EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

Why Mexico’s Problems Are Everyone’s Problems on the Colorado River, and the Other Way Around

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the plumbing of the Colorado River Basin

key to the plumbing system

- water diversions in acre-feet
  - 0 - 0.6 million
  - 1.2 - 2.4 million
  - 2.75 million

- significant tributary
- reservoirs storage capacity in acre-feet
  - less than 1.5 million
  - 2 - 5 million
  - 33 - 35 million

Clint McKnight, based on art by Lester Doré, High Country News
Colorado River Compact

- Allocates water among Upper Basin and Lower Basin
  - 7.5 maf for each basin
  - Extra 1 maf for lower basin
- Supplies Mexico first from surplus above total apportionment to upper and lower basins
  - If surplus insufficient to supply Mexico, then Mexico’s share supplied equally by upper and lower basins
- Upper division states “shall not cause” flow to lower basin to be less than 75 maf in 10 years
Guarantees 1.5 maf annual delivery to Mexico
  - Allows 1.7 maf when there is surplus in excess of US needs

Allows reduction of U.S. deliveries to Mexico in case of “extraordinary drought”
  - In the same proportion as consumptive uses in U.S. are curtailed

“Extraordinary drought” not defined
2007 Interim Guidelines

- Specifies curtailments of Lower Basin deliveries triggered by elevations in Lake Mead
  - Elevation 1075 – 333,000 acre feet
  - Elevation 1050 – 417,000 acre feet
  - Elevation 1025 – 500,000 acre feet

- Coordinates operations of Powell and Mead and triggers releases from Powell based on elevation of both lakes
  - Improves drought management in both basins
  - Makes Upper Basin and Lower Basin wholly interdependent

- ICS allows “augmentation” through conservation and other measures
Colorado River System Stresses

- 1922 Compact over allocates the River
- Uses in LB at or above apportionment; UB uses increasing
- Climate change increases probability of low flows and low lake levels
- Shortages/management/conservation in Lower Basin directly affects Lake Powell
- Mexico uses, conservation, and shortage management will directly affect all US reaches of River
Everyone could benefit from increased international cooperation

Current uncertainty about how shortage will be managed can be reduced

Use of US reservoirs to store water for use in Mexico will help Mexico manage shortage

Storage of Mexican water can help increase levels in Mead, and thus Powell

Mexican participation in ICS can help augment supply in US