

FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Announces New Investments to Protect the Colorado River System

April 06, 2023

President Biden's Investing in America Agenda is Enhancing Drought Resilience and Strengthening Water Security in the West

The Biden-Harris Administration is leading a whole-of-government effort to make Western communities more resilient to climate change and the ongoing megadrought by harnessing the full resources of the President's historic Investing in America agenda. The Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law together include \$15.4 billion to enhance the West's resilience to drought, the largest investment in climate resilience in our nation's history.

This week, senior officials from the White House and the Department of the Interior traveled to Arizona, California, Colorado, and Nevada to highlight the Administration's unprecedented investments in drought resilience and close collaboration with Colorado River Basin states, Tribes, water managers, farmers, irrigators, and other stakeholders.

The Administration is announcing new investments for water-saving projects and other conservation efforts in the Colorado River Basin that will immediately yield hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water savings. These water savings will grow rapidly in the years ahead as additional, longer-term water efficiency infrastructure and resilience strategies come online:

- **Up to \$233 million in water conservation funding for the Gila River Indian Community**, including \$83 million for a water pipeline project that will reuse approximately 20,000 acre-feet of water per year and help shore up elevations at Lake Mead. An additional \$50 million from the Inflation Reduction Act through Bureau of Reclamation's Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program will also save 125,000 acre-feet of water this year and provide similar investment and water saving opportunities in 2024 and 2025 for the benefit of the Colorado River System.
- **Up to \$36 million for water conservation in the Coachella Valley**. The Bureau of Reclamation's Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program, funded through the Inflation Reduction Act, will be entering into an \$12 million agreement in the coming weeks with the Coachella Valley Water District to conserve 30,000 acre-feet of water in Lake Mead this year and will provide similar

investment and water saving opportunities in 2024 and 2025.

- **\$20 million for four small surface water storage and groundwater storage projects in California and Utah, including one near the Salton Sea.** Funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, these projects are essential tools for stretching limited water supplies and increasing conservation in the Colorado River Basin. This includes \$9.5 million to maximize the Imperial Irrigation District's water management efficiency within California's Imperial Valley and \$4.7 million to Washington County, Utah.
- **Over \$54 million for repairs to aging infrastructure to improve water delivery, including \$8.3 million for the Imperial Dam.** Funding announced this week from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will go to 14 projects in the Colorado River System in fiscal year 2023 to improve water conveyance and storage, increase safety, improve hydropower generation, and provide water treatment through the Bureau of Reclamation.
- **Expanded drought-focused outreach and technical assistance to communities in the Colorado River Basin.** In the coming weeks, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) leadership will convene the environmental and infrastructure Secretaries from all seven Colorado River Basin states to discuss strategies to maximize long-term water savings. EPA will also leverage its

network of regional Environmental Finance Centers, the Creating Resilient Water Utilities initiative, and other technical assistance efforts to expand targeted outreach and enhance federal-state collaboration.

The Colorado River Basin provides water for more than 40 million Americans, fuels hydropower resources in eight states, supports agriculture and agricultural communities across the West, and is a crucial resource for 30 Tribal Nations. Despite recent heavy rain and snow, the historic 23-year drought has led to record low water levels at Lake Powell and Lake Mead.

The Administration is deploying these resources and more to protect the stability and sustainability of the Colorado River System now and into the future by:

- **Immediately reducing water demand** throughout the Colorado River System through incentives for voluntary water conservation;
- **Maximizing water resources** by investing in infrastructure upgrades and long-term strategies to improve water efficiency, desalination, reuse, storage, and recycling; and,
- **Protecting the Colorado River Basin's communities for the long term**, including farmers, ranchers, Tribal Nations, rural communities, and cities that will continue to face the impacts of drought and climate change.

