

Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study

Basin Study Program

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Spanning parts of the seven states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming (Basin States), the Colorado River Basin (Basin) is one of the most critical sources of water in the West. The Colorado River and its tributaries provide water for the municipal supply to 30 million people, irrigation of nearly 4 million acres of land, and hydropower facilities that generate more than 4,200 MW, helping to meet the power needs of the West and offset the use of fossil fuels. The Colorado River is also the lifeblood for at least 15 Native American tribes, seven National Wildlife Refuges, four National Recreation Areas, and five National Parks.

Water supply and demand imbalances already exist in some geographic areas in the Basin and are projected to increase in both magnitude and spatial extent in the future. Storage capacity of approximately four times the average inflow has provided the ability to meet most demands even over periods of sustained drought, such as is currently being experienced. However, studies indicate that droughts of greater severity have occurred in the past and climate experts and scientists suggest that such droughts are likely to occur in the future. Furthermore, studies have postulated that by mid-century the average yield of the Colorado River could be reduced by 10-20 percent due to climate change. Meanwhile, the Basin States include some of the fastest growing urban and industrial areas in the United States. Increasing demands coupled with decreasing supplies will exacerbate imbalances throughout the Basin in the future.

The Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study, funded through Reclamation's Basin Study Program and cost-shared by agencies representing the Basin States, will:

- Assess future water supplies and demands throughout the Study area (the Colorado River basin and the adjacent areas of the Basin States that receive Colorado River water – see map) through 2060;
- Assess the reliability of the Colorado River system to meet the needs of Basin resources, such as water allocations and deliveries consistent with the apportionments under the Law of the River; hydroelectric power generation; recreation; fish, wildlife, and their habitats; water quality; flow and water dependent ecological systems; and flood control; and
- Develop and evaluate adaptation and mitigation strategies to address future water supply and demand imbalances.

The Study, begun in January of 2010 and targeted for completion in July 2012, is a collaborative effort with interested parties throughout the Basin including environmental organizations, Native American tribes and communities, hydropower and recreational interests, and other Federal agencies.

