

Women in Water Diplomacy Network North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network Launch Event After Action Report¹



December 13, 2023 | Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Summary

The Women in Water Diplomacy Network is an informal community of practice comprised of both formal and informal women decision-makers and experts, representing a wealth of collective experience and expertise in transboundary water management and decision-making engaged in some of the most water insecure regions of the world. Originating in the Nile Basin in 2017, the Network has grown to be a global community of women water leaders (and male champions supporting gender equality) working collectively to strengthen women’s leadership in transboundary water decision making with support from a global coalition of partners across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

The development of a North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network was catalyzed by the participation of leading women water diplomats from North America in global engagements of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network since 2022. During the Network’s Global Strategy launch event at the Stockholm World Water Week 2022, International Joint Commission Commissioner Merrell-Ann Phare endorsed the Global Strategy and encouraged its adoption across North America. *“There has never been a more important time for a Network like this to exist. The challenges we are facing are so significant – while we all face them – the impacts are most severely on those that are marginalized and vulnerable. We all have the opportunity to benefit from this Network.”*² At Women in Water Diplomacy Network events organized alongside the 2023 UN Water Conference, North American champions were joined by the International Boundary and Water Commission and other core partners including numerous Indigenous community leaders and water experts, further building momentum to establish a North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network.³

On December 13, 2023 a broad consortia of partners co-convened a side event at the 2023 Colorado River Water Users Association (CRWUA) annual conference in Las Vegas, Nevada to **launch the North American section of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network**. The initial aim of the North American Network is to establish a regional Network across the Americas anchored in the Colorado River and



¹ This Women in Water Diplomacy Network After Action Report was prepared by Elizabeth Koch (ELI) with input from Dr. Sharon B. Megdall (University of Arizona), Jennifer Pitt (National Audubon Society) and Dr. Faith Sternlieb (Lincoln Institute for Land Policy).

² See Women in Water Diplomacy Network Global Network Forum 2022 After Action Report for details: <https://siwi.org/publications/women-in-water-diplomacy-after-action-report/>.

³ For further details on the Women in Water Diplomacy Network engagements at the UN Water Conference see Koch, E. Patel, E. et al. 2023. Women in Water Diplomacy Network After Action Report: The Water Diplomacy Symposium and Network Engagement in the 2023 UN Water Conference. Washington DC, USA and Stockholm, Sweden. [Available here](#).



Indigenous leadership in alignment with the Network's *'Path Forward for Women, Water, Peace and Security'* Global Strategy and objectives. The milestone event was **attended by approximately 150 water policy experts** and decision makers from a broad spectrum of stakeholder communities across the Colorado Basin including strong representation from Indigenous communities as well as Mexican representatives. The event's agenda is included in Annex I.

The event program began with sharing of meaningful traditional songs and bird dance about the Colorado River from **Rosa Long**, Vice-Chairwoman at The Cocopah Indian Tribe and **Alonso Pesado**, Cocopah Bird Singer and former Chairman. The Cocopah nation, also known as the River People, live in both Arizona and Mexico on both sides of the Colorado River in an area known locally as Pozas Arivisu.



Dr. Sharon B. Megdal, Director of the Water Resources Research Center at the University of Arizona followed with an enthusiastic welcome and reflection on the unique landmark launch event. Dr. Megdal shared her experiences of interacting and engaging with the Women in Water Diplomacy Network and her motivation – shared by many in the room – to establish such a Network in North America. Dr. Megdal thanked the extensive group of donors that enabled the launch event to take place and encouraged participants to consider how their organizations can contribute to the development and sustainability of the Network beyond the launch event.



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Elizabeth A. Koch, Environmental Law Institute and Process Support Lead for the Women in Water Diplomacy Network then provided a brief introduction to water diplomacy emphasizing the many different entry points to water diplomacy and breath of actors needed as part of decision-making processes to foster sustainable solutions. Elizabeth shared that the primary motivation for the development of the Network was based on the strong evidence that despite the importance of inclusive processes and the disproportionate impact of water and climate insecurity, women water decision makers are extremely under-represented globally – and at various scales in North America as well. Elizabeth shared some milestones from the Women in Water Diplomacy Network's inception and development in the Nile Basin, the launch of the Global Strategy 'A Path Forward for Women, Water, Peace and Security' and expansion of the Network into Central Asia-Afghanistan, Southern African basins and now the Americas as well as some of the Network's publications and resources of interest to stakeholders looking to learn more about the Network. Elizabeth closed her short presentation by encouraging North American women water experts to consider joining the Women in Water Diplomacy Network's Second Global Network Forum taking place in Vienna March 4-8, 2024.