Support to Immediately Reduce Water Demand in the Colorado River Basin

President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act is supporting voluntary water conservation measures to immediately reduce water demand throughout the Colorado River System. Ongoing investments from the Inflation Reduction Act's \$4.6 billion for drought resilience and other efforts to support short-term conservation include:

- **Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program Funding to Immediately Reduce Water Use:** In addition to the Coachella Valley and Gila River Indian Community agreements announced today, the Bureau of Reclamation this spring will announce [additional agreements for short-term water reduction](#) by Colorado River water delivery contract or entitlement holders in the Lower Basin that mitigate drought, protect important natural resources, and ensure a reliable source of water and power.
- **Up to 1 Million Acre-feet of Water Conservation in the Imperial Valley:** The Bureau of Reclamation's Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program, funded through the Inflation Reduction Act, is working with the Imperial Irrigation District on an agreement to conserve 250,000 acre-feet of water per year in 2023 through 2026 for the benefit of the Colorado River System.

- **Upper Basin System Conservation Pilot Program:**
The Bureau of Reclamation is making available [up to \\$125 million](#) to support the relaunch of a System Conservation Pilot Program, a voluntary conservation program in the Upper Colorado River Basin. The Upper Colorado River Commission is currently reviewing 2023 applications.

Infrastructure Upgrades and Strategies for Mid- and Long-Term Conservation

President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes \$8.3 billion for the Bureau of Reclamation's water infrastructure programs. These investments and other resources, including from the Inflation Reduction Act, are supporting infrastructure upgrades and other long-term strategies to improve water efficiency, reuse, storage, and recycling. Initiatives to make scarce water supplies go further include:

- **WaterSMART Program:** Interior's WaterSMART Initiative is investing over \$427 million for 127 projects across all seven Colorado River Basin states in fiscal year 2022 to help farmers and ranchers conserve water and build drought resilience in their communities. WaterSMART partners with the Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service to coordinate investments in [priority areas](#) and help accelerate water conservation in individual communities

to make a bigger impact where it is needed most.

- **Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program Funding for Long-term Water Conservation:** The Bureau of Reclamation will announce this spring that it is accepting proposals for long-term system efficiency improvements that will result in multi-year water conservation in the Lower Basin.
- **Salton Sea Restoration:** The Inflation Reduction Act is providing [\\$250 million](#) to restore California's largest lake, the Salton Sea, and help maintain water levels at Lake Mead. Exposed lakebed is contributing to harmful dust emissions in the surrounding communities and reducing important environmental habitat for wildlife.
- **Upgrades to Aging Infrastructure:** In addition to the \$54 million for repairs to aging infrastructure announced this week, Interior has already invested \$19.3 million in critically-needed upgrades to aging water infrastructure in the Colorado River Basin. This includes repairs to improve water supplies and delivery systems, including over \$5 million for canal lining in western Colorado.
- **Water Recycling:** Interior has invested \$281 million in 21 water recycling projects in Colorado River Basin states through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These projects will advance drought resilience and are expected to increase annual capacity by about 172,000

acre-feet of water.

- **Drought Resiliency Projects:** Interior has invested \$71 million in 32 drought resiliency projects in Colorado River Basin states. These projects will help bring clean, reliable drinking water to communities across the West through investments in innovative drought resilience efforts, such as groundwater storage, rainwater harvesting, aquifer recharge, water reuse, ion exchange treatment, and other methods to stretch existing water supplies.
- **Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds:** Since 2021, EPA has provided nearly \$2 billion to Colorado River Basin states through EPA's Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs), including funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Water systems and communities can leverage these resources to support projects such as aquifer storage and recovery, water reuse, green infrastructure, flood diversion and storage, water loss audits, meter replacement, groundwater replenishment, and nature-based solutions. EPA has released resources to help states and communities understand important drought-related eligibilities for the SRFs, including EPA's [Drinking Water SRF](#), [Clean Water SRF](#), and [Water Reuse](#).
- **Leveraging EPA Financing for Drought Resilience:** EPA's [Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation \(WIFIA\)_program](#) has helped finance 17 projects

leveraging over \$5 billion for water infrastructure improvements that address drought resilience and water supply in Colorado River Basin states. These projects include efforts to recycle wastewater, increase water storage, install water meters, and prevent saltwater intrusion in aquifers. The program is currently reviewing applications to support another seven drought-related initiatives totaling an additional \$1.3 billion and will open additional funding opportunities this summer.

