

# Integration and Collaboration



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**HAPPILY, WE ARE** now fully immersed in spring, and summer is just around the corner. Recent events like World Water Day, Earth Day, and the numerous local spring outreach events are coming to a close. Through my participation at these outreach events I have engaged with the public more often than usual.

While talking to the public at these events, current water resource disasters come to the forefront of the conversation. People ask about events like flooding in the Midwest, the increased frequency of extreme rain events in the Northeast, the 5-year drought in California and most recently, lead contamination in Flint, Michigan. Concerned citizens ask what is our risk, should we drink our tap water, when and how is our property going to be impacted and many other pertinent water-related questions.

As water resource professionals, these are issues we work on daily, yet the public does not typically think about water until it directly impacts them or hits the news outlets. Recently, the public has become more aware of the value and necessity of clean water, the negative impact of polluted water, the tragedy when there is not enough, the devastation of flooding, and the impact of climate variability.

The recent disaster in Flint (and other recent water resource crises) reminds the public that we cannot take clean water for granted. Clean, drinkable water is important and the management of it is complex. The Flint water crisis connects many topic areas in water resources; water quality, infrastructure, drinking water treatment, funding mechanisms, environmental justice, governance and policy, to name a few. The decisions and solutions require action and oversight from all levels of government (city, county, state and federal). Government, nonprofits, academic institutions and the private sector must come together to bring the issue to light and to identify solutions to the problem. The problems and solutions are integrated through sectors and through the wide range of water resource expertise.

The current crises are not an anomaly and water stressed conditions are becoming the norm. According to the U.S. Water Partnership,

“by 2025, nearly two-thirds, of the world’s population will be living under water stressed conditions, including roughly one billion people who will face absolute water scarcity. Drought and floods now affect more people than all other natural disasters combined” ([www.uswaterpartnership.org](http://www.uswaterpartnership.org)). Let these water-related disasters, past and current, be a reminder to the public and, most importantly, to water resource professionals, that our work is complex and collaboration and integration are essential. Collaboration among all sectors and disciplines is necessary to reduce the risk of such disasters, to effectively research and innovate, and to implement solutions.

The integration required to solve the Flint crisis is not unlike the work we do on a daily basis and the reason so many of us find AWRA an essential part of our work. AWRA has played the role of integrating students and professionals in the field of water resources for over 50 years. AWRA’s philosophy is that water resources management, planning and research are integrated. The multitude of disciplines and levels of expertise must come together to solve our water resources problems, develop solutions, effectively manage the resources and keep our water clean and drinkable. At AWRA we are guided by the principles of enhancing connections and communications between all sectors of the water resource community, and promoting and enabling the water resources research and practices that enhance the water resources field. This is why AWRA’s role has been, and will be, so important throughout the next century.

Many of us will come together in the next few months – Sacramento in July for AWRA’s Summer Specialty Conference on GIS and Water Resources, Orlando in November for AWRA’s Annual Conference, at state section meetings and through the upcoming webinars. At these events, as water resource professionals and students, let us recommit ourselves to the important work we do. Let us recognize that the public is going to be expecting more from us as water-related issues become more common. Finally, as AWRA members, let us continue to foster and strengthen this important space where integration and collaboration among sectors and expertise is a key part of everything we do. ■