Elizabeth then welcomed several high-level speakers to share reflections and their motivation for supporting the establishment of the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network. **Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner** of the International Boundary and Water Commission spoke first, sending greetings from her Mexican counterpart **Commissioner Adriana Resendez** who was unable to join due to urgent needs in the basin. Commissioner Giner recognized the many women water decisionmakers – some in the room with us – who broke through a male dominated sector to enable more women to take up decision making roles today. She recognized the role of reception attendee Jayne Harkins, the first woman Commissioner of the





IBWC, noting the unique significance of the IBWC for the first time led by two women Commissioners. Commissioner Giner shared the IBWC's experience of participating with the Women in Water Diplomacy Network at the UN Water Conference and expressed support in nurturing the development of the unique Network.

Lorelei Cloud, Vice Chair of the Southern Ute Tribal Council and Co-chair of the Indigenous Women's Leadership Network, followed sharing passionate remarks and reflections of the value of partnering across the basin to highlight women's voices, knowledge, and experience in water governance. Lorelei emphasized the importance of elevating Indigenous women's water knowledge and shared experience from her recent participation at the 2023 World Water Week in Stockholm, Sweden where she spoke alongside other Indigenous women water leaders. Lorelei shared the Indigenous Women's Leadership Network commitment to support the development of the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network highlighting the role the global Network can serve the IWLN in enabling global experience exchange.



Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton of the United States Bureau of Reclamation shared her enthusiasm for the launch of the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network reflecting on the past support from the Department of Interior and Bureau of Reclamation for the Network. She then shared a personal reflection on her role as the second Senate-confirmed Commissioner of the Bureau emphasizing the importance of modeling leadership for young professionals and girls.



Canadian Commissioner Merrell-Ann Phare of the International Joint Commission spoke to the assembled participants via a pre-recorded video message sharing her congratulations on the launch event and the support of the International Joint Commission in advancing the establishment of the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network. Commissioner Phare reflected on her experience of interacting and learning with Network members from around the world at the Network's first Global Network Forum in 2022 and the value of the Network's shared objectives. Commissioner Phare further shared reflections on the role that the Network had in supporting broad engagement of women water decision makers at the UN Water Conference including leading Indigenous water experts. The full recording of Commissioner Phare's remarks are available [here](#).



Jennifer Pitt, the Colorado River Program Director at the National Audubon Society then provided an opportunity for event participants to share some quick reflections as part of the session's 'open mic' section. Many participants were eager to share their support for the Network including **Governor Stephen Roe Lewis** of the Gila River Indian Tribes, **Rebecca (Becky) Mitchell** of Colorado, **Gabriela Caloca Michel** of Pronatura Noroeste, Mexico, and **Leslie Meyers**, Chief Water Executive of the Salt River Project among others.

Dr. Megdal closed the event echoing the overwhelming support for the launch event, calling for partners to invest financial resources in the further development of the Network, and highlighting the Elizabeth's role as coordinator of the growing global Network. She further shared final remarks on behalf of **Chairwoman Amelia Flores**, who was unable to join the





launch at the last moment, highlighting the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) support for the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network.

In addition to the formal program, the event enabled much needed informal networking among women water leaders from across the Colorado Basin, encouraged reflection on the unique value of engagements specifically targeting women water leaders and provided opportunity for young women water professionals to interact with more senior women water leaders. During the informal aspects of the program, a photo loop playing in the background showcased statements of support for the Women in Water Diplomacy Network from contributing partners and sponsors (see Annex II).

Additional resources and materials related to the [North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network launch event](#) are available at <https://www.eli.org/events/launch-event-and-reception-women-water-diplomacy-network-north-america> including [the full presentation](#) and a short article that appeared in [Politico](#) describing the launch event.

Next Steps

To support the development of the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network (NA-WWDN), the following prioritized activities are envisioned at an estimated direct cost of approximately \$300,000 over two years. To date \$50,000 has been leveraged by partners largely to support the costs of the December 2023 launch event.

- A. Conceptual Development, Process Support and Resource Mobilization
- B. **NA-WWDN Informational Session; January 29, 2024 8:30 MST/ 10:30 EST.** Pre-registration required to join this meeting at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcsceqtqzMpHNyGMh0ZtNh3iITdTcN5X9R->
- C. NA-WWDN members participation in Women in Water Diplomacy Global Network Forum, Vienna, Austria; March 4-8, 2024
- D. NA-WWDN Hybrid Consultation Workshop #1 (Adapting the Strategy); June 2024 (tbc)
- E. NA-WWDN Hybrid Consultation Workshop #2 (Developing an Action Plan); October 2024 (tbc)
- F. Publication Launch Event: Adaption and Adoption of the Women in Water Diplomacy Global Strategy in North America; February 2025 (tbc)
- G. Public Webinar: Release of NA-WWDN strategy alignment publication; March 2025 (tbc)
- H. NA-WWDN member online experience exchange sessions and contribution to experience exchange sessions in the Global Network; recurrent (tbc)
- I. NA-WWDN inputs into recurrent Women in Water Diplomacy Network Newsletters; twice annually
- J. Reporting/ Next Steps Identified



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Photo Highlights

For additional event photos please visit the Women in Water Diplomacy Network’s LinkedIn page at: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/women-in-water-diplomacy-network>.



