



TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
March 31, 2023

What does it mean if there's a global water conference and nobody cares?

It means not enough people read TUWaterWays. But you, dear reader, how aware were you of the conference hosted by the Netherlands and Tajikistan last week in New York? Well, none of us were probably as aware as we should have been given that [the meeting](#) was intended to make big plans and bold commitments to Sustainable Development Goals and adopt the [Water Action Agenda](#). And it's not fair to say that nobody cares, but it does seem that [the Guardian](#) is the only major news outlet to have covered it. And what does the Guardian tell us about the event? Many, many countries who attended spoke of their [water woes and how those are tied to climate change](#), putting a point on the importance of the next UN Climate Change Conference this December in Dubai.

The Water Action Agenda did gain 700 commitments from governments, non-profits, and businesses, but they seem to be entirely voluntary and there was nary a check written to address any of the many identified water needs. All of which left [many water experts less than pleased](#).

We here at Chateau d'Eau didn't attend the conference. Nor were we invited to join the ranks of displeased water experts. Surely our invitations were lost in the mail. 7,000 or so did attend the conference, but it seems that the private sector and the global north were overrepresented, especially in comparison to experts and water-insecure communities in the global south. But the real red flag for how little juice this conference had is there weren't even any protests. If nobody is willing to get symbolically arrested in front of the UN building over what you're doing in there, you're not doing enough.

To be fair(er) to the media, [NPR](#) did cover the release of a [UN World Water Development Report](#) published in association with the conference. The report found that nearly half of the world's population doesn't have access to adequate sanitation and 2 billion don't have access to proper drinking water. To reach those Sustainable Development Goals set for 2030, humanity may need to spend \$1 trillion a year. So, yeah, the problem is huge and our global leaders need to take action correspondingly huge—huge enough to have so many protesters they have to [swim in the East River](#)!

Untreated hazards will never die. They are buried and will come forth later in uglier ways.

[Or something like that](#). Groundwater. It's played a bigger role in all of our lives than we probably ever knew. As a kid, did you see people on TV [hanging out in basements](#) and wonder what was up with that? Well, it was probably the groundwater where you lived that deprived you of that (regional) right of passage. Groundwater, and its relation and distance to the surface, has a major impact on how we shape and place all the elements of the human landscape. Now, that relationship is changing in many places and making untenable many of our past decisions about what we can put underground and where. What are we on about? Well, the sea level isn't the only thing that's rising; [groundwater is, too](#), and not just on the coasts where it's getting pushed up by salt water intrusion underneath it, but also inland where [wetter weather](#) can mean more water soaking into the ground. What we call the water table is a measurement of where the top of the unconfined groundwater sits below the surface, and in

lots of places the water table is getting higher than ever before and interacting with things underground that were never intended to be soaking in, floating on, or mixing with groundwater. That includes a wide range of pollutants from industrial waste to human waste. And given that, from a federal perspective, groundwater is something of a [gray area](#) right now, it's probably time to do everything we can at both [state](#) and [federal](#) levels to ensure that we can properly deal with zombie pollutants rising from the grave to poison us all and deprive us of our basements ([whether you wanna go down there or not](#)).

How will [California Stars](#) align going forward?

From years of [no rain](#) to a winter wondering [who'll stop the rain](#), the Golden State has had something of a wet whiplash these last few months. It's as though mother nature is really trying to drive home the point that climate change means drier dries and wetter wets. It makes one question how much they'll be able to shift their infrastructure and economy to a world that's already looking much more volatile than the one that they've spent 160-some years driving to a finely tuned and increasingly precarious point. Meaning what? Meaning, what do they do when they have water? And how do they cope when they don't? And are they going to be able to change how they answer those questions? Because they clearly need to. Can they learn from the past without being tied to it? Can they resist the urge to simply [dump their problems into the ocean](#)? On the wet side, are they going to be able to capture that water in a sustainable way, perhaps one that [recreates](#) in the Central Valley what was once a massive [wetland](#) before it [became a massive farm](#)? Can they [strengthen the salmon runs](#) that [tenuously connect the region](#) from ocean to forest? Can they adjust the [infrastructure](#) they already have so that it doesn't get torn apart?

Coming Up:

[CRCL Lecture Series – Mike Tidwell](#); April 18;
Houma, LA

[Lower Mississippi River Science Symposium](#); April
27-28; New Orleans, LA

[2023 State of the Coast Conference](#); May 31-June
2; New Orleans, LA

Water jobs:

[Coastal Organizer](#); Healthy Gulf; Multiple Locations

[Policy Coordinator](#); The Water Collaborative, New Orleans, LA

[Assistant General Counsel – Water](#); Sandia Resort & Casino;
Albuquerque, NM

[Associate Attorney, Senior Attorney, and Paralegal](#); Earthjustice;
Multiple Locations

[Policy and Partnerships Manager](#); Bayou City Waterkeeper; Houston, TX

[Legal Director](#); Orange Country Coastkeeper; Costa Mesa, CA

[Program Director](#); Restore America's Estuaries; Long Island Sound

[Governor's Fellows Program](#); Baton Rouge, LA



The [Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy](#) is a program of the Tulane University Law School. The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and legal stewardship of water.

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