"Water Crises and Institutions: Governance Challenges in an Era of Uncertainty"

The editors of *Society & Natural Resources* invite submissions for a special, interdisciplinary issue on global water crises and efforts to create governance institutions and strategies for a more sustainable future, to be published in late 2015/early 2016. Authors whose paper proposals are accepted for consideration for the special issue will be encouraged to participate in a related special session at the 21st International Symposium on Society and Resource Management (ISSRM), June 13-18, 2015, Charleston, South Carolina, USA.*

**Background**

The challenge to secure and govern water supplies in sufficient quantity and quality, across diverse temporal and spatial contexts and scales, arguably involves multiple, interrelated water crises rather than a single, global crisis (Linton 2010). Current and anticipated water crises pose threats not only to human well-being and environmental sustainability around the world, but increasingly are framed by governments as threats to national security, as well (UNESCO 2014; Gleick 2000; Bakker 2014). These water crises will likely deepen in coming decades in complex and uncertain ways, with expected population growth, increased demand for water, and predicted climate change.

Growing attention is being paid to the role of governance in helping humans respond to the complexities and uncertainties of their water futures. Governance refers to the "range of political, organizational, and administrative processes through which community interests are articulated, their input is incorporated, decisions are made and implemented, and decision makers are held accountable in the development and management of water resources and delivery of water services" (Bakker 2003). The notion of governance, including in relation to water, emerge from multiple traditions, is operationalized in diverse ways (Lemos & Agrawal 2006; Evans 2012), and is therefore, in many respects, ambiguous. This ambiguity represents a challenge for researchers and practitioners as it impedes effective communication and sets participants at cross-purposes; at the same time, it also allows the concept to accommodate a fruitful diversity of thematic foci, disciplines and objectives.

Water governance's diverse thematic foci include attention to changing state agency involvement at multiple levels – global, international, national, subnational, and local (Agrawal and Lemos 2007). Some study market-based water governance at multiple levels, including privatization, commercialization, valuation, liberalization of exchange, etc. (Bakker 2014; Budds 2013). Others analyze the political dimensions of water governance, including formal and informal politics, organizations, and social movements (Armijos 2013). Yet other research explores hybrid forms of water governance, including public-private partnerships and collaborative approaches (Ostrom 1990).

Water governance is of concern to multiple disciplines, with rich contributions of scholarship and practice from across the social and natural sciences. Social science disciplines addressing water governance include human geography, political science, sociology, anthropology, economics and others. It is of concern to policy analysts and legal scholars. Physical and mechanical sciences including hydrology, biology, soil science, ecology, geology and physical geography, as well as engineering, have long made key contributions to the understanding of water governance.

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* Authors desiring to participate in both the SNR special issue and ISSRM 2015 in Charleston, SC, should also submit an abstract for the same paper via the conference website (http://www.issrm2015.iasnr.org/). Though highly encouraged, conference participation is not required for consideration for the special issue.
Significantly, water governance research pursues, explicitly or implicitly, diverse agendas, including development of frameworks relevant to scholarly analysis and policymaking; advocacy of particular policies and other response strategies; and practical organizing of diverse water interests in pursuit of solutions to concrete problems in specific locations.

**Aims of this special issue**

This special *Society & Natural Resources* issue aims to embrace the ambiguities of water governance by encouraging a discursive space where researchers and practitioners develop a productive dialogue about water crises around the world and their implications for governance. We welcome submission of papers that explore complex interactions between water's physical and material dimensions and the human institutions that develop and evolve to govern water; studies that draw on relevant theory and empirical cases that explore existing and emerging institutional, political and socio-cultural dimensions of conflict and collaboration around water; efforts to adapt and invent new governance strategies and others.

The multidisciplinary dialogue encouraged by this special issue will aim to critically explore the obstacles as well as opportunities posed by ambiguity in the definition of “water governance”, to mitigate against researchers “talking past one another.” It will encourage generation of new understandings of how diverse approaches might in more fruitful fashion harness both consensus and ongoing contestation over appropriate foci, disciplinary approaches and objectives. This dialogue, overall, will seek to support development of appropriate responses to complex water problems that often share common characteristics yet vary across diverse contexts.

*SNR*’s well-developed interdisciplinary community is uniquely positioned to create a space where water governance scholars and practitioners’ diversity of experiences and perspectives can be better understood and built upon to help make significant progress toward achieving a more sustainable water future for our planet.

**Proposals**


**Manuscript development**

Authors of proposed papers accepted for consideration for the special issue will be notified by January 31, invited to submit a complete draft by May 15, 2015. Those accepted for participation in the ISSRM 2015 special session will receive additional notification. Based on preliminary feedback from the editors (and discussants and audience for those participating in the ISSRM), authors will submit a final version through *SNR*’s usual, double-blind, peer review process. Selected accepted papers will appear in the special issue; others may be published as individual articles in *SNR*.

**Deadlines**

Paper proposals: January 15, 2015  
Complete draft papers: May 15, 2015  
Revised papers submitted to *SNR* for peer review: August 31, 2015