

# We are Water (WaW) Exhibition: Summative Evaluation from Library Host Sites March 2022 - May 2024

Prepared by Christine Okochi and Katie Boyd  
CIRES Center for Education, Engagement, and Evaluation (CEEE)  
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# About the WaW exhibition

The We are Water project was a collaboration launched in 2020 between scientists, Indigenous science educators, learning researchers, informal educators, and library staff. The project team aimed to create a traveling exhibition about water in the Southwest U.S. centered around the big idea that *Water, critical and scarce in the Four Corners Region, connects diverse communities through our shared place and unique stories.*

The library exhibition created a place where youth, families, and community members could experience, learn, share, and talk about what water means to them. The exhibit had four interactive parts, each highlighting a different theme and including a fun, hands-on activity or game: (1) Water and Life with a life-size Connect Four game; (2) Water Use, Water Rights with a Plinko-style game; (3) Water in the Landscape with an interactive AR sandbox; and (4) Water and Our Community with an interactive Storywall. While hosting the exhibit, library staff also facilitated water-themed STEAM programs for multigenerational audiences.

Learn more about the exhibition: <https://wearewater.colorado.edu/>



# About WaW project evaluation

WaW project evaluation was conducted by a team of evaluators. This report summarizes the “internal” evaluation conducted by the CIRES Center for Education, Engagement, and Evaluation (CEEE), seeking to understand:

- whether visitors saw themselves, their communities, or their cultures reflected in the exhibition;
- whether visitors were introduced to new water perspectives or ways of knowing about water;
- whether and how the exhibition inspired visitors to share their water stories;
- how library staff create welcoming spaces for diverse communities;
- visitors’ responses to STEAM programs; and
- visitors’ responses to the exhibit.

This evaluation focused on **visitor feedback** about the exhibit and STEAM programs; **visitor engagement** with the storywall component of the exhibit, with STEAM programs, and WaW social media; and how the WaW exhibition created **welcoming spaces** for diverse communities at the libraries.

Library visitors were invited to participate in several ways. **Anonymous exhibit feedback surveys** were available on paper cards and iPads at the library, or online via QR code. Visitors who attended STEAM programs or community events were invited to complete **anonymous activity feedback surveys** on paper or online via a QR code. Activity feedback cards with the QR code were also packed in take-home activity kits, which could be returned to the library or completed online. At some library sites, visitors who completed activity surveys were entered in a drawing for WaW prizes at the library.

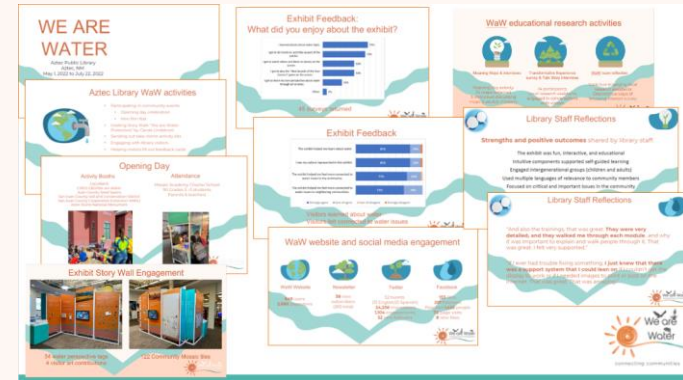


# WaW project evaluation (continued)

**Visitor engagement** with the story wall (comments posted on water tags, artwork posted on the story wall, responses to the touchscreen poll) and artifacts from STEAM programs (water meaning maps from opening day and scout day) were also documented and described here.

Evaluation results from each library site were shared on an ongoing basis throughout the project. This report covers the period May 2022 to March 2024, the seven libraries in the initial grant period.

In this report, responses to closed-ended, Likert-type survey questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Open-ended survey responses were summarized and for some questions, selected verbatim responses were included. Visitor art and contributions to the storywall were aggregated and summarized thematically. A summary of local media about the exhibit as well as WaW social media analytics were also included in this report.



Example site evaluation report sent to library staff

Note: See separate report for findings from “external” evaluators/project storytellers Dr. Shelly Valdez from Native Pathways and Jill Stein and Tamara Grybko from Reimagine Research Group.

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# Library host sites: May 2022 to March 2024

The We are Water exhibition traveled to seven rural and Tribal libraries in the Southwest U.S. during its initial run from May 2022 to March 2024:

**Aztec Public Library**, Aztec, NM

**Navajo Nation Library & Museum**, Window Rock, AZ

**Pine River Library**, Bayfield, CO

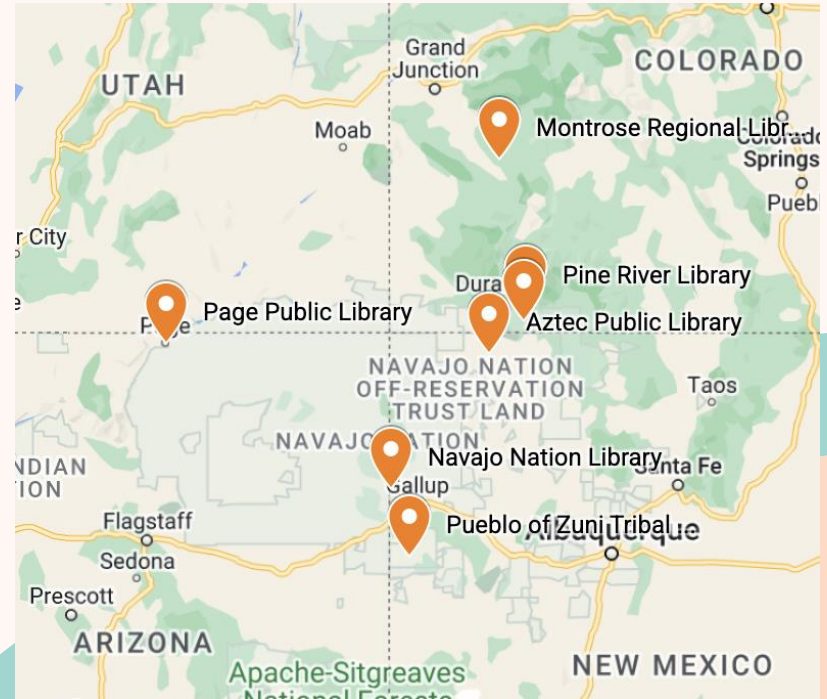
**Montrose Regional Library**, Montrose, CO

**Zuni Tribal Archives**, Zuni, NM

**Ignacio Library**, Ignacio, CO

**Page Public Library**, Page, AZ

Each library hosted the exhibit for three months, except for the Page Public Library, which as the final library site in the grant period hosted for an additional three months.



