



The Colorado River no longer reaches the ocean.

# Standing Together

Why shrinking rivers need us all. BY COURTNEY HOLDEN

**I**T'S GOING TO TAKE a collective effort to save the natural places where we all live, work, and play. And that's precisely the focus of Protect the West, an outdoor industry unifying effort led by nonprofit advocacy organization Western Resource Advocates (WRA). The goal: unite brands, businesses, and the outdoor community at large—as well as scientists, farmers, ranchers, and policymakers—against the environmental issues that threaten the places we love.

"It's a rallying cry for the outdoor industry to increase its involvement in helping protect the West's air, land, and water," said Bart Miller, WRA Healthy Rivers's program director.

Yesterday's panel, "Avoiding Crisis on America's Rivers: How the Outdoor Industry Can Seize Opportunities in a Changing Climate," brought together leading voices on water, farming, recreation, and business to discuss the critical role we all play in preservation. The discussion centered on water as the nexus between diverse groups and industries.


Take the Colorado River, for example. According to Miller, who sat on the panel, 40 million people from Denver to Los Angeles rely on the river for drinking water. Four million acres of irrigated land use its river water. And recreation on that river alone supports

250,000 jobs and brings in \$26 billion annually in revenue across the Colorado basin.

"Rivers all across the country—rivers just like the Colorado River—really are the lifeblood of our communities, and they're just getting sucked dry," Miller said. "It affects everybody."


Imagery from panelist and National Geographic photographer Pete McBride showed the point where the Colorado River ends, 90 miles short of the Gulf of California into which it once flowed, providing a tragic illustration of the problem.

Miller pointed to specific evidence representative of the larger problem: Lower snowpack levels lead to less water in the river, resulting in higher likelihood of fire and negative impacts on fish and other wildlife. "We're all going to see more and more of that unless we make some changes," he said.

"It's really important to use our voice, our platform, and our resources to help promote work on the nonprofit level," said Kim Miller, CEO of SCARPA, who was influential in introducing WRA to the outdoor community. "The West is the threshold of some of the wildest places that we have. When we start talking about land, air, and water conservation, it's important to think about where the headwaters are. We all need to be activists." 

## VOTE THE OUTDOORS

OIA's new campaign delves into the electoral side of politics to encourage the outdoor industry to put its ballot where its mouth is.

 The Outdoor Industry Association is taking its political work to a deeper level. This show, OIA announced a new campaign called Vote the Outdoors, marking a shift for the organization. The group has long devoted itself to lobbying efforts in Washington and in state houses, but until now, has never tried to rally voters directly.

"Vote the Outdoors is exciting because it's the first time the outdoor industry has really taken a step into electoral politics," said OIA political director Alex Boian.

The initiative launched alongside the OIA Congressional Scorecard, an interactive online tool grading all members of Congress on their voting history as it pertains to protecting public land, advocating for clean air and water, and fighting for trade interests that would benefit the outdoor industry. Vote the Outdoors will encourage voters to use this tool for the upcoming midterms and beyond.

"The ultimate outcome we hope for is that the outdoor recreation economy and public land and water issues will be voting issues in 2018 in races across the country," Boian said.

Over time, OIA hopes that brands will adopt the #VoteTheOutdoors campaign and encourage their customers to use the scorecard, and that the scorecard will unify voters across the industry.

The scorecard will adjust in real time as votes on tariffs and other issues come in, but it currently favors Democrats, awarding far more A and B grades to liberal Congress members than to conservatives. While Boian emphasized that the scorecard was created objectively without any partisan goals—conservation and business interests are both bipartisan issues, after all—the unmistakable takeaway for voters still might prove an obstacle for brands considering adoption.

"I personally feel like it's still really polarizing," said Alan Butts, membership outreach coordinator at Outdoor Prolink. "I'm from the South, and a lot of people there really care about the land, but the politics are still a tough subject."

Other visitors to OIA's booth, where the Vote The Outdoors logo is prominently displayed, agreed that it was a touchy subject, but that unity would be useful in effecting change.

"People vote on what's important to them," said Tracy Benson, cofounder of BeAlive Media. "And the more you can collaborate and encourage a community to vote as a bloc, that's important—regardless of where that bloc lies." —Corey Buhay