
GCSC Seminar Series

210 ASB
(Aline Skaggs Building)

Tuesday, February 6, 2018
4:00-5:00 PM

ALL ARE WELCOME

Refreshments & meet
the speaker at 3:45

Edella Schlager

Professor, School of Government & Public Policy at the
University of Arizona

“Water Scarcity, Governance, and Adaptation in Western Transboundary River Basins”



Social and political adaptation to existing and anticipated hydrologic variability in western river basins is a function of institutional design.

Abstract

River basins are complex adaptive social-ecological systems. Their biophysical diversity is often matched by social, economic, and institutional diversity with a host of governments and organizations representing different communities of place and of interests pursuing a variety of goals, from stable water supplies and drought mitigation to habitat protection and river restoration.

Such complex social-ecological systems, especially those that cross state lines present a number of challenges to adaptive governance, from zero-sum water allocation issues between upstream and downstream states, to the reluctance of state officials to strictly regulate their state's water users for the benefit of downstream users, to conflicts among states over responsibilities for recovering threatened and endangered species.

In this presentation, I examine how states and water users' (municipal, agricultural, environmental) efforts to adapt to water scarcity while addressing transboundary challenges are conditioned by how well governing arrangements are matched to the biophysical setting as well as the capacity of institutional arrangements to support cooperation and coordination of governments, organizations, and individuals over time. I draw on evidence and examples from western rivers governed by interstate compacts with particular emphasis on the Rio Grande River Basin, and I conclude with a number of policy lessons on adaptation.

Bio

Edella Schlager is a professor in the School of Government and Public Policy at the University of Arizona in Tucson. She has spent her career engaged in comparative institutional analyses of common pool resource governing arrangements. Water governance in the western US is the focus of her research, from conjunctive management of ground and surface waters within states, to interstate water sharing agreements (interstate river compacts), to regional intergovernmental arrangements that manage for habitat, water quality, and water quantity. She also examines the vulnerability and robustness of water institutions to climate change. Schlager has co-authored two books on water, *Common Waters, Diverging Streams: Linking Institutions and Water Management in Arizona, California, and Colorado* Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future (with William Blomquist and Tanya Heikkila; 2004); and, *Embracing Watershed Politics* Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado (with William Blomquist; 2008). She is the lead editor of the volume *Navigating Climate Change Policy: The Opportunities of Federalism* Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press (with Kirsten Engel and Sally Rider, 2011). In addition, she has published numerous articles and book chapters on water governance. Currently, Schlager is editor of the *Policy Studies Journal*, a leading journal focused on furthering the development of theories and frameworks of policy making.