

Building Organizational and Community Resiliency in the New West: Takeaways for Moving Forward

Accomplishments, Observations, and Next Steps from the Capacity-Building Peer-to-Peer Exchange Hosted by the Montana Watershed Coordination Council & Future West on November 11, 2021

Facilitated by Heather K. Stokes

On Thursday, November 11, 2021, Future West and the Montana Watershed Coordination Council partnered to support community-based conservation organizations and thriving watersheds through a virtual capacity-building peer-to-peer exchange. The exchange made clear that these organizations have been highly resourceful in protecting watershed and community health amidst the many changes their communities are facing. At the same time, there is a critical need for:

- Effectively communicating the collective value of locally driven watershed conservation
- Diverse fundraising efforts, and
- Baseline funding to support engagement on local conservation needs

To kick off the event, we hosted a [keynote panel](#). Event participants heard from:

- Holly Hill, Executive Director of the Gallatin Watershed Council
- Dusty Olson, Administrator for the Garfield Conservation District
- Heather Brighton, Watershed Coordinator for the Lolo Watershed Group
- Pedro Marques, Executive Director of the Big Hole Watershed Committee.

These panelists spoke to their respective stages of organizational development and the intersection of challenges facing their communities. Their specific and varied experiences provided participants with common ground, while also setting the stage for discussion on how participants are responding to challenges in their own communities.

Highlights from the [panel discussion](#) include a shared recognition that communities and landscapes are changing in a number of ways related to population demographics, climate, changes in land tenure, and many others.

- Some places are experiencing rapid population growth.
- Others face major shifts in land use.
- Most are struggling with drought and reduced water supplies.

Common to all of these changes is the need for organizations to maintain mission relevance while refining their approaches to collaboration and engagement of new and existing stakeholders to accomplish projects on the ground. Panelists and other event participants emphasized the difficulties of balancing a heightened sense of urgency to find solutions to water challenges with building the necessary trust and partnerships to move forward.

The panel discussion set the stage for breakout sessions where participants ground truthed what they have been observing in their own communities. To encourage discussion, we posed guiding questions around:

- Changes people are experiencing in their communities
- Ways their organizations are addressing these changes, and

- What resources and support they need to adapt.

The [resulting dialogue](#) identified common themes that will be used to guide a follow-up capacity-building workshop being planned for Spring 2022.

Following these breakout sessions, Facilitator Heather Stokes brought everyone back to [tie it all together](#).

It was clear from this exchange that the opportunity to come together and discuss these questions is critical to the resiliency of local conservation organizations, their missions, and the communities they support. As we seek to address identified needs for communicating the collective value of locally driven watershed conservation, more diverse fundraising efforts, and securing baseline funding sources, Future West and the Montana Watershed Coordination Council are taking time to reflect on this conversation to identify possible next steps. These will include an in-person gathering in Spring 2022 (Save the Date coming Soon!), online resources, and work groups.

We look forward to keeping in touch as we map out a path forward that will allow us to continue conservation work that benefits Montana's communities and all of their inhabitants.