# WaW community events and activities

The WaW team, library staff, and local community organizations collaborated to facilitate numerous community events and STEAM-focused activities such as:

- Opening day celebrations
- Mini film festivals
- Story walks
- Take-home activity kits for families
- Water-themed STEAM workshops for children, adults, and youth groups
- Arts and cultural events

The goals of these accompanying programs and events were that library visitors would: see water topics in new ways; increase awareness that water is critical and scarce; see themselves, their community, or their culture reflected in the exhibition; expand their cultural and/or scientific perspectives about water; and engage in local water topics through sharing art, stories, concerns, and conversations.



# WaW community events: Opening day celebrations



Zuni Tribal Archives Opening Day Celebration.

The WaW team and library staff collaborated with local organizations to make each WaW opening day a unique celebration of water and community.

After the successes and lessons learned at the first two opening day events, the addition of community liaisons at some libraries helped facilitate these community connections and assist library staff in planning the event.

Across the seven libraries, over 700 students, teachers, families, and community members attended opening day events (range of 10 to 180 attendees) to learn and create at the water-themed STEAM activity booths, as well as enjoy traditional dance performances and local artists' work at several library sites.

# WaW community events: Opening day celebrations

Building on the successes and lessons learned at the first two library opening day events, the WaW team created exhibit passports and opening day activity maps to help visitors navigate the event and increase participation at each activity booth.



Montrose Library Opening Day Celebration



Page Public Library Opening Day  
Photo credit: Aaliyah Henderson



Page Public Library Opening Day Celebration  
Photo credit: Annamarie Schaecher



# WaW community events: Mini film festivals

Three libraries - Aztec, Navajo Nation, and Montrose - hosted mini film festivals about the theme *Local Knowledge and Water Security*. The film festivals presented a curated selection of three to eight video clips focusing on local water issues, and engaged attendees in panel discussions with invited local water experts: Andy Bleckinger from the San Juan Soil and Water Conservation District, Crystal Tulley-Cordova from the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources, Nikki Tulley of the University of Arizona, filmmaker Diedre Peaches, Todd Ballard of CSU, Nancy Fishing from the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association, Penelope Powel from the Valley Food Partnership, and Mendy Stewart from the Shavano Conservation District.

The film festivals attracted 40 attendees across the three libraries; 15 participants completed evaluation surveys.



Navajo Nation Library and Museum Film Fest.



Montrose Film Fest.

*"I'm surprised and excited about how many water projects are being done by the community!"*

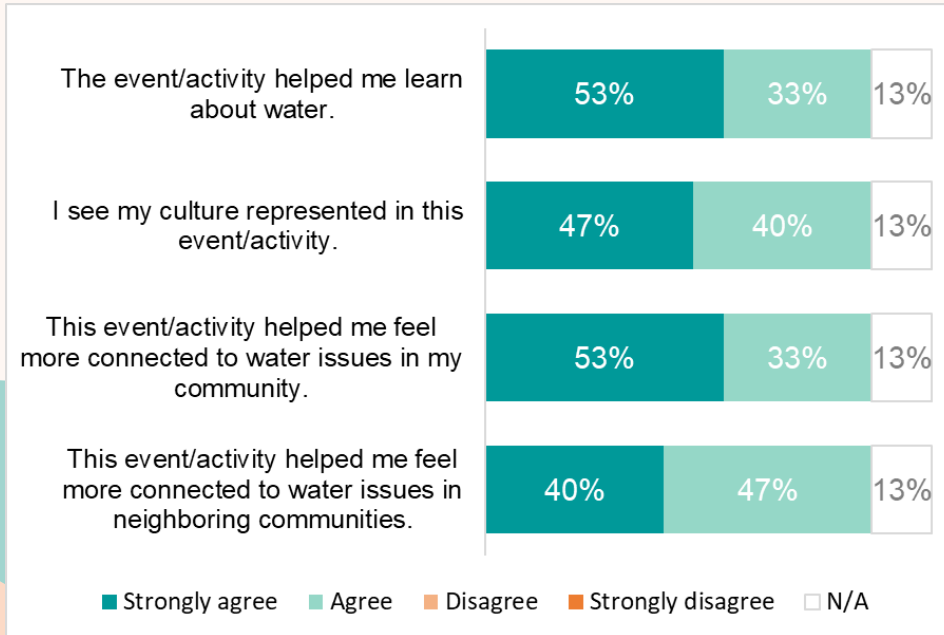
—Navajo Nation film fest attendee

*"I am so pleased to see that our young Navajo people have and are becoming educated to become advocates for water."*

—Navajo Nation film fest attendee



# Event survey: Reflection on project goals



The mini film festivals engaged adult audiences in **learning about water** and **feeling more connected** to water issues in their communities and neighboring communities.

N=15

# WaW community events: Highlights from around the region



**ICL**  
IGNACIO COMMUNITY  
LIBRARY

## We Are Water Video Contest

Create a video with a "We Are Water" story or lesson!  
Video must include stop motion animation elements in it.

**ACTION!**

Video should be in an MP4 format and sent digitally or brought to the library on a USB storage device.  
- winners will sign a release for use of their video and images on social media-

**ENTRIES DUE OCTOBER 31**

An experienced library staff member at Ignacio Library set up a **stop-motion animation** studio in the library and led a workshop for visitors to create their stories about water.

