



Oregon water: Assessing differences between the Old and New Wests



Erika Allen Wolters^{a,*}, Monica L. Hubbard^b

^a Oregon State University, 301 Gilkey Hall, Corvallis, OR 97331-6206, USA

^b Public Policy Research Center, Boise State University, Boise, OR 83725-1935, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 October 2012

Received in revised form 22 October 2013

Accepted 22 October 2013

Available online 4 December 2013

Keywords:

Old West–New West

NEP

Rural–urban

Water

ABSTRACT

The history of the American West is intimately tied to the movement and management of water. As the West developed, so too did the image of rural Westerners. As stressors like climate change and population growth strain existing water supplies, resource management benefits from understanding whether fundamental differences exist between the residents in the Old (rural) West and the New (urban) West. Using a survey conducted in the spring of 2010 of Oregon residents, this study explores whether residents in Oregon show distinct differences in environmental concern based on rural or urban residency. The results show that there are differences between groups on environmental beliefs, but likely attributed to factors other than rural and urban residency, and there are no significant differences between groups on water.

© 2013 Western Social Science Association. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The history of the American West is intricately tied to the management, movement, and infrastructure built around water. Water development in the 19th and early 20th century focused on “conquest and control” (Groenfeldt, 2010), with major projects like dams and river diversions regularly undertaken. Water scarce cities like Las Vegas rose out of the desert due to water diversions that siphoned water from the Colorado River into the desert for urban development, and even the residents of Las Vegas were once under the illusion of water abundance. In the 1980s, Las Vegas per capita water consumption was over double the amount of New York City’s, which gets ten times the amount of annual rainfall (Glenon, 2009). In sum, the West, in many ways, was forged out of the belief that

water could be manipulated to accommodate growth and demand.

Like many states in the West, early settlers in Oregon were eager to lay claim to land for ranching, agriculture, timber and fishing, and entrepreneurs were eyeing industries and revenue that these new cities could bring. The one thing that these ventures had in common was water. In 1909, based on the prior appropriations doctrine, the State of Oregon enacted the Oregon Water Code to mitigate growing conflict between users. By 1909, there was so much conflict over water in Oregon due to changes in water availability and population growth to the region that rules were formally established to guide water use and establish priority users.

Less than one hundred years later, in 2001, in Oregon’s Klamath River Basin, the combination of a drought and over-allocated water led the federal government to shut down irrigation water to farmers in compliance with mandates to protect endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. The decision to shut off water led to one of the nation’s most notorious water wars resulting in protests, illegal efforts to restore water to irrigators,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 541 737 1421.

E-mail addresses: Erika.Wolters@oregonstate.edu (E.A. Wolters), MonicaHubbard@boisestate.edu (M.L. Hubbard).

and a fight that is still being negotiated over a decade later. The Klamath water war highlights the complexities of water management between irrigators, commercial fisheries, Native Americans, energy producers, and endangered species (environmentalists by proxy), but on a more fundamental level illustrates the conflict between the values associated with the rural communities, or what is referred to as the “old commodity West” and the urban communities or the “new environmental West” (Hays, 1991).

Two pervasive stressors are now shaping the story of the American West and water: population growth and climate change. However, policies regarding water are as much a reflection of changing demographics and shifting weather patterns as they are about human values toward the environment and natural resources. Whereas early settlers in the West fought over access for use of water, more recent water wars in the West are fought over how water ought to be used. In previous natural resource conflicts, such as the Spotted Owl, Oregon has seen a difference between the Old West and New West, with the New West moving toward the biocentric view of conservation. The purpose of this paper is to determine whether the concept of the “new environmental West” and “old commodity West” holds true for water in Oregon, and addresses the question of whether there is a difference between rural (old) and urban (new) Oregon on water issues.

2. Background and justification for research

2.1. Stressors

Oregon has long held the reputation of water abundance. However, precipitation levels reveal an obvious imbalance to the amount and consistency of rainfall throughout the State. In the simplest explanation, the Cascade mountain range controls precipitation patterns. On the western side of the Cascade Range annual precipitation is 40–140 inches per year (Bastasch, 2006), a stark contrast with precipitation on the eastern side of the Cascade Range, which is only 10–20 inches per year (Bastasch, 2006). Regardless of reputation or even annual precipitation, demand for water exceeds supply in the summer months with many of Oregon’s surface water either fully or over allocated (Bastasch, 2006).

Exacerbating demand for water is projected impacts on Oregon’s hydrology due to climate change and the State’s steady population growth. Under current conditions, the Pacific Northwest is expected to have an increase of temperature between 1 and 5 °F by 2050 due to climate change (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2008). It is likely that Oregon will experience a change in hydrology with increased rainstorms and snowstorms in the winter and drier, longer summer conditions. Spring runoff will most likely come earlier in the year, altering flood patterns and changes to the availability of water for irrigation (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2008).

At the same time, recent growth in Oregon has been steady and relatively rapid. In the years between 1980 and 2006, Oregon’s population increased 40.5%, from 2.6 million to 3.7 million residents (Albrecht, 2008). Most of this growth occurred in the greater Portland, including the

Vancouver and Beaverton region, metropolitan area (Albrecht, 2008). Currently, over 75% of Oregon’s population resides in urban areas (U.S. Census, 2011). In addition, Oregon’s economic base has in recent years shifted away from a rural resource dependent economy to an economy that now is roughly 82% employment in the urban service-sector (Clucas, Henkels, & Steel, 2011) which can create further in-migration from rural to urban centers for employment.

Although the majority of Oregonians reside in urban areas, statewide domestic water use only accounts for about 1% of water withdraw (Kenny et al., 2009). Instead, like many states in the West, agriculture is Oregon’s primary use of water. In 2005, agricultural fresh water use in Oregon accounted for 80% of water withdraw (Kenny et al., 2009), therefore, holding the majority of the State’s water permits. However, Oregon’s rural population is in the clear minority. While agricultural products contribute an estimated 15% of the State’s economy (Sorte, Lewin, & Opfer, 2011), the change from a rural, agricultural based state to an urban, service industry has shifted the policy expectations and goals between rural and urban residents (Clucas et al., 2011).

As Oregon continues to become an urban, industrialized state, it will have to grapple politically with climate change effects on water usage, particularly since Oregon has current issues of over allocation. Whether urban residents, who are in the majority, and rural Oregonians, who maintain the vast holdings of water rights, will find areas of policy consensus is a central question.

While each state in the West faces different types of water challenges, lack of water impacts all states. Economies and social systems that were once predominated by agricultural industries and rural lifestyles have now transitioned into more urbanized industrialized regions. The larger question for the West is whether resulting policy differences is based on inherent beliefs resulting from the Old West and New West.

2.2. Rural–urban divisions: the new West vs. the old?

It has long been held that people in resource dependent rural communities are ideologically conservative, adhere toward more traditional views of land management practices, and hold political power due to economic contributions to western states (Sheridan, 2007). The images are of “ranches, timberlands, dusty cattle drives, and sleepy, homogenous communities” (Winkler, Field, Luloff, & Krannich, 2011), basically vast, unchanging, and unchangeable. Both the 2001 Klamath “water war” and the controversial 1995 Supreme Court decision protecting primarily northern Spotted Owl habitat are leading examples of rural, resource based communities fighting for their ability to, as they argued, protect their economy versus what was depicted as urban environmentalists wanting to sacrifice jobs for the environment. Both cases served as harbingers of potential Old West versus New West natural resources battles.

Political divisions over environmental issues in the West are, in part, due to the economic and cultural impacts of postindustrialism. In the last several decades, Oregon has

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/140108>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/140108>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)