




Gilded Flicker



## Importance of the Colorado River Basin

- Sustains communities, agriculture, and fish and wildlife
- Provides drinking water for > 36 million people
- Generates \$26 billion outdoor recreation economy and its quarter million jobs
- Generates total economic impacts estimated at over \$1 trillion



- Reservoirs in the Colorado River Basin, filled to the brim at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, were at historic lows last year, following a sixteen-year drought and growing human demands.
- While the current year has been unusually wet in parts of the West, one wet winter does not alter or solve the fundamental problem that demand for water in the Basin exceeds average supplies.
- Fluctuations in the weather do not substitute for putting systems in place that encourage conservation and flexible water management.
- Diminished stream flows pose serious challenges for cities, farms, wildlife and recreation.
- 70% of all wildlife in the west relies on rivers for some part of their lifecycle.
- According to the Bureau of Reclamation, by 2060, demand for water from the Colorado River may exceed supply by 3.2 million acre-feet. **Or 20% of today's average supply**
- Coming up short could put at risk the drinking water supplies of over 36 million people in the Southwest, 15% of US agriculture production, future economic growth as well as the Colorado River's \$26-billion outdoor recreation economy with its quarter million jobs.



  
  
 WATER

## Federal Programs and Funding

- Federal programs advance widely-supported conservation and efficiency measures to meet water demands while protecting and restoring healthy river flows.
- Federal funding from numerous programs run by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Department of the Interior) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (U.S. Department of Agriculture) support these goals.
- Audubon works in coalition with conservation NGOs and agricultural partners to advocate for this funding.

- The Federal government has a unique and significant role in supporting the sustainability of the Colorado River.
- These programs support projects that offer multi-sector benefits wherever possible to protect the flow of the river, ensure greater economic vitality, and secure water resources for millions of Americans dependent on this critical natural resource.
- Water users support these programs.
- These programs are based on voluntary, market-based incentives, and will help to avoid involuntary, uncompensated shortages to water
- Audubon is working on these asks with a large coalition of conservation NGOs and a large coalition of ag partners, including Family Farm Alliance, Imperial Irrigation District, Western Growers, etc.
- The Federal budget environment is very challenging right now, but the increased chance of success with this kind of coalition



## Federal Budget 101

- **Fiscal Year: October 1 through September 30.**
- **Regular appropriations process:**
  - President releases proposed budget on the first Monday in February
  - Congress considers a budget resolution that sets spending ceilings by April 15
  - Committee and floor consideration of appropriations bills occur during the spring and summer.
- **Continuing resolutions:**
  - If regular bills are not enacted by the beginning of the new fiscal year, Congress adopts a CR to continue funding, until regular bills are enacted.

## Fiscal Year 2017 and 2018

- **Fiscal Year 2017:**
  - Operating under a CR until April 28, 2017 at FY 16 funding levels
  - Negotiations on FY 17 continue; one week short-term CR may be needed
    - \$30 billion defense supplemental
    - \$3 billion border wall request
    - Policy riders
- **Fiscal Year 2018:**
  - President released “skinny budget” on March 16, 2017
    - Proposed decrease for DOI was 12%
    - Proposed decrease for USDA was 21%
  - President’s detailed budget will be released in mid-May
  - Truncated appropriations process; will need to be resolved by September 30, 2017.

Audubon



WATER

## Bureau of Reclamation

- **WaterSMART - \$30 million**
- **System Conservation Pilot Program - \$50 million**
- **Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program - \$8.2 million**
- **Lower Colorado Multi-Species Conservation Program - \$16.9 million**
- **Upper Colorado Endangered Species Recovery Implementation Program - \$4.9 million**

- **WaterSMART**
  - WaterSMART Program have been a powerful tool for conserving water through collaborative local projects.
  - The 243 grants issued from 2010 to 2015 save an estimated 557,000 acre-feet of water per year—enough to provide water for more than 2.2 million people.
  - Yet only about one out of five grant applications receives funding, which reflects a huge amount of unmet water savings potential.
  - Also, less than 10 percent fund projects that have benefits for both water users and the watersheds on which they depend; we believe that the program can do much more to improve river habitat and watershed health by prioritizing those water conservation projects that deliver benefits across ecological and agricultural or municipal sectors.
  - FY18 appropriations should include \$30 million for WaterSMART Grants, which will allow the Bureau of Reclamation to meet a goal of supporting approximately one out of every three grant applications.
- **SCPP**
  - The System Conservation Pilot Program (SCPP) is a critical tool for protecting water storage levels in Lakes Mead and Powell.

