

Water Wars

As mighty as the Colorado River is, these days its water usually doesn't reach the river's natural end at the sea. A lot of the water is used up by farmers watering crops, and people using it in their homes.

Every year, more water is taken out of the Colorado than the rain and snow can put back into it. That means the water use is unsustainable — it will eventually run out if people keep using as much water as they are now.

Where does the water go?

The Colorado provides water to 33 million people in the United States (US), and 3 million in Mexico. Every drop of water is accounted for — the seven US states that use the river have all agreed on the amount of water each state is allowed to use.

Most of the water is used for agriculture (farming). The rest is used by people for things like drinking, bathing, cleaning, cooking and watering the lawn.

WHO GETS WHAT?

US  (91%)
Mexico  (9%)

US State	Share of water
Wyoming	 (6%)
Utah	 (10%)
Colorado	 (24%)
New Mexico	 (5%)
Nevada	 (2%)
Arizona	 (17%)
California	 (27%)

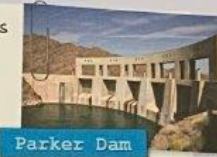


Do you think the Colorado's water has been shared fairly? Why or why not?

Slowing the flow

There have been lots of dams built along the Colorado to collect and control its water.

- Dams are very large barriers that are built along rivers to control the flow of water so less water is wasted.
- The water collects behind a dam in a reservoir — a man-made lake that's used as the water supply for farms, homes and businesses.
- Some dams use the powerful flow of the river to generate electricity. The electricity can then be used to power people's homes.
- Dams are useful but they can be bad for the environment. Changing the flow of the river has destroyed the homes of a lot of wildlife on the Colorado.



Parker Dam

Conflict on the Colorado

Sharing the water in the Colorado River hasn't been easy. Arizona wasn't happy with plans to build Parker Dam in 1934 — they thought California would use it to steal extra water! Arizona even sent out the national guard to try to stop the dam being built.

WATER WASTING WOES

The Colorado River has been in a drought since about 2000. 'Use it Or Lose it' laws were written to make sure everyone gets enough water. The laws say that if a city or farm doesn't use their share of the water, they'll get less water in the future. This makes some people waste water on purpose so that their allowance doesn't go down. This means there's not always enough water for people who actually need it.

Can you think of some ways that people can try to save water?

The Colorado's water level has dropped a lot in recent years. These white 'bathtub rings' at Hoover Dam show just how far.

It's not all so serious...

The way the water in the Colorado is used is a pretty serious business, but this river also creates a lot of ways for people to have fun, too. You'll see how on the next page.