Western U.S. Water Utilities and Adaptive Capacity: A Case Study

Water in the U.S. West faces considerable challenges and uncertainties. Climate change has intensified weather extremes, threatening water sources that support the region’s many stakeholders. Urban water providers are among these stakeholders contending with providing reliable water supplies to their growing populations. Recognizing the critical role that institutions play in building societal resilience, this research studies urban water provider institutions and their capacity to adapt to climate change. It poses to the research question: which characteristics of Western urban water utilities either support or impede their institutional capacity to adapt to climate change? To investigate this question, the research conducts a case study of public water utilities located in three mid-size urban areas: Denver, CO, Salt Lake City, UT, and Portland, OR. The Adaptive Capacity Wheel (ACW) developed by Gupta et al (2010) provides a framework for a document review and for interviews with water professionals. The research finds that the adaptive capacity of Western water utilities is generally robust, especially in relation to leadership. However, challenges for adaptive capacity remain, notably in the availability of resources. This research brings together literature on water resource management and adaptive capacity, and applies it within the context of the U.S. West, for the purpose of guiding Western water utilities in enhancing their institutional resilience to climate change.

December 13, 2023
10 AM
Bexell 414 or Zoom:
Email mike.terry@oregonstate.edu for Zoom access

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: ED WEBER, ERIKA WOLTERS, AND BRENT STEEL