



Reflections: On Networking and My Path to the 10th World Water Forum

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I write this while traveling to the 10th World Water Forum, which is being held in Bali, Indonesia from May 18 through May 25. Networking is foundational to much of what I do, including my participation in the Forum. It is about establishing and maintaining the connections that are so important to my ability to access people and information. Similarly, networking facilitates connections so others can reach out to me.

I focused on networking in my keynote address at the February 2024 annual conference of the Multi-State Salinity Coalition, where I was presented their Salt of the Earth Award. To a room full of technical experts, I spoke to how I became connected to large-scale desalination efforts and have established relationships with a broad range of water experts, decision-makers, and others. My “Salty Reflections” remarks were organized around a series of “lessons learned,” with the very first being to *establish and maintain connections*. I explained, “When you meet a great expert – keep in touch and find out a way to continue connecting.” Next, I advised the audience to *ask questions to learn* and *listen to learn*. Asking questions and listening to the responses are ways to engage with experts and are an active way of learning. I spoke about *being proactive in communicating*. This helps maintain connections to people. While social media is a fine way to share things you’ve written, actively emailing individuals still has its benefits. Although what you send may not be read, this sort of sharing is more direct and immediate than connecting through social networking, which I do somewhat irregularly. With respect to incoming communications, another networking tip is to *be responsive in communications*. Responding to inquiries from news media, for example, undoubtedly helped me get quick responses from journalists when reaching out to them regarding plans for a journalists’ panel at the WRRC 2024 Annual Conference. I also admitted that *establishing and maintaining networks can be exhausting*. But I also noted that having broad and deep networks can return big rewards, including enhancing one’s ability to help others advance in their careers.

This last point is highly relevant to my Spring semester graduate course, Water Policy in Arizona and Semi-arid Regions. Each year, as I develop a syllabus that provides timely information to help students become familiar with key water policy and management issues, I invite water experts to guest lecture as enhancement to what I provide as readings, other assignments, and my own introductory lectures. Students appreciate these guest lectures and I often receive unsolicited feedback from them—after they receive their

grades—noting how they benefited from the information and insights shared by the guest speakers. One student wrote, “I like the variety of topics covered in such a short period of time, as well as the quality of speakers. You're one of only a few people in Arizona who have that type of network, and it really benefits the class.” Another commented, “I learned so much in your class! It was very interesting and I loved the guest speakers and the pragmatic conversations that we had!” Clearly, the engagement of individuals from my network of experts helps me train the next generation of professionals and water leaders.

Having an up-to-date network helps me share information and insights with others. A great example of this is the panel of university personnel I assembled for the Family Farm Alliance (FFA) annual conference this past February, in which panelists shared info about their current and highly relevant research and programs. When following up on a discussion with the late Pat O’Toole, FFA President, and FFA Executive Director Dan Keppen on my interest in sharing information about the recommendations of the UArizona President’s Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Food Production in a Drying Climate, they invited me to assemble a panel of University of Arizona experts for their conference, the first time they featured a panel of university personnel. Engaging with people at conferences is a great way to build and maintain networks, and it leads to opportunities for meaningful partnerships. I’ll note that this was severely hampered during the pandemic shutdown of in-person events. Although it’s great to be able to participate in conferences virtually, distance participation restricts networking opportunities.

As I travel to Bali for the 10th World Water Forum, an event that happens every three years, I reflect on how my networks and my body of work, particularly in transboundary groundwater assessment, have led to participation in several sessions. The body of work comes first, of course. I submitted five expressions of interest through the open call for participation. All led to speaking opportunities, with most of them organized by people in my networks. A sixth opportunity came in more recently through someone I’ve engaged with only virtually. There are several implications related to networking here. Over time, networks expand. However, it should not be assumed that just because I am advanced in my career, people will come to me. The saying “out of sight, out of mind” is largely in play, meaning staying current with your networks is vitally important. Although I noted that virtual networking has some limitations, the virtual networking of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network (WWDN) led to the sixth invitation for me to speak. The WWDN members look forward to interacting in person at the World Water Forum.

The titles of my six sessions are (1) Transboundary and Cross-Sectoral Dialogue for Peace and Water Resilience, (2) Groundwater Governance, (3) Turning Crisis into Opportunities: How Civil Society Engagement Helps Solve Water Issues, (4) Handbook for the Local Implementation of the OECD Principles on Water Governance, (5) Urban Water Resilience in a Catchment Context, and (6) The Role of Science for Building Capacity and Dialogue Across Transboundary Basins.

A lot of preparation on the part of so many has gone into making the World Water Forum an informative and meaningful experience. Though a long journey to it, I write this essay with excitement about my participation. Be on the lookout for my post-forum essay, where I’ll reflect on the insights gained from my participation and networking!