Visitors were invited to enter their animation in the library's contest. Approximately 30 children and adults experimented with the medium and several completed their stories.

Watch the winning video on the Ignacio Community Library Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/ignaciolibrary/videos/the-winner-of-the-stop-motion-animation-contest-was-reagan-osee-her-work-in-the-/685180253395648/>



# WaW community events: Highlights from across the region

Library staff collaborated with community organizations to facilitate additional water-themed STEAM activities and workshops for children, adults, or youth groups, or arts and cultural events.

- The Montrose Library partnered with the Ute Indian Museum to host an event, ***Water is Alive***, featuring Indigenous storyteller and flute player Bobby Jimenez.
- The Ignacio Library partnered with Garrett Pachey, wildlife biologist with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe to facilitate a workshop ***Wildlife and Water***.
- Zuni Tribal Archives and Montrose Library hosted ***Girl Scout Days*** for exhibit tours and STEAM activities.
- Zuni Tribal Archives created a **Community Waffle Garden**.



The screenshot shows a news article from the Montrose Press. The article is titled "‘Water is alive’: local storyteller shares the importance of water" and is categorized as "FEATURED". It is written by Rhiannon Bergman and dated April 26, 2023. The main image shows Bobby Jimenez, a local storyteller and flute player, wearing a hat and playing a flute. The article includes a "Subscribe for \$2.95/week" button and a "VIEW TODAY" link. The URL for the article is provided below the screenshot.

[https://www.montrosepress.com/news/water-is-alive-local-storyteller-shares-the-importance-of-water/article\\_7c808112-e536-11ed-89fc-7b8cd5e2368c.html](https://www.montrosepress.com/news/water-is-alive-local-storyteller-shares-the-importance-of-water/article_7c808112-e536-11ed-89fc-7b8cd5e2368c.html)



# WaW community events: Highlights from across the region



Educator Open House at Page Public Library.  
Photo credit: Annemarie Schaecher

- Montrose Library and Page Library hosted Educator Open Houses to share resources with local teachers and encourage them to bring classes to visit.
- Aztec Library piloted **Living Room Conversations** with visitors.
- Pine River Library collaborated with The Powerhouse Museum to host a **closing day event**.
- Page Public Library incorporated water-themed STEAM activities into their **weekly children's workshops**.

# Virtual event: WaW photo contest 2022

28 Submissions:  
21 Photos  
7 Water Reflections  
90% from current residents  
10% from visitors



3rd Place  
Little Fall  
by Cheyenne Munns



1st Place  
Misty Wheel Lines  
by Jon Hafen



2nd Place  
Bisti Badlands. Desert Solitaire.  
by Rebecca Larivee

Best Water Reflection/Memory by  
Margaret Armes

*"I have the utmost respect for water and feel that our community is blessed to have the water resources we have in the Four Corners region. Water is Life, the process by which energy and resources are transformed. Cutter dam is part of that transformation. It is beautiful and quiet in its own little part of San Juan County. In all of its stillness it provides water to one of the largest irrigated farms in the United States. I am honored to enjoy this hidden lake that is like a gem in the middle of New Mexico's high desert."*



Best Visiting Photo  
Dusk on the San Juan River  
by Mark Landers



# Virtual event: WaW photo contest 2023

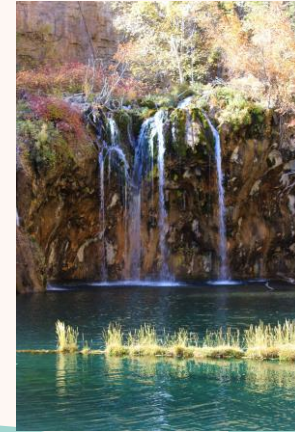
12 submissions  
100% from current residents



1st Place  
Neat-ure  
by Cheyenne Munns



2nd Place  
Stillwaters  
By Debi Roundtree



3rd Place  
Blue Lake  
by Kyndal Amis

Best Water Reflection by Debbi Roundtree

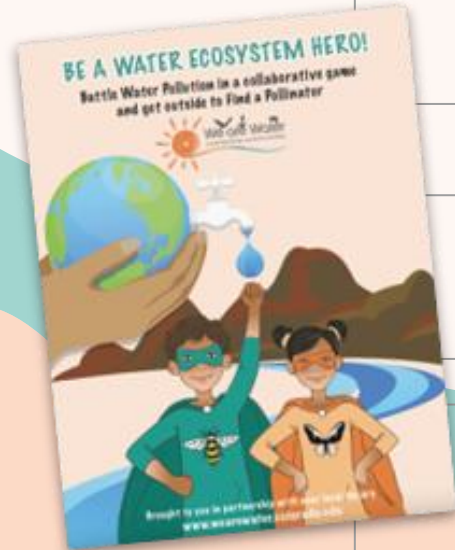
"I find that when I need perspective and peace to center my soul I turn to kayaking. Water and nature have a way of bringing a healing experience to one's heart and soul."



# Take-home activity kits

Library staff distributed four different take-home kits and two coloring books in three languages for children and families to record water stories in their communities, investigate water properties, and learn about how they can protect water for the future.

Take Home Activity	Language	Count
Be a Water Detective	English	335
	Spanish	65
	English & Navajo	30
Be a Water Ecosystem Hero	English	335
	Spanish	65
Be a Water Historian	English	320
	Spanish	105
	English & Navajo	50
Waffle Gardens	English & Spanish	150
Coloring and Activity Book 1	English & Spanish	415
	English & Navajo	50
Coloring and Activity Book 2	English & Spanish	385
	English & Navajo	120
Total		2445





# Visitor engagement: WaW exhibit story wall



Community Mosaic at Page Public Library.

The story wall component of the exhibit invited visitors to comment and post responses to prompts about water on exhibit tags, color and contribute a tile to the community mosaic picture, post their artwork, or fill out a poll about water on the touchscreen.

