

Reflections: Planning for the Future

by Sharon B. Megdal
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From left to right: Women in Water Diplomacy Session host Sharon B. Megdal, panelists Elia Tapia, Adriana Resendez, Darnella Melancon, Jennifer Pitt, and Brenda Burman, and panel moderator Margaret J. Vick. Image: Bridget Schwartz-Manock.

On the Colorado River water front, 2025 did not end on a high note. Reservoir storage was low, snowpack was below average, and the relationship between the Upper Basin and Lower Basin state negotiators was frayed. Discussions and presentations at the December 16–18, 2025 Colorado River Water Users Association's (CRWUA) annual conference suggested the potential to arrive at a negotiated agreement by February 14, 2026, the deadline established after no agreement was reached by the prior November 11, 2025 deadline. But specifics were lacking. Moreover, federal representatives were unwilling to indicate what they would do should the deadlock continue. They stated that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement would not specify a preferred alternative.

As I was interviewed in December by media representatives, I commented that people work to meet deadlines, especially if there are negative consequences to not meeting them. And Colorado River water users must figure out how to work with what Mother Nature is providing. As I wrote in my **August 2022 Reflections**, the Colorado River is not waiting. I noted that feelings of frustration were prevalent. Another matter I pointed to in some interviews was process. For some time, I've been speaking and writing about the importance of **process** for identifying solutions and debating their trade-offs before acting to address wicked water problems. I enumerated seven process factors in a case study published as Chapter 43 in the **freely available in PDF format** *Routledge Handbook of Water Diplomacy*. This recently published volume has much useful information and insights into water diplomacy, which were highlighted during the **December 15, 2025 WRRC Water Webinar** featuring *Handbook* editors and authors.

When speaking about the list of seven process factors in my case study, I often add **transparency**. Transparency is lacking in Colorado River negotiations. Not only are meetings closed, but there is limited opportunity for others to offer suggestions. The closed-door process does not allow for people to voice ideas through, for example, a call to the public. Such a call could allow all of us to hear alternative options. There are a lot of good minds out there. It would help if we could hear some of them rather than follow a process that only allows for written comments at very limited points in time. It also could be helpful to have more reporting out, in summary form, on the status of the negotiations. There is so much at stake!

Before leaving Las Vegas, the site of the CRWUA conference, on December 18, 2025, many attended a gathering convened by the Women in Water Diplomacy Network and Indigenous Women's Leadership Network, with support from the Central Arizona Project and Salt River Project. There, we heard from several speakers about how life experiences shape who we are as professionals — and as people. The event provided an uplifting close to this business trip, the last one for almost all of us before the end-of-year holidays and work slowdown.

As I returned home to Tucson, I thought that I would experience a quiet holiday break in relatively warm Tucson. But that was not to be. Underscoring the reminder that we have personal lives and families was the early arrival on Christmas Eve of my first grandchild. So, I hurriedly packed for an early Christmas Day flight from warm Tucson to the very cold and snowy Northeast to greet my granddaughter, Ayla, and spend time with my daughter and son-in-law. Her arrival underscores the importance of family and the cycle of life. And she provides a much needed reminder that we must plan well for many generations into the future. The little ones are depending on us. We cannot fail them!

