New Report: 3 of 4 Upper Colorado River Basin States Overusing Colorado River Water

Shrinking Snowpacks in Utah, Wyoming, Colorado require states to cut their water use from Colorado River and its tributaries or risk 'Call on the River'

Virtual Press Conference Scheduled for 10:00 am Mountain Time Dec 13 on Zoom (see page 3)

New research released today argues that Utah, Colorado and New Mexico are overusing their rights to the Colorado River and have not reduced their use in the face of a declining water supply. The Report, ***A Future on Borrowed Time***, shows that while Colorado River flows declined 20% over the last two decades, it is likely that water flows will decline more in the future.

If these water deficits continue, the Lower Basin states of Arizona, California, Nevada alongside Mexico have the right to force the Upper Basin states to cut their water use of Colorado River water. The report also demonstrates that Upper Basin water leaders proposing additional water diversions are jeopardizing the water supplies for both cities and farmers in their own states.

"**There's some antiquated leadership in the Upper Basin from proponents of new water diversions who are jeopardizing the water rights of farmers and cities who have been using Colorado River water for decades**" said Zach Frankel, executive director of the Utah Rivers Council, which produced the report. "**Water leaders need to either stop denying that the Colorado River has dropped 20%, or they need to be replaced with professionals who embrace science and want to protect existing water users, instead of endangering them by proposing new water diversions amidst a declining supply**."

"**The water crisis in the Colorado River Basin gets more dire everyday**," said Jen Pelz, Wild Rivers Program Director at WildEarth Guardians. "**This report makes plain that additional dams and diversions from the Colorado River are not only irresponsible, but put the entire basin and the communities that benefit from its water at risk of economic, environmental and cultural collapse. We need real and immediate commitments, especially from the Upper Basin states, to live within the river's means**" said Pelz.

The report showcases the water deficits happening today among Utah, Colorado and New Mexico. These water deficits are based on the 21st Century average of water flows, which are 19% less than the 20th Century average on the Colorado River. Additional reductions in Colorado River water flows of 30% and 40% reductions in water volume demonstrate that serious water cuts may have to be made in the Upper Basin states, including all newly proposed water diversions.

Overuse of Colorado River in Upper Basin States

Figures in millions of acre-feet of water, includes Mexico obligation

Climate Flow Scenario	Colorado River Flow at Lee Ferry	Upper Basin Surplus (Deficit)	Colorado Surplus (Deficit)	Utah Surplus (Deficit)	Wyoming Surplus (Deficit)	New Mexico Surplus (Deficit)
20th Century Average	15.2	2.3	1.1	0.5	0.5	0.3
21st Century Average 19% Decrease	12.4	(0.5)	(0.4)	(0.2)	0.06	(0.04)
30% Decrease	10.6	(2.3)	(1.3)	(0.6)	(0.2)	(0.2)
40% Decrease	9.1	(3.8)	(2.0)	(0.9)	(0.4)	(0.4)

