
21st Century Colorado River Budget

Recommendations for the Colorado River Basin in FY18

The Colorado River is one of the great icons of the American West, and a fundamental resource for the nation. It is a foundation for the western economy, supporting five million acres of irrigated farmland, providing drinking water for more than 35 million people, while winding its way through eleven national parks. The river supports a \$26 billion recreational economy, with total economic impacts estimated at over \$1 trillion.

The river, though, is in crisis. Sustained drought and an over-tapped supply have led to historically-low levels in its reservoirs. The river faces a significant risk of a shortage declaration this year and in years to come, which would threaten agricultural and municipal communities, the outdoor economy, and a vital ecosystem.

The federal government has a unique and significant role in supporting the sustainability of the Colorado River. While recognizing the states' authority to manage water resources within their borders, the federal government should advance widely-supported conservation and efficiency measures, along with creative financing mechanisms, to meet water demands while protecting and restoring healthy river flows. These efforts are supported by numerous programs run by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, which should be fully funded during the budget process.

This report outlines some of the key federal programs that would support a modern, well-funded budget for the Colorado River. These recommendations are an important step toward reaching a sustainably managed river, but working with the basin states, the federal government also has a critical role in making headway toward binational and interstate agreements, coordinating federal investments, and supporting other innovative solutions to ensure the Colorado River continues to be the lifeblood of the West.

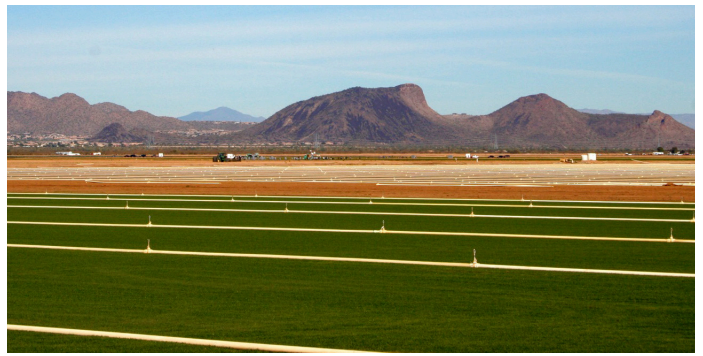
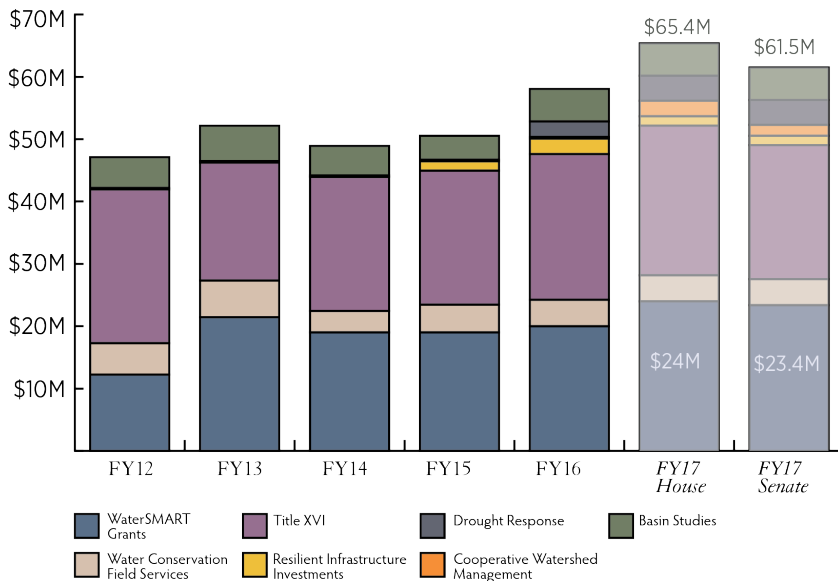


Photo credits (top to bottom): NPS, Alan Levine, AL_HikesAZ (Flickr CC)

WaterSMART

Bureau of
Reclamation

WaterSMART sustains water resources across the West by supporting grants, collaboration, studies, and more. The program is expected to have saved more than one million acre-feet of water annually, which would provide enough water for 4.6 million people. The grants have funded 234 projects in 15 states, supporting water districts, tribes, and municipalities. From \$135 million in investments, nearly \$400 million in water conservation projects have resulted. Yet only about 1 out of 5 grant applications receives funding, reflecting even further water savings potential. Congress should fund WaterSMART to support a 1 in 3 success rate, and increase or remove the statutory funding cap that could end the WaterSMART Grants program in FY18.



