael and Jean's presentation topics are fully applicable to what I do. Up until Jean's talk, I didn't know much about how the water commissioner would "calculate" how much each water rights owner gets on a daily basis. After that, I now have a better idea! This information is helpful as BTWC approaches ditch companies to hold discussions about upgrading infrastructure and other water conservation projects.
- Yes, absolutely. Again, I appreciated everybody's feedback on my specific issue, but I also took away a much greater understanding of Fort Collins' water rights and how they're impacted by upstream/more senior rights.
- Understanding how to better steward and collaborate this resource for more efficient use is the critical component and not trying to figure out how to always "make" more water from an eco-system that is producing any more.
- Absolutely! My answer to question 2 is something that I will be able to take back and research more that should be able to help me and my team in the Stormwater Division get a better handle on. Also, with my board position with the Big Thompson Watershed Coalition, it is so great that I am learning more about the Colorado – Big Thompson project and the diversion systems that get that CBT water to the Big Thompson. I very much enjoyed hearing Jean Lever talk about how water resources are managed within her district. When I am

## 2023-2024 Water Literate Leaders of Northern Colorado Homework Assignment for **October 2023**

talking to other board members, staff, or the general public, it is important for me to have an understanding of how we get our water in the Big T and where it comes from, to be able to help advocate and educate to the importance of protecting these precious water resources.

- Hearing the various perspectives of classmates from their personal/professional viewpoint is so useful for how to move forward in our community talking about water.  
I would love a bit more time to speak as a group (maybe one or two other 30 minute sessions of "chat time") to gain more perspective about how other class members are approaching water issues in their industries.
- There were several components from this class that applied to my current career. However, the number one component that will help the most is Whitney Coulter's discussion. I say this as the Town of Severance Council is currently looking for a Water Attorney to help with the acquisition and other matters, so I was able to pass her information on to my Council, which will probably lead to a meeting with her firm. Additionally, her topic on the different types of waters in our area has led me to look at the ditch companies surrounding Severance to see if it is possible to tap into these systems for future Town uses.
- This once again, the use of rights of water are a great topic for most to know but especially when folks might be trying to develop areas/subdivisions/housing as well as folks buying land/property in rural areas as well as knowing what it takes for businesses to have to plan for in the fee's department, etc. I also have come away from each session so far and "Made" some people listen to what I learned ha ha But I feel like that is a huge part of this program.....teaching folks about this subject so that we can continue to HAVE plenty of this resource for future generations. I also REALLY REALLY enjoy the aspects of leadership, listening, how to discuss difficult topics....to me, those things can be used in EVERY day life by EVERY single person so absolutely felt like I walked away with a bunch more knowledge on those!
- Being in the community baking world, I think it is important for us to think about how policies are being decided and based on what long term principals they are being guided by. Also, as the region continues to grow together how different communities, with different challenges, can work together to strategically plan for a shared future.
- Yes. I broker water rights so Whitney's presentation was very applicable.
- Yes, it really helps to learn about Colorado Water law and I thought Ms. Phillips Coulter did a good job with a basic explanation. Also, learning that CBT water can be used, reused and continually reused until it leaves state lines is helpful to know as we convert to our city's non-potable system. Also, hearing about Ft. Collins' experience with water rate increases is really helpful, too. Communication and education are key to meaningful and necessary water rate policy.
- Appreciated the discussion/overview of Colorado Water Law.  
Also really appreciated the discussion early in the day regarding water fees and development. The need for a regional or statewide approach.
- The applicability of this session's learning for me is to broaden my knowledge so that I may talk intelligently to leaders about water and water resource management in our region.
- Active and empathic listening is certainly applicable to my current position as I interact with staff, other senior leaders of Weld County, and elected officials.
- The general Knowledge imparted at the session is invaluable as a Board Member of a water authority.