In all, visitors contributed **332** water perspective tags, **56** artworks, and **565** community mosaic tiles.

See more photos in the website gallery:

<https://wearewater.colorado.edu/exhibit>



# Visitor engagement: Examples of story wall tags

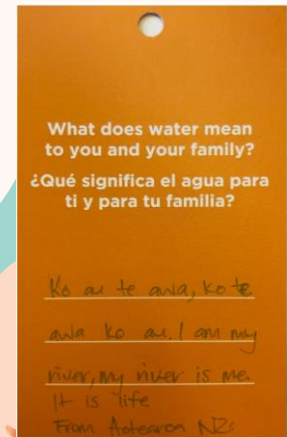
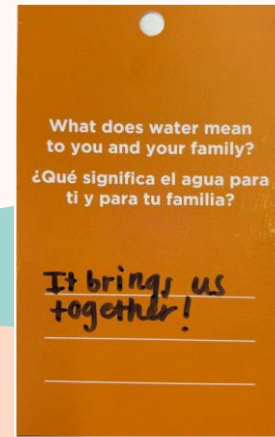
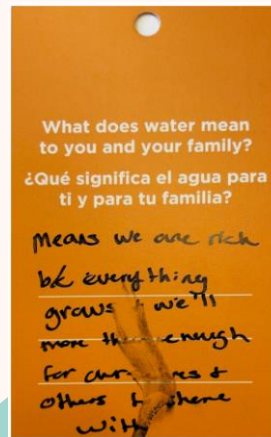
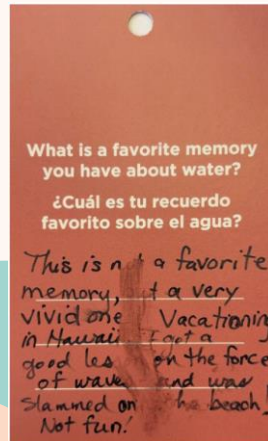
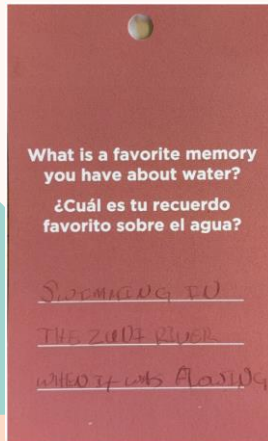
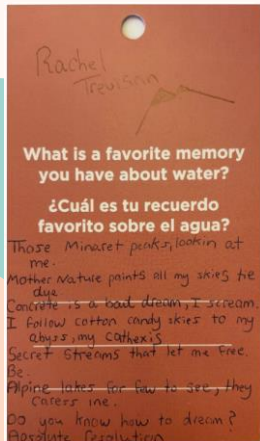
Visitors were invited to comment and post responses to 6 different prompts about water on exhibit tags. A total of **294 tags** were posted to the story wall across the seven libraries. Most prominent themes for each question are listed below (number of tags in parenthesis).

## What is a favorite memory about water?

- Swimming, fishing, recreation with family, friends (39)
- Being in nature, bodies of water (14)
- Spiritual/cultural connection with water (7)
- Importance for health (5)

## What does water mean for you and your family?

- Water is life (12)
- Health and survival (10)
- Growth: Food, livestock, plants, trees (7)
- Connects people (1)



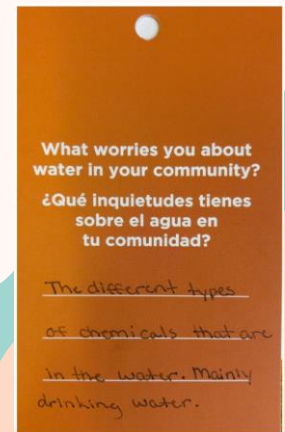
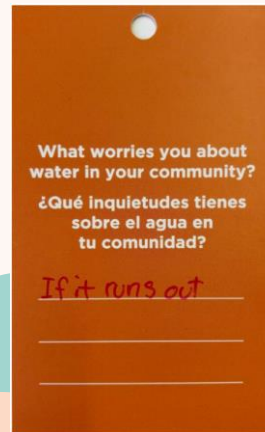
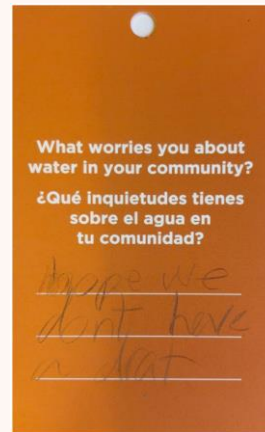
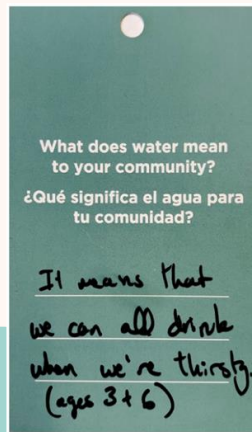
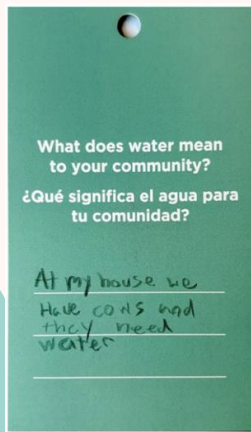
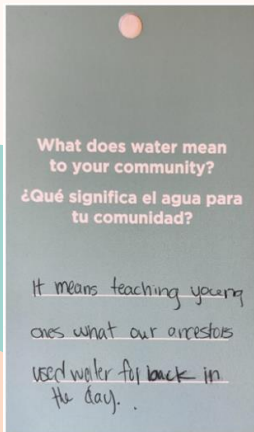
# Visitor engagement: Examples of story wall tags

## What does water mean to you and your community?

- Health and survival (19); drinking (8)
- Growth: garden, crops, livestock (10)
- Other: beauty, science, mental health, fun, energy, cultural knowledge