- SCPP supports approaches to conserve water in ways that benefit the entire Colorado River system – a novel goal that reflects increased collaboration among all water use sectors.
- The SCPP pilots have shown that temporary, voluntary and compensated reductions in water use can benefit water users, instream habitat and reservoir storage.
- 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.
- In FY15, another \$8.6 million in federal funds supported a similar and larger effort in the Lower Basin to protect at least 750,000 acre-feet of storage volumes at Lake Mead, with the bulk of the protection coming from water providers in the Lower Basin.
- Reclamation received another \$5 million for SCPP in FY16.
- Increased appropriations are needed in FY18 to scale up these system conservation programs in both the Upper and Lower Basins of the Colorado River.
- In the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, Congress authorized \$50 million for SCPP to continue these innovative projects in the Upper and Lower Basins.
- The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (Title II) enhances and protects the quality of water available to users above Imperial Dam. The basin-wide federal-state Salinity Control Forum has recommended increasing appropriations, which are more than matched by hydropower revenues from federal dams in both the Upper and Lower Basins and by funding from USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program in the Upper Basin. Much of this salinity control is achieved by modernizing irrigation systems, which could be paired with reductions in water consumption for system conservation. Without the Salinity Control Program, it is estimated that municipal and agricultural water users along the Colorado River would incur almost \$400 million more in economic damages per year.
- The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program, requested in FY17 at \$16,851,000, provides long-term ESA compliance for both current and future water delivery and diversion, and power production, and quality habitat to conserve populations of 26 species, including federally endangered species.
- The Upper Colorado and San Juan Rivers Endangered Species Recovery Implementation Programs, funded through the Bureau of Reclamation and Fish and Wildlife Service, support two critical partnerships working to recover endangered fish in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, and provide Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance for more than 2,300 water projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin.



  
  
 WATER

## Natural Resources Conservation Service

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program – full funding**
- **Farm Bill Conservation Programs – full funding**
  - Environmental Quality Incentives Program
  - Conservation Stewardship Program
  - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
- **Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations - \$200 million**

- In the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory spending by \$6 billion. The cuts contained in the 2014 Farm Bill mean that new enrollments in conservation programs will decline by millions of acres. Cuts to conservation programs limit the capacity of producers to implement common sense practices that conserve water and maintain habitat while supplying food and fiber to all Americans. We would like Congress to avoid further cuts in FY18 appropriations and instead rely on the Congressional-mandated levels for USDA conservation programs. Specifically:
  - The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (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.
- 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) 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) 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 Enhancement Program (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.
- Finally, we would like to see funding for the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations program at \$200 million. Under the Watershed Program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (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 of water, 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.



 Audubon  
WESTERN RIVERS  
ACTION NETWORK

**Join Today!**  
**[bit.ly/JoinWRAN](https://bit.ly/JoinWRAN)**

- Audubon's multi-state, grassroots effort to protect and enhance rivers and wetland/riparian habitat
- Focused on the Colorado River and its tributaries
- A multi-state network; about 35,000 strong (8,000 Arizonans)
- Provides opportunities for conservation action
- Non-traditional partners
- Non-partisan, based in sound science

Photo: Havasu NWR, USFWS

- Conservation Action:

## What you can do to help

- **Join network of ongoing advocacy updates and opportunities and stay involved**
  - Sign up for future WRAN webinars: [bit.ly/azWRANevents](http://bit.ly/azWRANevents)
  - Take action on current issues: [bit.ly/azWRANaction](http://bit.ly/azWRANaction)
  - Sign our Petition for Healthier Rivers: [bit.ly/azRiverPetition](http://bit.ly/azRiverPetition)
- **Stay in touch with Members of Congress' in-state staff**
  - Contact them now about important conservation programs highlighted today
  - Personalized calls, office visits, e-mails, letters make a difference
- **Stay in touch with Members of Congress**
  - Schedule in-district meetings
  - Attend town halls or other community events
- **Submit a letter to the editor of your local paper describing the importance of this funding to birds and their habitat**

## Questions?



Gila Woodpecker  
Vermillion flycatcher