

USDA Funds \$19.5M for CO River Basin Salinity Control

From the U.S. Department of Agriculture

In November, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming will receive \$19.5 million in funding from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to control salinity in the Colorado River Basin. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will provide \$9.7 million each to Colorado and Utah and \$90,000 to Wyoming. Only these three states have USDA-approved salinity control projects in the basin.

Through EQIP, NRCS works with eligible agricultural producers in the basin who voluntarily implement land management and irrigation improvement practices that reduce salinity by preventing salts from dissolving and mixing with river flow. Improved irrigation systems reduce leaching in the soil, which in turn decreases the amount of salt that moves through the soil into the water table. The result is less salt in the Colorado River.

USDA partners with the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Land Management to carry out Colorado River Basin salinity control activities. The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum, established in 1973 by the basin states, provides interstate and interagency coordination and guidance for the combined state and federal salinity control efforts.

USDA aims to reduce the annual salt loading by 705,000 tons by the year 2020. So far, agricultural producers have reduced over 404,000 tons of salt, nearly 57 percent of the USDA goal. The collective goal for the federal partners is to reduce 1.8 million tons of salt annually by the year 2020.

Additional information on USDA's Colorado River Basin salinity control activities is at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/salinity/index.html. Additional information on EQIP is at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip.

Updated Water Reuse Guidelines from EPA

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Water and Office of Research and Development, in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), have released the 2004 "Guidelines for Water Reuse Manual" (EPA625-R-04/018), which provides water reuse guidelines and supporting information to help water and wastewater utilities and regulatory agencies, particularly in the United States.

The new document updates the 1992 guidelines by incorporating new information on water reuse, including expanded coverage of water reuse issues and practices in other countries. It was developed through an EPA Cooperative Research and Development Agreement with the consulting firm CDM, and an Interagency Agreement with USAID, along with extensive volunteer contributions. Topics covered include reuse applications, technical issues in planning water reuse systems, U.S. regulations and guidelines on water reuse, legal and institutional issues, funding, public involvement programs, and water reuse outside the United States.

The 288-page document is available through EPA's Office of Research and Development/Technology Transfer Program at www.epa.gov/ORD/NRMRL/pubs/625r04108/625r04108.pdf.

Tribal Water Settlement Ends Long-Standing Disputes

An agreement that the *Arizona Republic* called "the most far-reaching Indian water settlement in U.S. history" was signed into law in December, settling decades-old disputes involving the state of Arizona, several tribes, and the federal government, according to the newspaper.

The settlement allocates 47 percent of the Colorado River water in the Central Arizona Project (CAP) to Indian tribes in Arizona, which may then lease the water back to cities for a profit, said the report.

Cities are expected to benefit by having a determined water supply and by being able to claim a small amount of new water. Specific allocations were made to the Gila River Indian Community south of Phoenix, which received the largest share of CAP water – 155,700 acre-feet per year – and the Tohono O'odham Nation south of Tucson, which received 37,800 acre-feet, according to the *Republic*.

Additionally, the article said the settlement resolves a dispute over Arizona's debt to the federal government for the cost of building the 336-mile CAP canal, completed in 1993. The federal government had previously demanded that Arizona repay \$2.3 billion of the canal's \$3.6 billion cost; the amount was reduced to \$1.65 billion in the agreement.

The bill includes \$2.2 billion over 40 years to cover operation and maintenance charges for delivery of water to Indian communities and to accommodate future settlements. San Carlos Apache water rights claims were protected under the legislation, but are still under litigation. The bill does not address Colorado River claims by the Hopi and Navajo tribes, which continue to await settlement, according to the *Republic*.

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Water Supply a Concern for Rural Arizona

Rural Arizona needs state help in dealing with water resource challenges such as drought, rapid growth, and tougher arsenic standards. That view was voiced at a Water Conservation Leadership Forum in Phoenix on Jan. 7.

One participant noted that establishing new Active Management Areas (AMAs), which provide water management in Arizona's urban areas, is difficult, and current AMA regulations would not address some rural problems, such as the tens of thousands of domestic wells currently exempt from AMA regulations.

