



Conference Panel on Adapting Policy. Photo: Clayton B. Lyon

## Reflections: On Annual Conference Key Themes – and Questions About 2024

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The WRRRC's 2023 Annual Conference, held in mid-July, tackled this key question: What can we do to address Arizona's water challenges? We developed the agenda differently in that we solicited abstracts for presentation. We did not want to presume we knew the solutions to be featured. Combining proposed solutions with some invited presentations resulted in a packed two-day agenda filled with a variety of speakers and solutions.

As I sit looking at the Pacific Ocean during my annual escape from Tucson's summer heat, the role of seawater desalination in meeting water demands comes to mind. Particularly in freshwater-scarce regions like Israel and United Arab Emirates, desalinated seawater is critical to meeting water needs. Though mentioned at the conference, discussion of how seawater might fit into Arizona's solution set was limited. Perhaps this should not be surprising. After all, Arizona does not border a sea or ocean. And seawater desalination is only one of many options. Over the two days of robust presentations and discussions, it was apparent that many solutions to addressing the numerous challenges must be pursued simultaneously. There is no single solution.

We were honored to have University of Arizona President Robert C. Robbins open the conference, mentioning the forthcoming report of his Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Food Production in a Drying Climate. Sessions covered proposed solutions for a broad range of challenges, including water quality, information gaps, improving farming practices, managing groundwater, utilizing stormwater, adapting policy, growing the water workforce, technological innovation, and financing opportunities offered



Conference poster presenter Zoey Reed-Spitzer. Photo: Clayton B. Lyon

through the Water Infrastructure Financing Authority of Arizona. Speakers also provided information and insights on responses to the Colorado River shortage, Tribal consultation and solutions, portfolio-based approaches to meeting water demands, and Arizona State University's water innovation initiative. In addition, more than a dozen presenters participated in the second day's poster-networking session. The full agenda, along with recordings of oral presentations, has been posted on the [WRRC 2023 Annual Conference web page](#).



Networking with sponsors. Photo: Clayton B. Lyon

Aside from specific solutions, I picked up on two key themes that permeated speakers' descriptions of programs and processes for moving forward: partnerships and inclusivity. Concepts related to partnerships rang through the two days. Many spoke to the cooperation and consultation required to get feasible solutions on the table and the buy-in needed for implementation. Inclusive consultation and involvement are key, but inclusivity was highlighted in a different context as well. Several speakers mentioned the need to reach out to those not typically or historically part of the conversation and to make sure programs and resources reached underserved communities and individuals. Speakers underscored that we are in this together. It will take individual and collective actions to address the challenges and adapt as conditions change. Solutions will need to be thoroughly vetted through inclusive processes and considerations, and it is important that we do not leave people or communities behind.

It is gratifying that we received much positive feedback about the conference, including praise for the opportunity it afforded to hear diverse perspectives and to engage in informal discussions. Yet, we all realize there is much work to do as we continue contributing to the dialogue through our ongoing applied research, community and individual engagement programs, and education efforts. And there is the 2024 Annual Conference to plan. It is in the context of our conference planning that I'd like to ask you about next year's conference, whether or not you attended this year's conference and/or [past conferences](#). Would you like to see next year's conference focus again on solutions, with a call for abstracts? Or is there a different topic we should address? Please send your thoughts to me at [smegdal@arizona.edu](mailto:smegdal@arizona.edu) and, if not already subscribed, sign up for the [Weekly Wave](#), WRRC's e-news digest, to hear about our plans and programs.

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We partner with many to deliver our annual conference, the WRRC's signature event. I thank our presenters, sponsors, conference advisory committee, and in-person and Zoom attendees from so many communities, states, and countries for participating. I thank the staff, students, and volunteers who are essential to delivering a smooth experience. I thank all who engage with us and look forward to continued engagement in working toward solutions to the water challenges of Arizona and beyond!