

Bobby Kennedy Jr. helps launch Las Vegas water nonprofit

Bobby Kennedy Jr., a longtime environmentalist and son of former presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, stopped in Las Vegas on Tuesday to launch a new organization dedicated to protecting one of nature's most vital resources — water.



Clark County Commissioner Chris Giunchigliani, from left, Nevada Senator Tick Segerblom, and Bobby Kennedy Jr., Waterkeeper Alliance president, during a kick-off event for the Las Vegas affiliate chapter of the Colorado Riverkeeper, at Doña Maria Tamales restaurant in Las Vegas, Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2018. Erik Verduzco Las Vegas Review-Journal @Erik_Verduzco

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Vegas on Tuesday to launch a new organization dedicated to protecting one of nature's most vital resources — water.

“The big polluters, the Koch brothers, etc., and their indentured servants in the White House and Capitol Hill are saying constantly that we have to choose between environmental protections and economic prospects,” Kennedy told a crowd of several dozen people at Dona Maria's Mexican Restaurant. “That is a false choice. In 100 percent of the situations, good environmental policy is identical to good economic policy.”

Kennedy Jr., whose father Robert Kennedy was assassinated in 1968, has worked as an environmental attorney since 1984. Today he is president of The Waterkeeper Alliance, a New York-based organization comprised of more than 350 water protection groups around the world.

The Waterkeeper Alliance, which began in the 1960s by fishermen who sued polluters on the Hudson River, protects more than 100,000 miles of rivers, lakes and coastlines.

But Southern Nevada didn't have advocates protecting its waterways — until now. Kennedy Jr. and state Sen. Tick Segerblom, who was recently elected to the Clark County Commission, on Tuesday launched the “Las Vegas Water Defenders.”

A fisherman plies the waters of the Colorado River at the Willow Beach Marina in Arizona, south of the Hoover Dam on Sunday Nov. 14, 2010. (Mark Damon/Las Vegas Review-Journal)

Segerblom will serve as program director of the group, which will be an affiliate of the Colorado Riverkeeper. It will work to protect the Colorado River watershed of southeast Nevada, about 11,000 square miles.

The Las Vegas group will patrol the waterway, advocate for water protections and legislation and sue polluters.

“We need to use less water and work with you and your organization to have free-flowing rivers,” Segerblom said. “If we can get the Colorado River flowing through the Grand Canyon again — that’s my lifetime goal.”

John Weisheit, the conservation director of the Colorado Riverkeeper, said federal water agencies are making decisions that have depleted reservoirs.

“This is about the people who live here,” Weisheit said. “The people who actually use and enjoy the Colorado River. This is a movement. We’re trying to bring the voice back to the people because right now it’s held by the water managers.”

Kennedy, who grew up fishing and kayaking, said protecting water is important to him because it’s a “public common” and private interests are trying to steal the water to transform it into profits.

President Donald Trump has been criticized for denying climate change and pulling the United States out of the Paris Climate Accord. In an interview with the Review-Journal, Kennedy called the president’s stance on environmental issues a “formula for Armageddon.”

“We have the technology today to solve almost all of our major environmental problems,” Kennedy said. Converting natural resources into fast cash makes a few billionaires, Kennedy said, but impoverishes everyone else. “And our children are going to pay for our joy ride,” he said.

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