Westwide Impact

1 million acre feet
of annual savings, enough
for **4.6 million people**

Recommendation

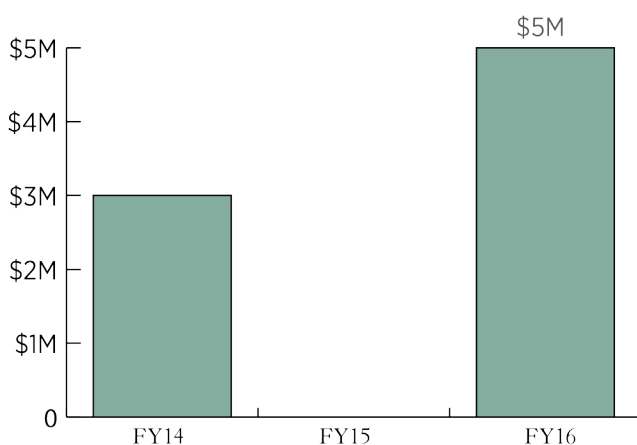
\$30M

for FY18
WaterSMART Grants

System Conservation Pilot Program

Bureau of
Reclamation

The System Conservation Pilot Program (SCPP) is a critical tool for protecting water storage levels in Lake Mead and Lake Powell. SCPP supports water conservation in ways that benefit the entire Colorado River system – a novel goal that reflects increased collaboration among all water use sectors. The pilots have shown that temporary, voluntary, and compensated reductions in water use can benefit water users, instream habitat, and reservoir storage. It allows for direct payments to farmers on a voluntary basis. SCPP was launched in FY14 with \$3 million in federal funds and \$9.5 million from large cities in both the Upper and Lower Basins. Increased appropriations are needed in FY18 to scale up these programs.



Basin Impact

100,000 acre feet
savings per-year in Lake Mead

Recommendation

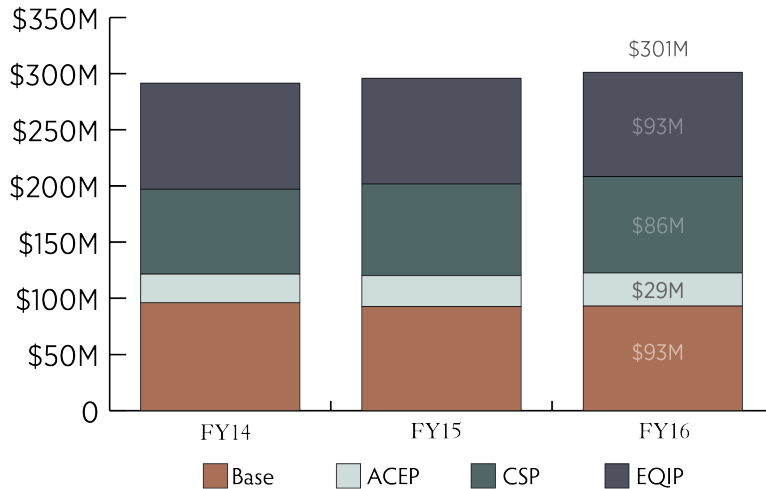
\$50M

as authorized by the WIIN Act, for FY18

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

NRCS

RCPP promotes innovative conservation practices that improve the health of working landscapes and rivers through partnership-driven regional projects that address multiple natural resource concerns on a meaningful scale. The Colorado River Basin has been designated one of eight critical conservation areas under RCPP. Across the country, the program has supported nearly 200 projects in all 50 states, from about \$590 million in investments. More than 2,000 conservation partners contributed an additional \$900 million in financial and technical assistance, indicating RCPP's ability to significantly leverage non-federal funding.



Basin Impact
Seven basin projects
that protect water and habitat

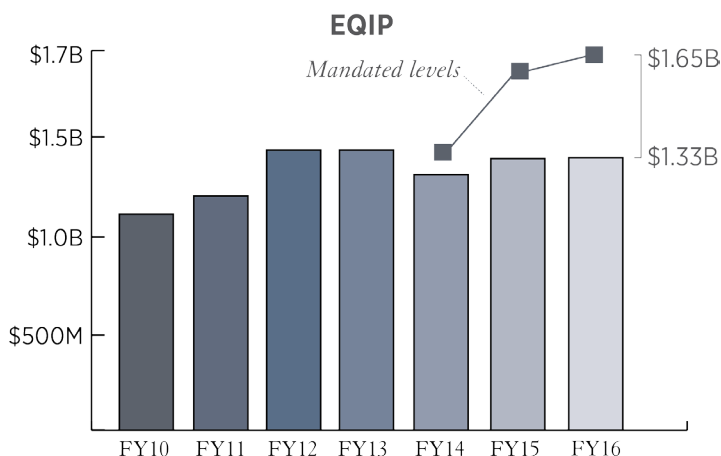
Recommendation
Full Funding
for mandatory Farm Bill programs