## What worries you about water in your community?

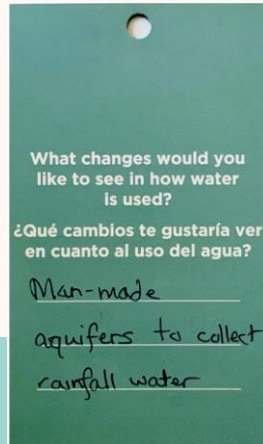
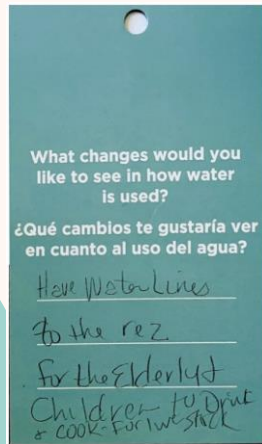
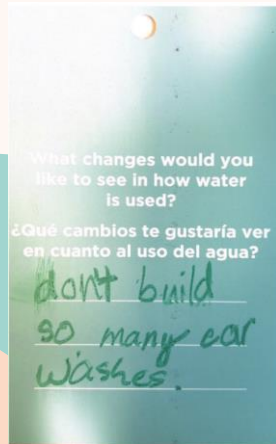
- Misuse, wasting it, running out of water (26)
- Drought (5), flood, wildfire (7)
- Access to clean water (11)



# Visitor engagement: Examples of story wall tags

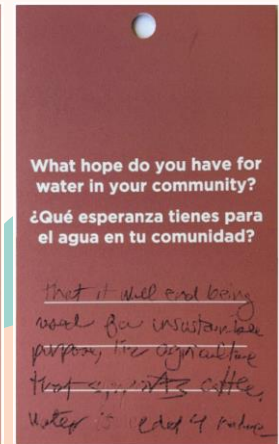
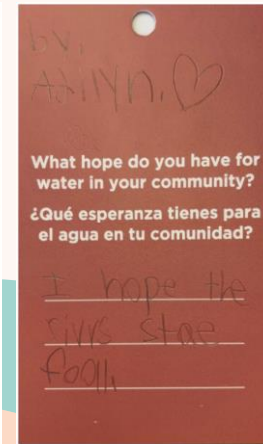
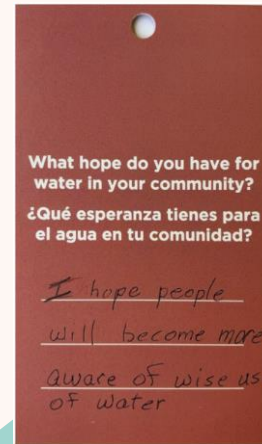
## What changes would you like to see in how water is used?

- Used more wisely, conservation, recycling, aquifers (16)
- Access to clean water, for fish and drinking (10)
- Equitable access to water in homes in Navajo Nation (3)
- Water parks and swimming for kids (2)



## What hope do you have for water in your community?

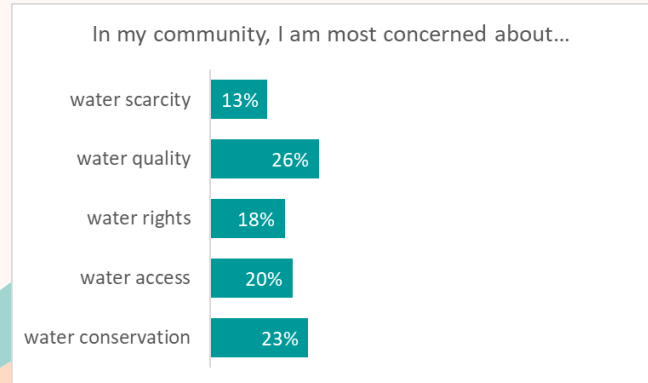
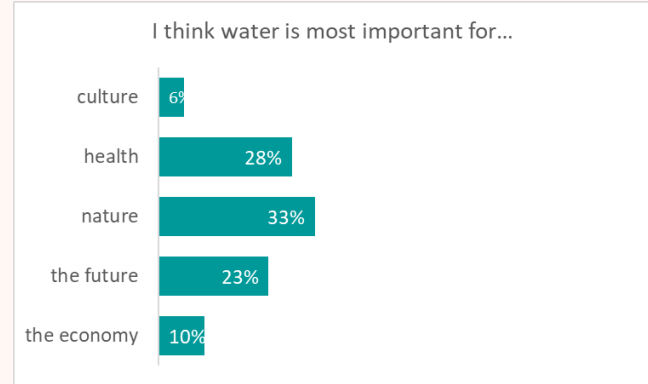
- Water is available, doesn't run out (16)
- Clean water (9), stay healthy (3)
- Use water wisely, learn about conservation (7)
- People share, equitable access (4)



# Visitor engagement: Story wall touch screen poll

The touch screen on the story wall included a short anonymous poll. Visitors could see their responses on the screen and choose to have them recorded and displayed in the aggregated results. Questions for the poll were developed in part based on responses to the initial project needs assessment survey. Due to the design of the touchscreen software, all poll questions were multiple-choice only and did not allow for open-ended responses; downloaded responses could not be disaggregated to allow for any comparison between library communities. While these design features did limit the use of the poll in evaluation findings, the poll responses provided a **snapshot** of visitors' perspectives about water in the region and lessons learned for future work.

A total of **163 responses** were recorded; 53% of respondents lived in a small town (27% rural, 20% city) and 40% were kids (31% teens, 29% adults).

