

# GOVERNMENT

## Nevada to Build Lower CO Reservoir

Buried in a tax bill passed late last year, Congress directed the federal government to build “without delay” a reservoir near the Mexican border to capture some of the flow from the Colorado River that otherwise goes into Mexico, reported the *Las Vegas Sun*. The \$84 million reservoir, to be funded by the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) under an agreement with the other Colorado River Basin states, will intercept unused irrigation water diverted from Lake Mead to Southern California fields. Usually the farmers use the water. But because it takes three days for the water to reach them, if rain falls after the water has been released from Lake Mead, the farmers may not need it and the water may pass on into Mexico. Nevada’s reservoir is designed to capture that unused water, according to the report.

The reservoir will provide a near-term safety net for SNWA to meet its rapidly growing water demand. The terms of the agreement guarantee SNWA as much as 40,000 acre-feet per year for seven

years, said the *Sun*, increasing the current 300,000 acre-feet-per-year allocation to the state by about 13 percent. By the time the arrangement ends, SNWA plans to have the rights and infrastructure in place to transfer water from rural northern Nevada to supply the Las Vegas area.

According to the *Sun*, “the reservoir deal is important not only for the water it could provide but also for the clout it will give the region in water allocation talks by making permanent improvements to the Colorado River system.”

The “without delay” language may help the project to move forward without lengthy environmental battles, said the *Sun*; the wording was also used for a congressional mandate in the same bill to move forward with the lining of the All-American Canal, which continues to be delayed by lawsuits.

Environmentalists, who have long sought protection for the Colorado River Delta ecosystem, expressed concern over the reservoir plan. The *Sun* reported that Jennifer Pitt of Environmental Defense said that while she is not opposed to more efficient use of the Colorado River System, the new reservoir will

mean even less water flows to the delta to support wildlife there.

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## Feds: CA Has No Compelling Interest to Conserve

In an essay originally printed in the *Sacramento Bee*, Pacific Institute President Peter Gleick criticized the Bush administration for thwarting California’s efforts to improve energy and water efficiency in the absence of any serious federal actions. “Our state, the federal government would have us know, does not have a compelling interest in conserving water or energy,” Gleick wrote.

At issue is a water efficiency standard for residential washing machines that was passed by the 2002 California legislature and signed by Gov. Gray Davis. A federal waiver is required before states can pass their own such standard, and the Schwarzenegger administration filed for one in 2005. According to Gleick, the U.S. Department of Energy “sat on this waiver request for more than a year, only to deny it on Dec. 28—three days before California’s rules were to take effect and at a time when people were unlikely to notice.”

Gleick wrote that the standard would have saved more than 33 billion gallons of water per year in the state and energy consumption equivalent to that used by 85,000 homes.

DOE’s explanation for denying the new standard? “California failed to prove that it has ‘unusual and compelling water interests,’” according to Gleick.

DOE also cited hardship for washing machine manufacturers as a reason for the denial, but Gleick reasoned that manufacturers already are making more efficient machines, and they still could sell the less-efficient ones in other states.

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## HydroFacts

Average monsoon precipitation in Tucson during the 1980s:	6.91 inches
Average monsoon precipitation in Tucson during in the 1990s:	6.16 inches
Average monsoon precipitation in Tucson, 2000-2006:	5.44 inches

source: National Weather Service

Percent of U.S. Forest Service budget devoted to fire suppression in 1991:	14
Percent devoted to fire suppression in 2006:	42
Percent projected for fire suppression in 2008:	48

source: U. S. Forest Service

Rivers transporting the most sediment per year:	
Amazon, 8 countries in South America:	1.20 billion tons
Ganges-Brahmaputra, India and Bangladesh:	1.04 billion tons
Yangtze, China	0.48 billion tons

source: UNESCO

Estimated number of exempt (unmetered) domestic wells in:	
Arizona:	95,000
New Mexico:	140,000
Colorado:	200,000
Nevada:	not counted

sources: AZ Dept. of Water Resources, NM Office of the State Engr., Colo. St. Univ. Coop. Ext.