

## The Colorado River is a major source of water for California

The Colorado River provides roughly a third of all supplies for Southern California cities and suburbs. It also supports a large farming industry in Imperial and Riverside Counties.

California shares this resource with six other states and Mexico, and water allocation is governed by an interstate compact and an international treaty. The US share of the river is divided among four upper basin states (Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico) and three lower basin states (Arizona, Nevada, and California). The federal government has key roles in managing infrastructure and supplies. Under current agreements, 15 million acre-feet (maf) of water per year is allocated to the United States, and 1.5 maf to Mexico. This exceeds average annual supplies, and long-term drought has sharply reduced storage in the major reservoirs. Climate change studies project an overall decline in water in the river, exacerbating the imbalance of supply and demand.

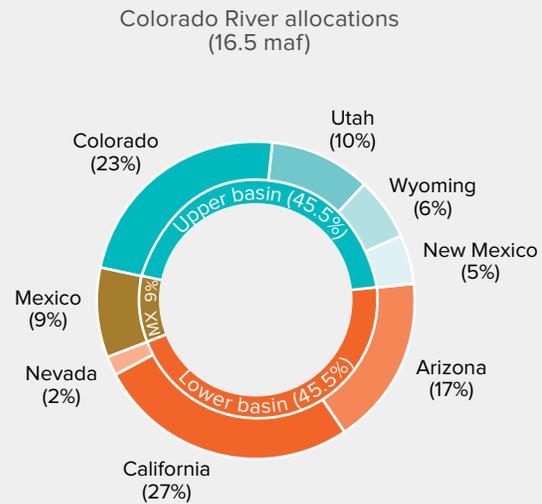
As other states began to use their full allocations in the early 2000s, California was required to reduce its use of the river. Cooperation between urban and agricultural agencies has made this possible. Quantitative Settlement Agreement (QSA) programs save water by lining earthen canals and improving irrigation efficiency, along with some land fallowing. This makes more water available, but some of these programs reduce inflows to the Salton Sea—a vast saline sea in Southern California whose main water source is irrigation runoff from Imperial Valley farms.

Under the QSA, in 2018 the state of California becomes responsible for mitigating the ecological and public health impacts of a shrinking Salton Sea. California also needs to stay engaged in regional efforts to bring the Colorado River Basin into balance.

### CALIFORNIA IS A MAJOR USER OF COLORADO RIVER WATER



- Upper Colorado Basin
- ▨ Upper Colorado export areas
- Lower Colorado Basin
- ▨ Lower Colorado export areas
- Colorado Basin in Mexico



SOURCE: Author illustrations using maps from the US Bureau of Reclamation.

NOTES: The circle graph shows how the 16.5 million acre-feet (maf) are apportioned among the seven basin states and Mexico. Totals do not sum to 100 percent because of rounding. Most of California's allocation is delivered by canals and aqueducts to agricultural and urban export areas outside the river basin. Other export areas in the upper basin include the Denver metropolitan area, Albuquerque, and Salt Lake City. Arizona receives 2.80 maf as a lower basin state and 0.05 maf as an upper basin state.