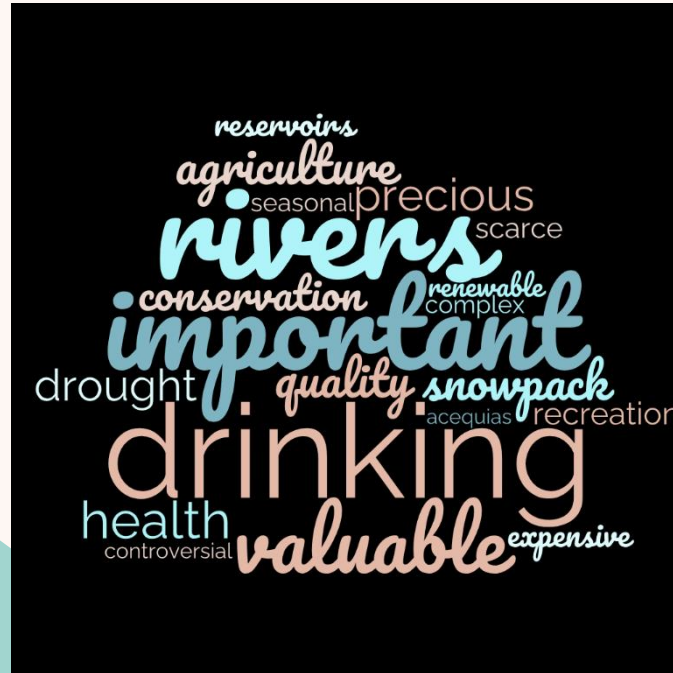


N=163

# Visitor engagement: Story wall touch screen poll

Out of twenty possible choices (select all that apply), words that poll respondents chose most often to talk about water in their communities were *drinking* and *rivers*.

Word	Percentage of respondents
drinking	58%
rivers	58%
health	48%
important	44%
precious	42%
valuable	42%
drought	40%
agriculture	34%
quality	33%
snowpack	33%
conservation	30%
reservoirs	30%
recreation	29%
scarce	26%
renewable	26%
seasonal	23%
complex	23%
expensive	22%
controversial	20%
acequias	8%

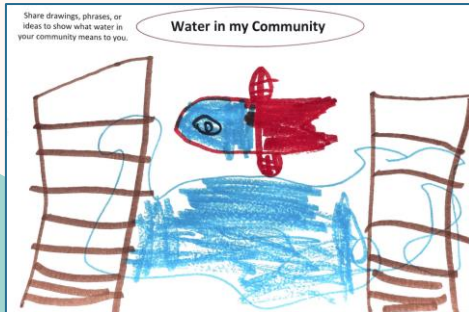


# Visitor engagement: Examples of water meaning maps

During opening day and scout day events, WaW staff invited visitors to create water meaning maps with the prompt: *Draw, write, or share ideas about water in your community.* Visitors were also invited to have a conversation about what their maps (or describe them more in writing). A total of 81 water meaning maps were created, mostly by children, at six libraries.

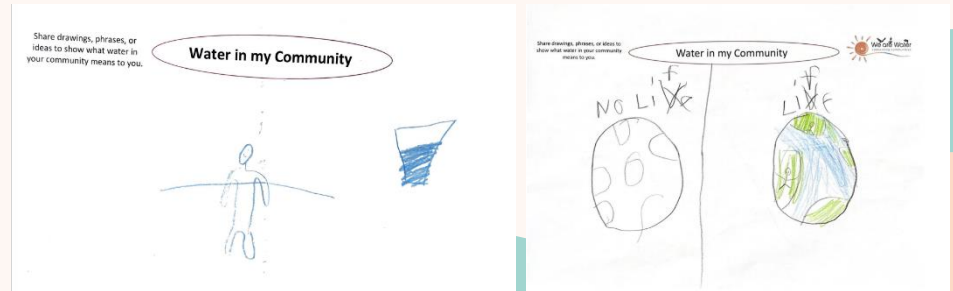
Analysis focused on participants' words, descriptions, and meaning-making rather than relying on evaluators' interpretations of drawings. **Fifty-five water meaning maps** included text or conversation notes that described the content and/or meaning of the maps and therefore were included in the full evaluation. Examples here were grouped by each of the four exhibit themes.

## Water Use, Water Rights



This child's map represented a fishing trip with his dad and showed the dams on the river.

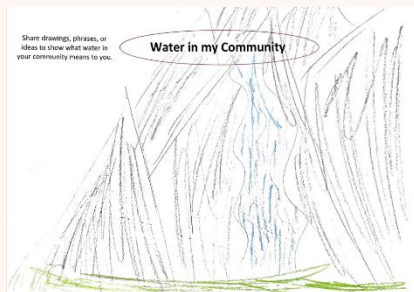
## Water and Life



Some visitors represented the importance of water for people or for life on earth.

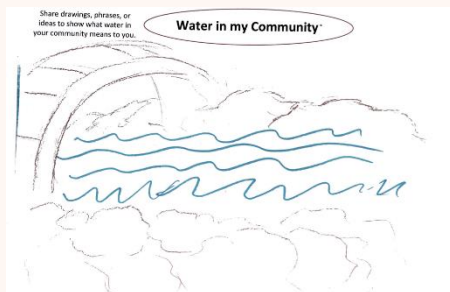
# Visitor engagement: Examples of water meaning maps

## Water in the Landscape

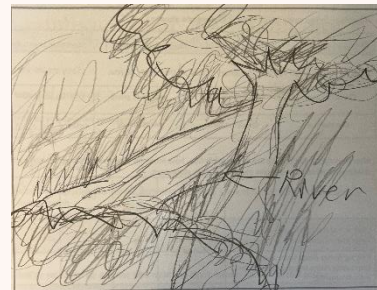


This child's map represented a family trip to the mountains and a waterfall they saw.

