

EFFICIENT WATER MANAGEMENT FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE (VIRGIN RIVER)



Credit: Stuart Ruckman

WHAT THIS PROJECT DOES

This project, which was completed in 2025, modernized the City of Hurricane, Utah's water delivery system and provided in-stream benefits to increase flows for the Virgin River as well as support at-risk and other river-dependent species. When there is more water in the Virgin River, survival odds increase for fish as well as the huge range of unique and rare plants and animals depending on this river. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and partners came together to collaborate on a 17-mile river stretch of the Virgin River just below the town of Hurricane. To help achieve the goals of modernizing water delivery and improving river health, TNC worked with many diverse partners to apply for and receive Natural Resources Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding to modernize Hurricane's water delivery system. This RCPP project funded irrigation infrastructure improvements that modernized water management and reduced system losses, benefitted local water users, and secured additional water to improve flows and reduce temperatures in the Virgin River. Projects in the RCPP project generate water savings, river and riparian restoration benefits as well as in-stream benefits. Finally, this project supported a nearby project in Washington City that increased flows by piping a return-flow canal.

PROJECT BENEFITS

This project bolsters habitats for and supports 18 state-sensitive species and six federally-listed species that depend on the river to survive, and six species of native fish, including the endangered woundfin and Virgin River chub. Modernization of infrastructure is providing benefits to communities and recreational users as well.

PROJECT DETAILS

Project Location: UT

Project Cost: \$7.85 million

Federal Funding Award:
\$4.28 million

Federal Funding Program:
Natural Resources
Conservation Service's
Regional Conservation
Partnership Program (RCPP)

Partners: The Nature
Conservancy, Washington
County Water Conservancy
District, City of Hurricane,
Natural Resources
Conservation Service

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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Scan the QR code to learn more about resilience projects in the Colorado River Basin