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Shifting Baselines and New Meridians: Water, Resources, Landscapes, and the Transformation of the American West (Summer Conference, June 4-6)

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SLIDES: The Big Questions

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The Big Questions

5 questions in 2 categories

- What is the Target (of water management)?
 - (1) Sustainability?
 - (2) Future of agriculture?
- What are the Strategies for Meeting the Target?
 - (3) Markets v. regulation v. planning v. social reform?
 - (4) Where does prior appropriation fit in?
 - (5) Can we move beyond the supply-side focus?

The Big Questions

(1) Should “sustainability” be the criterion upon which we measure the efficacy of western water institutional arrangements (as is often advocated in academic circles), and if so, what does this really mean in practice? If not sustainability, then is there another (more useful) criterion available that captures the notion (and reality) of resource limits?

The Big Questions

(2) What is, and what should be, the future of irrigated agriculture in the western US? Is this a decision that should be made through a deliberate public planning/policy-making process, or should this be left to the “invisible hand” of market forces? Is the growing frequency of agricultural-to-urban water transfers a sign of success or failure in western water management?

The Big Questions

(3) What types of strategies offer the greatest potential for addressing the increasingly difficult challenge of balancing western water supplies with demands: legal/regulatory measures; economic/pricing/market approaches; revised planning and decision-making regimes; cultural/social/ideological reforms; technical innovations; and so on? Is the era of solving water problems through new storage over?

The Big Questions

(4) Ultimately, will meeting the diverse water needs of western residents and the environment require abandoning key tenets of the prior appropriation doctrine, and if so, which tenets, when, and why?

The Big Questions

(5) Is it possible for political leaders and/or water managers to advance their careers arguing for anything other than predominately supply-side approaches to addressing water scarcity issues?

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