

SAN JUAN RIVER WATER LEASE AGREEMENT PARTNERSHIP FOR FISH HABITAT IMPROVEMENT



Photo Source: Roberto Rosales

WHAT THIS PROJECT DOES

The Jicarilla Apache Nation (Nation), the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NMISC), and The Nature Conservancy worked together to design a new innovative water-sharing agreement that allows the NMISC to lease up to 20,000-acre feet of water per year (for 10 years) from the Nation. The water will be released to the San Juan River, a tributary of the Colorado River, to benefit threatened and endangered fish and increase water security for New Mexico. This agreement demonstrates how Tribal Nations and state governments can work on a sovereign-to-sovereign basis—with support from conservation organizations—to find collaborative solutions that benefit multiple interests and users of the San Juan and Colorado rivers. With input from scientists, hydrologists, and representatives from the Endangered Fish Recovery Programs, the first water release happened over two days in June 2023. The partners applied for and received a \$4 million grant from the America the Beautiful program in 2023, which was supported by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds. Partners are using the funds to secure additional water, expand community outreach efforts, and support implementation to benefit aquatic species and increase resilience.

PROJECT BENEFITS

This first-of-its-kind project is truly a win-win-win solution that provides revenue to the Nation and advances Tribal self-determination in the management of Tribal water resources and sustaining Tribal communities, while helping the state of New Mexico maintain compact compliance and contributing to the health of the river for both people and nature. As many across the Colorado River Basin work to develop projects and solutions to address climate change and drought, the Nation, the NMISC, and TNC hope this innovative water sharing project can serve as a model for water sustainability throughout the basin. This project demonstrates that the Colorado River Basin's Tribal Nations are important leaders and partners in crafting transformative water solutions across the West.

PROJECT DETAILS

Project Location: NM-CD3

Federal Funding Program:
National Fish and Wildlife
Foundation's America the
Beautiful Program

Federal Funding Award:
\$4,000,000

Partners: The Jicarilla
Apache Nation, the New
Mexico Interstate Stream
Commission, and The
Nature Conservancy

PROTECTING THE COLORADO RIVER AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT DEPEND ON IT

The Colorado River is a resource for 40 million people. It provides drinking water, as well as critical food and energy production. It's an engine for local economies, an irreplaceable habitat for native birds, fish, and wildlife, and an essential part of the Western way of life. But it's on the brink of collapse.

The river is over-allocated, and its two largest reservoirs have fallen to roughly one-third capacity. Decades of drought and rising temperatures threaten the reliability of future water supplies in Colorado River Basin states, putting crucial infrastructure in jeopardy and increasing risks to communities from natural disasters like wildfires and floods.

INVESTING IN THE COLORADO RIVER BASIN'S FUTURE

In order to ensure that the Colorado River can continue to be a reliable source of clean water for communities and agriculture throughout the Basin, we need long-term, sustainable state and federal funding for strategies that make the river more resilient, conserve water, and protect communities from increasingly severe fires, floods, and drought.

HOW TO CREATE A MORE RESILIENT COLORADO RIVER BASIN



Improve forest health using management and restoration strategies designed to protect the forested areas in the Colorado River Basin, such as thinning overgrown areas, removing invasive plant species, and conducting prescribed burns.



Restore wetlands, high-elevation mountain meadows, and riverside habitat to help improve the health of rivers and streams across the Basin, reduce sediment in downstream reservoirs and water infrastructure, improve water security, and enhance forage. Strategies include implementing wood and rock structures to slow river flows, reestablishing native plants, and replenishing groundwater to help protect clean water supplies and restore degraded rivers and streams.



Increase agricultural efficiency and enable farmers to develop strategies that work for them, like supporting on-farm water conservation methods, alternative crops that use less water, and investing in infrastructure upgrades like lining canals.



Boost municipal water conservation by expanding what is already working, like water-efficient plumbing and appliances, leak detection systems, water reuse, replacing thirsty lawns with drought-tolerant landscaping, and incorporating water planning into urban development and growth decisions.

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