The current Adequate Supply Program, intended as a consumer protection measure for home buyers outside AMAs, was deemed ineffective and in need of replacement by the far more stringent 100-Year Assured Supply requirements of AMAs. Currently, rural counties have no authority to deny new developments on the basis of inadequate water supplies; however, granting such authority is the goal of recently introduced legislation.

Nevada and Arizona Reach Water Banking Agreement

The Southern Nevada Water Authority and the Arizona Water Banking Authority reached a historic agreement in December that will guarantee 1.25 million acre-feet of Colorado River water to Nevada in exchange for \$330 million to Arizona.

The deal also ensures Nevada's support of Arizona's efforts to change existing priority status rules, which give Arizona junior rights status for Colorado River water. Under current rules, if drought were to severely limit Colorado River flows, Arizona would be required to give up the Colorado River water it uses in the Central Arizona Project to supply water to Phoenix and Tucson, before any other state would have to cut its water use. Nevada has now pledged in writing to support equal sharing of shortages among states.

Under the agreement, Nevada will pay \$100 million in 2005 and \$23 million a year for ten years beginning in 2009 for the river water, plus any additional costs. The state will be allowed to withdraw from Lake Mead an annual amount, beginning with 20,000 acre-feet in 2007 and increasing to 40,000 acre-feet per year starting in 2010, until the full allocation is withdrawn. Nevada would have until 2060 to withdraw the total amount.

Arizona has been unable to use its full annual allocation of 2.8 million acre-feet of Colorado River water, and since 1996 has banked its unused allotment in groundwater aquifers. According to

the *Arizona Daily Sun*, Herb Guenther, director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources, believes Arizona will benefit from the agreement not only because it will reduce costs of banking unused water, but also because it will ensure Arizona's share in future years. Under current law, if California becomes dependent on the excess water it receives, Congress could opt to permanently reduce Arizona's allocation.

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Nevada Acquires Land, Water Access

Late last year, President Bush signed the Lincoln County [Nevada] Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2004, establishing both vast wilderness areas and access for a proposed water pipeline, in a compromise between environmentalists and developers. Lincoln County is north of Las Vegas, and is one of the least-populated counties of the state, according to an article in the *Los Angeles Times*. Among the provisions of the bill, reported the *Times*, are the sale of 90,000 acres of public land for private development, the establishment of 768,000 acres of wilderness for 14 new wilderness areas, and "rent-free rights of way across federal land for a massive proposed pipeline system that would carry groundwater from rural Nevada to the Las Vegas area."

Nevada Rep. Jim Gibbons praised the new opportunities it would provide for economic development, recreation, and tourism in Lincoln County, and a representative of the Wilderness Society noted that, while the bill isn't everything they'd hoped for, the areas that will now be protected are "extremely significant," said the article. On the other hand, criticism came from the Western Land Exchange Project, which argued that the bill will damage the landscape by promoting privatization where there is no demand and by permitting pipeline construction, reported the *Times*.

According to the newspaper, the pipeline easements will remove some obstacles to Southern Nevada Water Authority's interest in pumping groundwater from Lincoln County for transport to Las Vegas, but the agency will still have to comply with federal environmental reviews and state groundwater protection laws. The bill includes \$6 million from Las Vegas land sales to fund a groundwater study.

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Enviros Become Farmers in NM

The Las Cruces-based Southwest Environment Center (SEC) has decided to start farming to pursue the organization's goal of restoring Rio Grande riparian health, according to an *Associated Press* story in the *Albuquerque Journal*. The group wants to become a constituent of the Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBIW), which requires its members to own more than two acres of land and develop a crop. The SEC hopes to buy a 15-acre parcel and 7 acre-feet per year of irrigation district water rights from a private landowner, and will consider cottonwoods and wetlands—food for wildlife rather than people—as their crop, said the article.

The SEC has a history of opposing farmers over issues regarding management of Rio Grande water and its natural habitat, but unlike other groups who have sued to accomplish the same goal, the SEC is trying to work within the system, reported *AP*. According to the article, the targeted parcel already supports cottonwood and willow trees, and the group may grow organic agricultural crops as well. The center is working to raise the \$200,000 purchase price of the land.

At a November meeting, the EBIW board stopped short of publicly endorsing the proposal by the SEC, according to *AP*, but one board member did concede that such actions are what the district has "encouraged the environmental community to do for years."

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