Farm Bill Conservation Programs

NRCS

In addition to providing significant benefits on their own to the Colorado River Basin, through irrigation efficiency and conservation, these Farm Bill programs also provide the primary investments for RCPP.

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**
EQIP promotes the voluntary application of land use practices that maintain or improve the condition of natural resources, including grazing lands, wetlands, and wildlife habitat.
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**
CSP encourages producers to maintain existing conservation activities and to adopt additional practices, including efforts to improve water usage through irrigation efficiency or select crops based on available moisture.
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
ACEP, a consolidation of three previous Farm Bill conservation programs, provides direct assistance to landowners for agricultural land easements as well as wetland reserve easements that protect and restore wetlands.



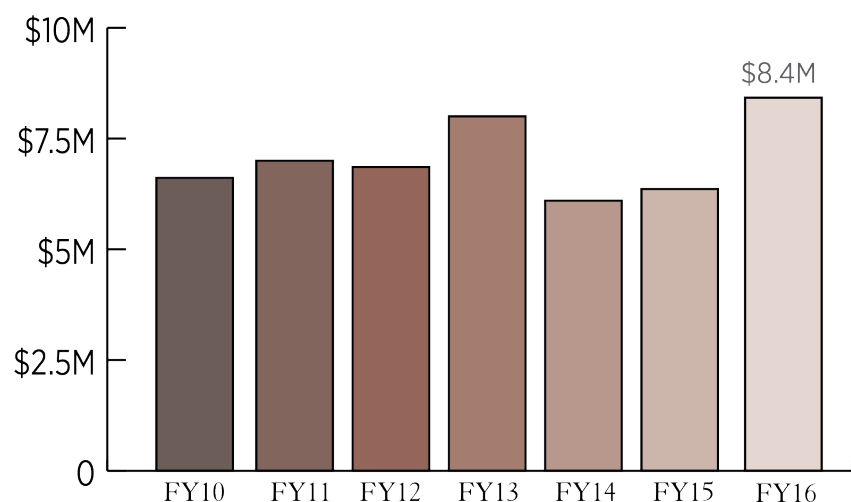
Basin Impact
\$236M from 2009-2015
in investments for **water benefits**

Recommendation
Full Funding
for mandatory Farm Bill programs

Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

*Bureau of
Reclamation*

The Salinity Control Program enhances and protects the quality of water available to all users in the basin by implementing water quality improvement projects on both public and private lands and facilities. It also is essential to managing water quality in the lower Colorado River below Imperial Dam, and helps protect storage volumes in Lake Mead.



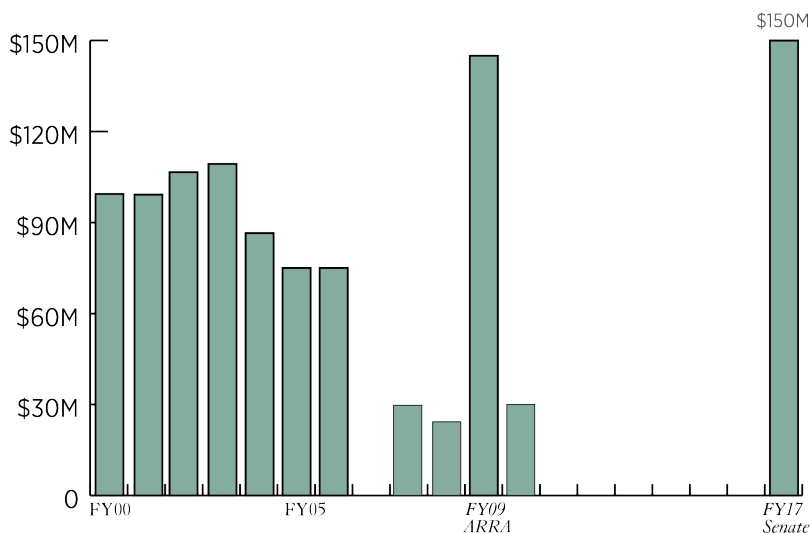
Basin Impact
\$600M per year
in prevented damages

