

MONTANA'S WATER POLICY:
INNOVATIONS, REALITIES, AND PROSPECTS

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Montanans have historically characterized our homeland as "The Treasure State", indicative of our hard-rock mining heritage. Montana's mineral resources have consistently been the source of both wealth and controversy. In recent years, other natural values have received nationwide attention, such as the "Big Sky" that gives its name to Chet Huntley's famous resort near Yellowstone Park.

One of those "other values" is Montana's water resource, which includes the rising of the Missouri River and of the Kootenai-Clark Fork, major branches of the Columbia River. Montana is now known as a "Headwaters State" as well. But although large quantities of water rise in Montana and leave its borders, the distribution of those waters results in scarcity in the arid plains that cover much of the state.

The variety of values placed on Montana's natural resources is a topic currently much debated by citizens of the state. According to some economic indicators, we are a depressed state with stagnant growth (almost last among the 50 states), out-migration of talented individuals (especially young native Montanans), and shrinking public services. Critics blame our system of environmental protection, our tax