## Water and Community

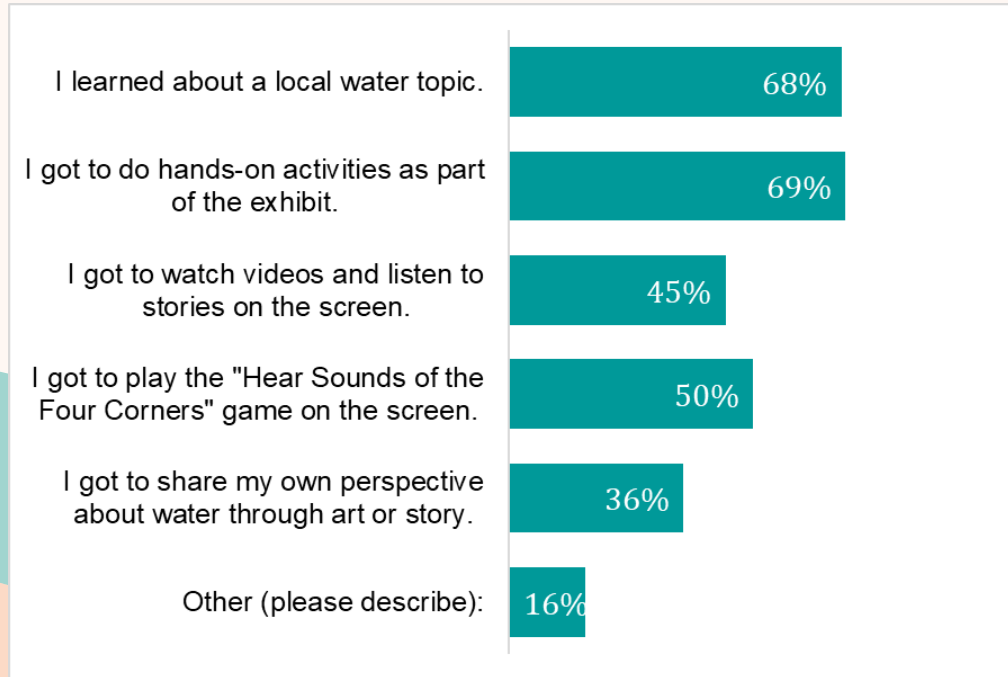


Some visitors from different communities represented local water features by name, showing a strong **place-based connection**, but for different reasons: on the left, the map depicts the local river water park where people go for recreation, and on the right, the map depicts the river in their community because it “represents peace”.





# Exhibit survey: *What did you enjoy about the exhibit?*



**Learning about a local water topic and doing hands-on activities topped the list.**

N=391



# Exhibit survey: *What did you find new or surprising about water?*



## Visitors were **surprised**...

- how badly we conserve water
- how water is so scarce and precious for some people

## Visitors **appreciated**...

- the presence of the exhibit
- the interactives, especially the AR Sandbox
- the interviews with locals
- connections to culture and storytelling
- the images
- learning new things
- the interactives were fun and informative, especially for kids

## Visitors **felt**...

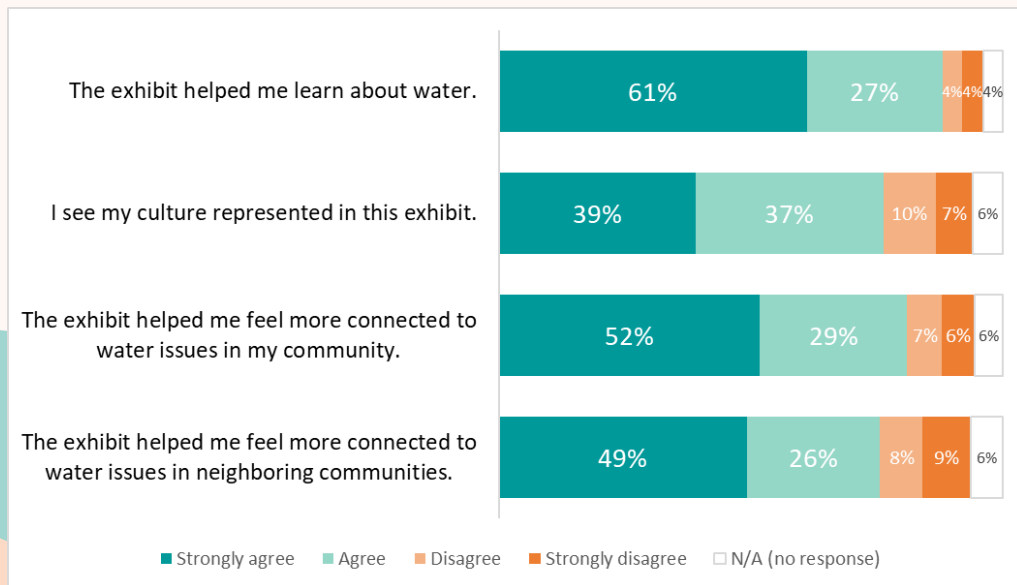
- excited, connected, and motivated by the exhibit
- That water is sacred/water is life
- That water is integral to the area
- connected to others in small towns

## Visitors **learned** about...

- extreme drought
- the water cycle and ecosystem: how water moves and changes landscapes
- water distribution, rights, and challenges with access to water
- the importance of water
- water quality and issues with mining; water is used in mining
- history of water compacts in the region
- Breakdown of upper and lower basin
- how climate change affects water
- Water is life; water gives us food
- People have different views about water
- How we treat water



# Exhibit survey: Reflection on project goals



The majority of exhibit survey respondents agreed that the exhibit **helped them learn about water**, that they saw their cultures represented, and **felt more connected to water issues in their communities and neighboring communities.**

N=391



# Exhibit survey:

## What suggestions do you have to improve the exhibit?



### Exhibit pieces:

- bigger and deeper sandbox
- quieter interactives
- fixing the water cycle display
- two sets of headphones on story wall
- more local interviews
- an explanation for each interactive
- a separate touchscreen for kids' activities (e.g., connect the dots or cartoons)
- a feedback form for kids
- more games and interactives in general
- adding real water
- include traditional Diné stories

### Activities or accompanying materials:

- more books and magazines
- learning about quality, tasting different drinking water
- a map of the exhibit pieces in the library
- scavenger hunt
- more arts and crafts (e.g., painting)
- scheduling WaW activities during story times

### Information on panels:

- more information about reservation water
- more about clouds and rain
- information about what will happen if drought becomes more intense
- more about animals and wildlife
- including facts about bodies of water in photos gallery
- more about conservation and what we can do,\
- focus on the local place, include the Zuni language
- More about recreation; water and ag connection was a stretch