- **Initiatives to Enhance Water Efficiency:** EPA's WaterSense partnership, a voluntary program to help households save water, is carrying out targeted efforts within Colorado River Basin states to advance its Labeled Homes program and reduce household water consumption. Based on some studies, WaterSense labeled homes can reduce household water use by up to 45 percent.
- **Climate-Smart Agriculture:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting applications for [\\$850 million](#) in fiscal year 2023 funding opportunities for producers in Western states and across the nation who want to participate in Natural Resources Conservation Service conservation programs and adopt climate-smart agriculture practices. This is part of a \$19.5 billion investment through the Inflation Reduction Act for climate-smart agriculture. These investments provide

resources for farmers, ranchers and forest owners to implement conservation practices for their land.

Collaborative Planning to Protect Communities Now and into the Future

As the Biden-Harris Administration deploys unprecedented investments to increase water security and resilience throughout the Colorado River Basin, the Administration is also working collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure the Colorado River Basin's farmers, ranchers, Tribal Nations, rural communities, and cities have the tools and resources they need to manage the impacts of drought and changing climate conditions today and into the future. These efforts include:

- **Updated Operating Guidelines for Glen Canyon and Hoover Dams:** Interior is working to update the operating guidelines for the Colorado River System to address ongoing water scarcity and to ensure continued water deliveries and hydropower production. Interior will soon be inviting public input on options for operating the Colorado River System beginning in August 2023. This plan will incorporate the ideas and input of states, Tribes, and stakeholders; the latest science and hydrological forecasting; and the expected water savings and efficiency improvements that will come from the Biden-Harris Administration's unprecedented

investments in water security.

- **Support for Farmers and Ranchers:** Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack [convened the leaders of the seven basin states Departments of Agriculture](#) last month to discuss the challenges faced by farmers and ranchers in the Colorado River Basin and USDA resources and programs available to mitigate the impact of historic megadrought. In 2022, producers in the seven basin states have received [over \\$1.8 billion](#) in federal crop insurance indemnity payments due to drought and drought-related impacts. USDA has also provided [nearly \\$680 million](#) in Emergency Relief Program funding for producers impacted by natural disasters in the seven Colorado River Basin states, including drought, in 2020 and 2021. Through the Emergency Livestock Relief Program, USDA has provided nearly \$180.9 million in payments for livestock producers impacted by drought in 2020 and 2021. USDA's Farm Service Agency and Risk Management Agency are also working to implement an additional \$3.7 billion in disaster relief for 2022 disasters, which includes drought impacts.
- **Resilient Water Utilities:** EPA is working with water utilities across the Colorado River Basin to ensure continued water supplies into the future. EPA has provided technical assistance and held workshops to support water systems working to build drought

resilience into their operations and capital planning efforts. EPA also offers [community level training](#), [case studies](#), and resources to help state and utility partners such as an [incident action checklist](#) and a [guide for water utilities](#).

- **Western Water and Working Lands Framework:** In February, Secretary Vilsack and the USDA announced the [Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action](#), a comprehensive, multi-state strategy under USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to address key water and land management challenges across 17 Western states. The framework includes guidelines for identifying vulnerable agricultural landscapes and 13 strategies to help NRCS state leaders, water resource managers, and producers respond to priority challenges.
- **Indian Water Rights Settlement Completion Fund:** The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes [\\$2.5 billion](#) for Tribal water rights settlement projects to help deliver long-promised water resources to Tribes and build a foundation for future economic development for communities that depend on common water resources.
- **Drought Early Warning Systems:** The National Integrated Drought Information System is working with the climatologists in the Colorado River Basin states to provide timely drought conditions and forecasting information, including the impacts of high precipitation.

Additionally, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is working on a Next Generation Water Resources Modeling framework to accelerate research, increase community engagement, and transform its water resources predictions.

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