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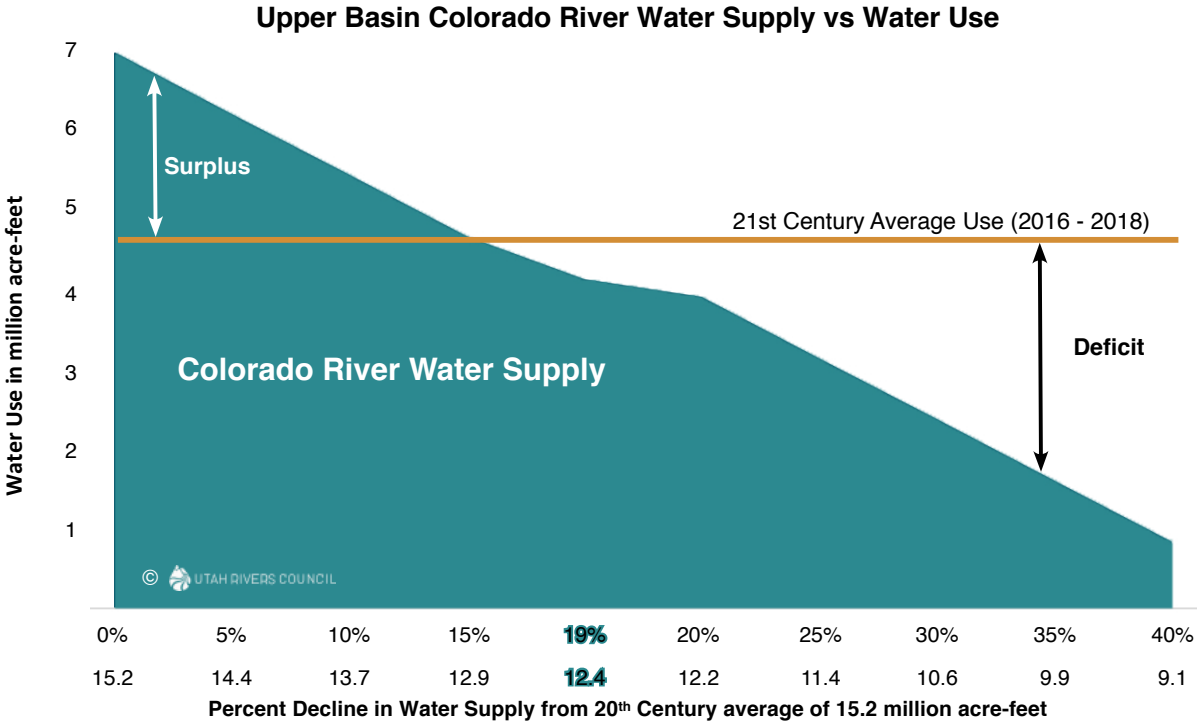
"This report underscores what many officials are reluctant to say: The Upper Basin is already using more water than legally allowed" said Kyle Roerink, executive director of the Great Basin Water Network. "**Any new dam or diversion for non-tribal entities would be a conflagration of the law and detrimental to the public interest. It's time for the Upper Basin to follow the lead of the Lower Basin and begin doing the hard work to get the Colorado River System back in balance**" said Roerink.

As Upper Basin states have sought to increase their water use in the face of a declining water supply, the Lower Basin states and Mexico are cutting 613,000 acre-feet of water from their Colorado River water deliveries starting on January 1, 2022. Arizona, Nevada and California have also announced their intention to cut an additional 500,000 acre-feet on top of these water cuts to adapt to shrinking water supplies.

"**The State of Baja California in Mexico depends heavily on Colorado River water and these water cuts mean less water for drinking, hygiene and other essential human needs**" said Margarita Diaz, executive director of Proyecto Fronterizo de Educación Ambiental, the Tijuana Waterkeeper. "**We need to create a plan to ensure our people have the essential water they need to survive our climate change crisis**."

"**Upper Basin water leaders have refused to accept forty years of science demonstrating that climate change is shrinking the Colorado River"** said John Weisheit, Conservation Director Living Rivers, Colorado River Waterkeeper. "**It's time to stop pretending that shortages in the Upper Basin are not coming, they are here now.**" said Weisheit.



The above graph shows the 2016 – 2018 water use for the four Upper Colorado River Basin states as a brown line. The 21st Century Colorado River flows were 19% less than the 20th Century Average of 15.2 million acre-feet. This means the Upper Basin is using more water than it is entitled to under compact and treaty obligations. Data taken from Bureau of Reclamation.

This research was part of a year-long research effort led by the Utah Rivers Council with input from water experts from across the American West. The report was funded in part by a grant from the Cultural Vision Fund.

To download the report visit the Utah Rivers Council website:

Download Report Here.

ZOOM INVITATION for PRESS CONFERENCE

9:00 am Pacific Time
10:00 am Mountain Time

Utah Rivers Council is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Press Conference on New Colorado River Report
Time: Dec 13, 2021 10:00 AM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

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