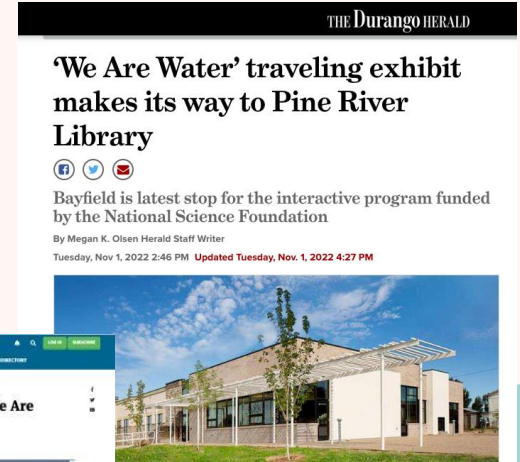
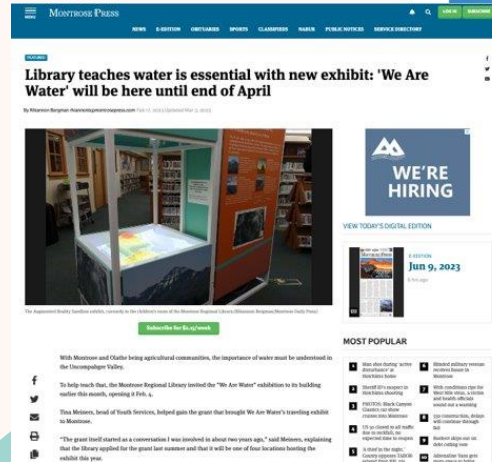
*“Be open to suggestions on improvement. Don't force anything. Be happy. Respect everyone and everything around us. Understanding comes in time.” –Montrose Library Visitor*



# Engagement: Local media

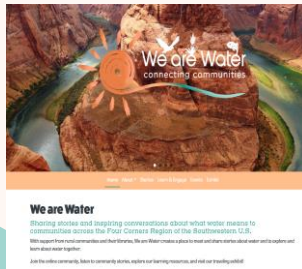
Many library staff worked with local media, including print, web, and radio, to include stories about the exhibition in their area. This helped spur interest for visitors and created collaborations between the library and local media outlets. For example, the Zuni radio station KSHI 90.9FM aired promotions of and hosted a remote broadcast during the opening day event. Read about the exhibition in the news:

- [Aztec: USA Today/Aztec Farmington Times](#)
- [Pine River: Durango Herald](#)
- [Montrose: Montrose Daily Press](#)
- [Ignacio: Southern Ute Drum](#)
- [Page: Lake Powell Chronicle](#)



# Engagement: WaW website, newsletter, social media

The WaW team engaged with audiences online through the website, social media, and a regular newsletter. The website hosted virtual depictions of exhibit elements and other project artifacts such as water stories. A gallery of story wall artifacts has been added to the website. Social media and newsletters highlighted library and WaW activities including the photo contest.



## WaW Website

<https://wearewater.colorado.edu/>

**5,555** users

**27,642** pageviews



## Newsletter

**411** total  
subscribers



## Twitter/X\*

**190** tweets  
(108 English/82 Spanish)  
**89,515** impressions  
**2118** engagements  
**417** followers



## Facebook

**182** likes; **231** followers  
Reached **13,654** people  
**707** page visits

\*Note: X does not allow users to track analytics. Twitter analytics are only current through the Ignacio site.





# Conclusions: Lessons learned

As the exhibition travelled, feedback from library staff and library visitors helped improve the exhibition.

## Recommendations for the exhibit:

- Troubleshooting: Audio was difficult for visitors to hear; connect four tokens were loud; AR sandbox was messy; computers did not turn on
- Provide more ways for attendees to engage with evaluation
- Focus exhibit on the host location; include more local perspectives and languages in exhibit

## Actions taken:

- Headphones added for audio on story wall; tokens reprinted and added tape; provided libraries with vacuum troubleshoot tech remotely
- Added iPads to the exhibit for visitors to provide feedback
- Awarded supplement to create WaW Community Exhibit in three additional libraries, co-designed with those communities

## Recommendations for events:

- Increase participation in opening day
- More advertising for community events like the film fest
- Provide more ways for attendees to engage with evaluation

## Actions taken:

- Hired community liaisons when feasible to help organize and connect with local organizations; created activity maps for visitors to navigate the event
- Worked with library staff and community liaisons to advertise events
- Hired local student assistants to collect feedback in person at community events



# Conclusions: Future plans



The WaW project just wrapped up a no-cost extension period in which the exhibition was hosted in additional two library sites: Cortez Public Library in Cortez, CO and the Mesa County Central Library in Grand Junction, CO. The exhibit will next be housed at The Powerhouse in Durango, CO for an extended period beginning in the spring of 2025.

The WaW team was also awarded supplemental funding to bring a **WaW Community Exhibit** to three small, rural libraries in the region that could not host the full exhibition. Based on evaluation recommendations, the WaW Community Exhibit will be co-developed with each of the three libraries to include locally specific content and activities.

## Events

We are Water hosts events about the historical, local, and cultural significance of water to communities in the Four Corners Region of the Southwestern U.S.

Explore one of our events to learn more about water, and join the conversation!

The We are Water exhibit will reopen in May 2025 at [The Powerhouse](#) in Durango, Colorado.

Check back soon for more details about Opening Day in the spring of 2025!



Events [Past Events](#)





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National Recreation Area, National Weather Service – Flagstaff, Navajo Nation Fish & Wildlife, New Mexico Social Justice and Equity Institute, New Mexico State University - McKinley County Extension Office, Outer Range, Pine River Valley Heritage Society, San Juan Citizen's Alliance, San Juan County Cooperative Extension, San Juan County See Savers, San Juan Soil and Conservation District, Shavano Conservation District, Southern Ute Water Resources Division, State Forest Service – Gunnison, Twin Buttes Cyber Academy, Valley Food Partnership, Water Information Program, Water Protectors Running Club, and the Zuni Youth Enrichment Project.



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