

Adventurer and advocate  
Josh Jespersen

## Water Worries

The state of Colorado and the West face a coming crisis. What can we do to solve it?

By Josh Jespersen

**COLORADO IS MY ADOPTED HOME** state. It's where I climbed and skied all the 14ers in record time, where I call the backcountry my home, and where I developed a deep appreciation for public lands. I've seen almost every corner of this state and talked to locals in every town, and I'm still able to find new opportunities to fall in love with our home every time I go outside. I've committed myself to environmental issues because I see first-hand the impacts of climate change in my own backyard, and I'll do whatever I can to protect this inspiring place.

What I do is dependent on consistent snowpack, clean air, and healthy rivers. This week at Summer Market, I'm working with Western Resource Advocates and Business for Water Stewardship to speak about healthy rivers in the West alongside other river adventurers, authors, and conservationists. All of us feel the pulse of this complex environmental ecosystem—I am tuned more into snowpack and the impacts of climate change, while others are watching stream flows more closely. But together, through a set of diverse experiences, our collective message is that Colorado's

water supply is challenged and our rivers are in trouble.

Think about this: Colorado's water supply has diminished by 19% since 2000 and is expected to decrease by another 15% by 2050. More than 80% of our water comes from snowpack, which is expected to decrease by 50% this century. There is a widening gap between the water that Colorado has and the water that a prospering Colorado needs.

This was an epic snow year, which could make you think the problem is fixed. It isn't. The Colorado River Basin is facing a new normal of drought, increasing temperatures, and growing populations. We had a wet year in 2011, but it was immediately followed by the driest two-year period in recorded hydrology, which dropped water levels at lakes Powell and Mead to historic lows. We can't rely on Mother Nature to fix our problems.

The solution to Colorado's water crisis is all-encompassing, and it's going to take a broad effort to figure it out—outdoor companies, athletes, creatives, media, and NGOs all contributing diverse perspectives and opinions. We have to work together in various



ways to protect a region that sustains our lifestyles, our jobs, and our future. We really cannot wait a minute longer to protect this place we love.

I'm proud to say that Colorado is showing leadership. A couple of weeks ago, Gov. Polis enacted legislation that puts Colorado on a path to reducing carbon pollution 90% by 2050. This puts Colorado in line with what science tells us: Fully decarbonize by 2050 or pass the tipping point of being able to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. New Mexico and Nevada have made similar commitments, and we need your help getting other states to follow the environmental leadership of these Western states.

In another step, Colorado's new Water Plan is a smart and comprehensive approach to solving the water gap. Developed with the input of 30,000 farmers, scientists, and citizens from every corner of the state, it represents the long-

term solution for water conservation and river health. Now we need to fully fund and implement this conservation plan.

I hope you'll join our conversation at **3:30 p.m. today at The Camp**, where we'll be talking about water in the West and how all of us can work together to keep it around for the next generation.

And then I invite every Colorado-based business to stick around for happy hour to preview "For the Love of Colorado," a state-wide ad campaign to raise awareness of Colorado's water shortage and the importance of funding the Water Plan, a solution to one of our most pressing environmental issues. ▲

*Josh Jespersen is a former Navy SEAL who holds the speed record for skiing/riding all 54 Colorado 14ers and an advocate for action on climate change and river stewardship. For more information on water and rivers in Colorado, go to [fortheloveofcolorado.org](http://fortheloveofcolorado.org).*

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