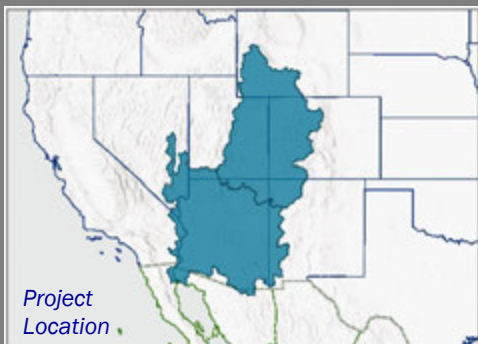


ACTIONABLE SCIENCE

Colorado River Basin Ten Tribes Partnership Tribal Water Study



The Ten Tribes Partnership (Partnership) was formed in 1992 by ten federally recognized tribes with federal Indian reserved water rights or claims in the Colorado River or its tributaries. In 2018, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), in collaboration with the member tribes of the Partnership, completed the Colorado River Basin Ten Tribes Partnership Tribal Water Study (Study). The Study documents how Partnership Tribes currently use water, projects how future water development could occur, and describes the potential effects of tribal water development on the Colorado River System. The Study also identifies challenges related to the use of tribal water and explores opportunities that provide a wide range of benefits.



Project
Location



Colorado River Running Through the Colorado River Indian Reservation

KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

The Study builds on the scientific foundation of the 2012 Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study (Basin Study) and advances critical information about the Partnership Tribes beyond the limited assessment of tribal water in the Basin Study. The Basin Study did not assess the future impacts of tribal water use in the Basin. Moreover, it did not fully account for tribal water demand, reflect the potential use of tribal water presently used by others, or show the potential impact on the Basin water supply if a substantial amount of the presently unused or unquantified tribal water is used by the tribal water rights holders by 2060.

PROJECT GOALS

- Improve understanding of tribal water throughout the Colorado River System
- Characterize current tribal water use and a range of future tribal water development for each Partnership Tribe
- Identify tribal water development challenges and opportunities to reduce future uncertainty and future water imbalances

STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS

The partnerships forged and strengthened during this Study will prove to be critical in order for the significant challenges ahead to be collaboratively addressed.



Fort Mojave Indian Tribe's Willow Pump Bringing Water to Arizona Farms

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Importance of Partnerships: Recognizing the importance of understanding tribal water (both currently and in the decades ahead), Reclamation and the Partnership collaborated to document Partnership Tribes' water use and potential future development to facilitate planning and decision-making throughout the Basin.

Scenario Planning: Using a scenario planning process, the Study documented each Partnership Tribes' anticipated development and use of reserved water rights and identified a range of trends for full tribal water development.

Effects of Tribal Water Development: Modeling the effects of the Partnership Tribes' water development within the Basin provides a sound technical basis and projection of likely future scenarios for tribal water development.

Tribal Participation: The Study was conducted in a true collaborative manner. Partnership Tribes' designated technical staff participated in every step of the analyses. The report documents each tribe's story of their existing water use and future water development. The Partnership Tribes collectively identified their water development challenges as well as several opportunities and potential future actions to overcome them.

Collaborators

- Member Tribes of the Ten Tribes Partnership
- Bureau of Reclamation Upper Colorado Basin Region and Lower Colorado Basin Region

Authors: Nicole Williams, University of Arizona, Pam Adams & KayLee Nelson, Bureau of Reclamation, November 2021.

Photos courtesy of the Tribal Water Study
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LESSONS LEARNED

The Study revealed disparities among the Partnership Tribes, and between the Partnership Tribes and other water users. These disparities have created barriers to the full development of their federal reserved water rights that include access to funding for development, the lack of— and poor condition of— existing infrastructure, access to clean drinking water and adequate sanitation, and legal restrictions.

Partnership Tribes have reserved water rights, including unresolved claims, to divert nearly 2.8 million acre-feet of water per year from the Colorado River and its tributaries. None of the Partnership Tribes currently has the basic infrastructure or legal and administrative flexibility to fully use or realize the full economic value of its reserved water rights.

The full development of reserved water rights for tribal benefit will widen the gap between projected water supplies and demands in the Basin in coming decades. However, modeling using the Colorado River Simulation System indicates that the effect of tribal water development in the Basin is not as significant as full development of state apportionments in the Upper Basin and the projected effect of climate variability.

NEXT STEPS

- Identify potential future actions to fulfill Reclamation's commitments to increase opportunities for tribes to develop, manage, and protect their water and related resources
- Identify near-term activities to help address tribal water challenges in the Colorado River Basin

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Irrigation Canal on the Colorado River Indian Reservation