From left to right: Dr. Sharon B. Megdal opening the event; informal images of participants including representatives from the Indigenous Women’s Leadership Network, former Assistant Secretary of the Interior Tanya Trujillo together with Walton Family Foundation representative Ted Kowalski, IWLN co-chair Lorelai Cloud, Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton of the United States Bureau of Reclamation, Governor Stephen Roe Lewis of the Gila River Indian Community, Rebecca (Becky) Mitchell of Colorado and Gabriela Caloca Michel of Pronatura Noroeste, Mexico.



Annex I: Event Agenda

- 4:30-5:00** **Reception Registration and Mingle**
- 5:00-5:05** **Blessing and Land Recognition**
- 5:05-5:10** **Welcome**
Dr. Sharon B. Megdal, Director of the Water Resources Research Center at the University of Arizona
- 5:10-5:18** **A 'Path Forward for Women, Water, Peace and Security' in North America.**
Elizabeth A. Koch, Environmental Law Institute and Process Support Lead for the Women in Water Diplomacy Network
- 5:18-5:30** **Reflections from Network Champions**
Commissioner Adriana Resendez, International Boundary and Water Commission, Mexico and **Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner**, International Boundary and Water Commission, United States
Lorelei Cloud, Vice Chair, Southern Ute Tribal Council, Southern Ute Tribe and Co-chair, Indigenous Women's Leadership Network
Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton, United States Bureau of Reclamation
Commissioner Merrell-Ann Phare, International Joint Commission, Canada (recorded video message)
- 5:30-6:00** **Open Mic - Share your thoughts!**
Facilitated by **Jennifer Pitt**, Colorado River Program Director, Audubon
- 6:00-6:10** **Concluding Remarks**
Chairwoman Amelia Flores, Colorado River Indian Tribes



Annex II: Statements of Support



"Indigenous women, as water warriors, have an important role and responsibility to protect the water. By coming together with each other and our allies we create opportunities to further protect the land and water for future generations."

- Chairwoman Amelia Flores, Colorado River Indian Tribes




"As women, we understand the importance of supporting other women. Women take on many roles - mother, daughter, leader, teacher, and so on - all in one day. As leaders, we must bring other women along with us and help them be better than we are. The Indigenous Women Leadership Network supports Indigenous women, particularly in the Colorado River Basin, to bridge the knowledge gap, support women in leadership, and help them succeed in their careers. When one woman succeeds, we all succeed."

- Lorelei Cloud, Vice Chair, Southern Ute Tribal Council and co-chair of the Indigenous Women Leadership Network




"A key take-away for me in our partnerships with indigenous women leaders is a reminder on the importance of respect and listening to learn, along with the importance of building relationships."

- Dr Sharon Megdal, Director of the Water Resources Research Center at the University of Arizona




"Empowering women in water diplomacy not only unlocks our potential, but also through our perspectives - and abilities to listen and connect - opens the floodgates to more sustainable solutions."

- Jennifer Pitt, Director, Colorado River Program, National Audubon Society




"The energy and humanity generated by the Women in Water Diplomacy Network is phenomenal and inspiring no matter where in the world one goes. This fellowship, this sisterhood, gives life to all who touch it, giving us the energy needed to bring people together to find solutions to help both people and planet."

- Felicia Marcus, William C. Landreth Visiting Fellow, Stanford University, Water in the West Program




"To meet the challenges facing the Colorado River Basin, we need leadership from diverse voices. The Women in Water Diplomacy Network helps ensure women are in decision-making roles where they can drive solutions that help people and nature thrive together."

- Ted Kowalski, Colorado River Initiative Lead and Senior Program Officer, Environment Program, Walton Family Foundation




"When water is a shared resource between two nations, challenges and objectives are also shared. In this sense, this network of women in water diplomacy gives us the opportunity to share their experiences with a common goal of improving water management."

- Commissioner Adriana Resendez, International Boundary and Water Commission, Mexico




"The US International Boundary and Water Commission is appreciative of the great work of the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network and supports the efforts to advance women as leaders in transboundary water decision-making. Both our organizations share a common mission of improving the health and welfare of vulnerable border communities through innovative and bold solutions associated with access to clean and reliable water."

