

Public Beliefs Towards Water Use in the West

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Abstract. The population of the Western United States is currently undergoing a rapid and drastic change as more people migrate to the west and move from rural communities to more urban areas. As this population shift occurs, the primary use of water will swing from traditional agricultural uses to municipal and industrial uses. This shift in use will inevitably result in dramatic conflicts. Unfortunately, the social causes and expected results of these conflicts are not well studied or understood. An email survey of municipal households throughout the 17 western-most states was administered in order to gain a better understanding of individuals' basic beliefs towards water use and conservation. Basic beliefs are second order cognitions focused on specific issues, such as water conservation, and give meaning to an individual's more abstract values. It is thought that by identifying a pattern of basic beliefs toward water conservation, managers may be informed on how the public feels about various strategies and potential policies regarding water use and reallocation. Thus, levels of public agreement with water management issues may be better predicted. In general, residents of the West agree that the natural environment deserves the same consideration and priority as the economy during water planning processes; water conservation and conservation strategies are issues that are personally important and have a daily impact on their lives; and also the government has a responsibility to develop policies to conserve water and employ requirements to decrease water consumption.

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