Recommendation
\$8.2M
for Title II in FY18

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations

NRCS

Under the Watershed program, NRCS works with local sponsors to facilitate the construction of small watershed improvements, including agricultural water management, fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, stream channel restoration, water conservation and quality, forest health, recreational development, and more. These are locally-driven, cost-shared projects that address critical community needs with multiple benefits. Since its inception, it has invested over \$6 billion from more than 2,000 projects nationwide, conserving 1.8 million acre-feet, and protecting or enhancing over 47,000 miles of stream corridors, 2.5 million acres of lakes and reservoirs, and 280,000 acres of wetlands. NRCS estimates annual needs of \$1.4 billion for authorized, unfunded projects.



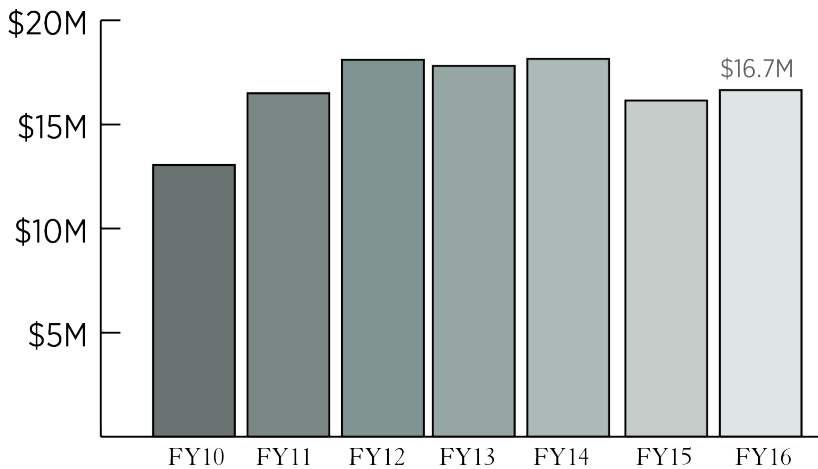
Nationwide Impact
\$6 billion
in locally-driven investments

Recommendation
\$200M
for FY18

The Lower Colorado Multi-Species Conservation Program

Bureau of
Reclamation

MSCP benefits native fish and wildlife in the basin by establishing habitat, augmenting populations, and undertaking research and monitoring. It provides long-term ESA compliance for both current and future water delivery and diversion, and power production by the United States and its water users. The program will provide quality habitat to conserve populations of 26 species, including federally-endangered species, and will lead to the spawning and rearing over 1 million native fish in the river.



Basin Impact

8,000 acres
of restored wildlife habitat

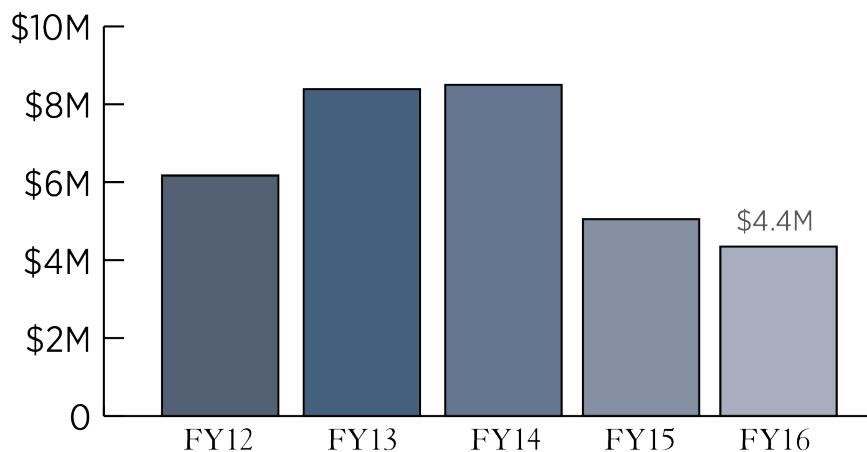
Recommendation

\$16.9M
for FY18

Upper Colorado Endangered Species Recovery Implementation Program

Bureau of
Reclamation

The program supports two critical partnerships working to recover endangered fish in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming – the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program. In addition, the recovery programs provide Endangered Species Act compliance for more than 2,300 water projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin.



Basin Impact

2,500 projects
provided ESA compliance

Recommendation

\$4.9M
for FY18