



## **Fresh Water News – Digital News Initiative**

### **Editorial Policy**

**Adopted May 18, 2018**

As traditional news gathering outlets have shrunk in number and scope, it's more critical than ever that independent news journalism grows, focusing on water issues in the American West.

At the core of Water Education Colorado's digital news initiative, Fresh Water News, is the journalistic principle that self-governed societies function optimally when served by a free and responsible press that informs, engages and inspires.

To that end, we've adopted the following news editorial policy, which covers our ethical and professional obligations to our readers with regard to Fresh Water News:

Our journalism will be of the highest quality and will be as accurate, fair and complete as possible.

Our primary allegiance is to the public. Our goal is to write stories that are balanced, engaging and well-sourced. Decisions about what we cover and how we cover it are made by our editors.

#### **Editorial independence**

Water Education Colorado's Fresh Water News staff retain full authority over editorial content to protect the best interests of our organization and the integrity of our coverage. We maintain a firewall between news coverage decisions and sources of all revenue. Acceptance of financial support does not constitute implied or actual endorsements of donors or their products, services or opinions.

We accept gifts, grants and sponsorships from individuals and organizations for the general support of our activities, but our news judgements are made independently and not on the basis of donor support.

Water Education Colorado may consider donations to support the coverage of particular topics in Fresh Water News, but our staff maintain editorial control of the coverage. We will cede no right of review or influence of editorial content, nor of unauthorized distribution of editorial content.

#### **Prior review**

For the purposes of accuracy and fairness, there are times when we may review portions of quotes and attributed material with sources to ensure they have been captured correctly, but we do not preview stories with sources in advance of their publication.

#### **Journalistic conduct**

As journalists we have unique professional obligations and limitations. As a result we conduct ourselves in ways that respect our profession's ongoing quest for impartiality. The public deserves factual reporting and informed analysis. To that end, our opinions shall not influence our content as we seek to present the story in as many of its facets as practically doable on deadline.

Paid employees of Water Education Colorado's Fresh Water News initiative must be mindful that opinions they express may damage our reputation as an unbiased source of news. They must refrain from declaring their views on contentious public issues in any public forum, whether in tweets and other social media posts, or web blogs and chat rooms.

We strive to provide our readers with all the tools they need to evaluate our work. We fully disclose our funders on our website. [The list can be viewed here.](#)

We take full responsibility for our work and will correct errors as soon as they come to our attention.

While the majority of our reporting will occur on the record, from time-to-time, we will use information from our sources on an "off the record" or "on background" basis. We will use the same definitions for these terms as those used by the Associated Press. They are as follows:

***On the record.*** The information can be used with no caveats, quoting the source by name.

***Off the record.*** The information cannot be used for publication.

***Background.*** The information can be published but only under conditions negotiated with the source. Generally, the sources do not want their names published but will agree to a description of their position. Reporters should object vigorously when a source wants to brief a group of reporters on background and try to persuade the source to put the briefing on the record. These background briefings have become routine in many venues, especially with government officials.

***Deep background.*** The information can be used but without attribution. The source does not want to be identified in any way, even on condition of anonymity.

### **Gifts and honoraria**

Paid employees of Water Education Colorado's Fresh Water News initiative must inform the executive director before accepting honoraria and/or reimbursement of expenses for giving speeches or participating in seminars at colleges and universities or at other educational events if such appearance make use of Fresh Water News' name or the employee in his or her role as a journalist affiliated with Fresh Water News.

### **Fairness**

A strong sense of fair play must imbue our writing, accurately reflecting motives of sources. The tone and language of stories must be even-handed and avoid loaded phrasing.

Even under deadline pressure, it is imperative that we allow news subjects ample time to respond and react to issues, events and, most important, allegations against them. We should make every possible attempt to reach them, both at home and work.

We should accurately characterize their response or lack of response. "Would not comment" may be preferable to "refused to comment." However, it may be appropriate to characterize a public official, who typically is obligated to respond, as refusing to comment when given ample time and opportunity.

*\*This editorial policy draws generously on the policies of the following news organizations: The Associated Press, National Public Radio, Denver Post, the Institute for Nonprofit News, and Chalkbeat.*