- Dr. Maria-Elena Giner, P.E; Commissioner International Boundary and Water Commission, U.S. Section




"The Women in Water Diplomacy Network provides a much-needed network and community building space for women working in and around shared waters."

- Dr. Andrea Kristen Gerlak, Director, Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy




"Women provide diverse, strategic, and healthy perspectives to decision-making, and through mentorship, training, shared experience, and skills transfer, the Women in Water Diplomacy Network helps to broaden inclusion within the water industry today and into the future."

- Colby Pellegrino, Deputy General Manager, Southern Nevada Water Authority





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"By elevating the voice of indigenous women leaders and decision-makers in water diplomacy, I believe our lands and waters will be cleaner, more resilient, safer, and more productive and we in turn will learn to be better stewards. We all win."

- Dr Faith Sternlieb, Associate Director of Engagement for the Internet of Water, Center for Geospatial Solutions



"Mentoring women in science and policy helps promote collaboration in water management and decision making. It is exciting to support the mission of the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network and share our experience in the western United States with a diverse group of women leaders."

- Juliet McKenna, Principal Hydrogeologist, Montgomery & Associates



"Walking alone is often lonely, unpredictable and long. In the company of our Women in Water Diplomacy Network sisters and brothers all around the world – and the collaboration, partnership, mentorship and support that binds us - we are stronger together and can achieve much. On behalf of the Network's Leadership Council – warm welcome to our sisters in North America!"

- Dr Zadwa Dlamini on behalf of the Women in Water Diplomacy Leadership Council



"The Shared Waters Partnership has had the honor of supporting water diplomacy processes in conflict sensitive basins for over 10 years. Throughout this time, the gender gap in high level water decision making has been more than apparent. The Women in Water Diplomacy was initiated by SWP as a targeted engagement to address and transform this dynamic."

- Kerry Schneider, Senior Manager, Shared Waters Partnership Program, SIWI



"Since 2017 we've seen the Women in Water Diplomacy Network grow as the world increasingly recognizes the critical role of women water leaders around the world. The launch of WWDN in North America is an important and natural expansion of these efforts to foster networks at the intersection of women's rights, resilience, and water. The Environmental Law Institute is honored and excited to support this work."

- Jordan Diamond, President, Environmental Law Institute (ELI)



"CAP is honored to be part of the Women in Water Diplomacy effort and to contribute to fostering inclusive, cooperative dialogue and decision-making around water resources."

- Brenda Burman, Central Arizona Project General Manager



"I have the incredible honor to lead SRP's landscape-scale watershed initiatives that are creating resilient communities and water supplies."

- Elvy Barton, Manager Water and Forest Sustainability at the Salt River Project



"Water is fundamental to life and the prosperity of communities across the globe. Empowering the voices of women and integrating the diverse perspectives of marginalized community members is critical to sustainably and equitably managing our precious water resources. Stantec is proud to support the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in creating this important forum where ideas, understanding, and dialogue can flow."

- Kari Shively, Senior Vice President and Water Business Leader, Stantec



"To deal with - and overcome - today's climate and water challenges, we need to break down silos and build cross-functional collaborations. Harnessing the power of women to support one another, join forces and rethink old paradigms is the key to achieving this goal."

- Tamar (Tami) Shor, COO, N-Drip #Bringthemhomenow



"In this era of conflict and war, water scarcity poses a great threat to society. The diplomacy of women working across multiple boundaries is the best approach, perhaps the only viable approach, to ensure we equitably and peacefully find ways to share this precious resource. I am honored to be a part of the North American Women in Water Diplomacy Network launch."

- Meena Westford, Executive Policy Advisor, Colorado River, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California





Women in Water Diplomacy Network
A Growing Partnership across North America!

Logos included: Environmental Law Institute, SIWI, Walton Family Foundation, International Joint Commission, International Boundary and Waters Commission, University of Arizona's Water Resources Research Center, Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Audubon, Southern Nevada Water Authority, Central Arizona Project, Salt River Project, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, N-Drip, Montgomery & Associates, Freeport McMoRan.

JOIN US!

This event was organized by the Women in Water Diplomacy Network and partners including the Environmental Law Institute, the Stockholm International Water Institute, the International Joint Commission, the International Boundary and Waters Commission, the University of Arizona's Water Resources Research Center and Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Indigenous Women's Leadership Network, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, National Audubon Society and the Gila River Indian Community with gracious support provided by the Walton Family Foundation, the Southern Nevada Water Authority, the Central Arizona Project, the Salt River Project, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, N-Drip, Montgomery and Associates, Freeport McMoRan, and Stantec.

Please join in supporting this much-needed network for women working in and around shared waters in North America!

For additional details please contact:

Elizabeth A. Koch, Senior Manager, Environmental Law Institute
Process Support Team Lead, Women in Water Diplomacy Network
koch@eli.org