The problems facing the Colorado River Basin are well known: limited supply, sustained drought, and growing demand for water have produced a supply and demand gap that will only grow wider. By 2060 there will be a 3.8 million acre-foot deficit in river supply, placing significant stress on agricultural and municipal communities.

The economic and environmental damages of a diminished Colorado River are unacceptable. Over 36 million people rely on the Colorado River for drinking water—a number that is only going to get larger as the population of the Southwest continues to grow. It irrigates 5.7 million acres of farmland supporting diverse rural communities that grow 15 percent of all U.S. crops and 13 percent of livestock. It also supports a $26.4 billion recreational economy with 234,000 jobs. Hydropower and thermoelectric power facilities served by the river provide more than 19,200 megawatts of power annually. And more than 30 distinct fish species are found only in the Colorado River; four of those have gone extinct while 12 are imperiled.

The federal government has an inherent interest in the short- and long-term sustainability of Colorado River water use. While recognizing the states’ primary authority to manage water resources within their borders, the federal government must advance widely-supported conservation and efficiency measures, along with creative financing mechanisms, to meet water demands while protecting and restoring healthy river flows.

**Adopting the specific recommendations in this report is a key first step, but, working with basin stakeholders, the federal government must find additional ways to apply proven, innovative solutions that reverse the imbalances between water supply and demand.**

*Left to right: Arizona agriculture (Lars Hammer, Flickr CC); Fishing in the Colorado River’s Gore Canyon (William Currier, Flickr CC); Western Yellow-Billed Cuckoo (USFWS)*
**WaterSMART**

WaterSMART sustains water resources through grants, collaboration, studies, and more. 80 WaterSMART Grants were awarded in FY13-14. Combined, these projects will save an estimated 167,000 acre-feet of water per year -- enough to serve more than 650,000 people, or more than the population of Wyoming. Yet only about 1 out of 5 grant applications receives funding. This reflects a huge amount of unmet water savings potential. The administration should set a goal of funding one-third of WaterSMART Grant requests, and Congress should fund WaterSMART to meet this goal. To continue these water conservation successes, Congress needs to remove the statutory restrictions that could end the WaterSMART Grants program as soon as 2017.

---

**Upper Colorado Region Endangered Species Recovery Implementation Program**

The Upper Colorado Region Endangered Species RIP 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.

**For FY16:**

*Additionally, aim to fund one-third of WaterSMART grant requests*
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

The Salinity Control Program enhances and protects the quality of water available to users in Arizona, California, Nevada and Mexico by implementing water quality improvement projects on both public and private lands and facilities. Without the Salinity Program, it is estimated that municipal and agricultural water users along the Colorado River would pay almost $400 million more in economic damages per year.

For FY16:

Every year: $400M

In savings for water users from prevented economic damages

Match the President’s Budget Request

$8.4M

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP)

MSCP 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.

For FY16:

Over 50 years: 26 species

Targeted for habitat restoration and population recovery

Match the President’s Budget Request

$16.7M
Critical Farm Bill Programs Face Proposed Cuts in FY16

Just one year ago, 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 in FY 2016. Despite these cuts, the administration’s FY16 budget request proposes more than $800 million in additional cuts to programs in the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill, including:

- $300 million from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program relative to the Congressionally-mandated amount
- $54 million from the Conservation Stewardship Program relative to the Congressionally-mandated amount
- $60 million over five years from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

These cuts will further limit the capacity of producers to implement common sense conservation practices that conserve water and maintain habitat while supplying food and fiber to all Americans.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP promotes the voluntary application of farming and other land use practices that maintain or improve the condition of various natural resources, including grazing lands, wetlands, and wildlife habitat. In addition, the 2014 Farm Bill requires that at least 5 percent of EQIP funding benefits wildlife.

For FY16:
Reject the proposed $300M cut
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

RCPP promotes innovative conservation practices that will improve the health of working landscapes and rivers, and 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. While more than 600 proposals were submitted during the initial application process, NRCS only selected 115 projects in the first round of agreements. NRCS will award these projects $370 million in RCPP funding, which will be bolstered by approximately $400 million from non-federal stakeholders, indicating RCPP’s ability to significantly leverage non-federal funding.

For FY16: Reject the proposed $60M cut and initiate new round of funding in 2015

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and to adopt additional ones on their operations. Using CSP, producers can improve water usage through irrigation efficiency, select crops based on available moisture, and reduce the negative impact of transported pollutants on surface and subsurface water sources.

For FY16: Reject the proposed $54M cut

In FY14: $69.6M came to the seven Basin states, or 6.5% of all spending
ACEP, a consolidation of three previous Farm Bill conservation programs, offers two conservation incentives: (1) an agricultural land easement under which NRCS assists eligible entities to protect agricultural land by limiting non-agricultural land uses; and (2) a wetland reserve easement under which NRCS provides assistance directly to landowners to restore, protect and enhance wetlands through the purchase of wetlands reserve easements.

In FY14:
$38.3M came to the seven Basin states, or 10% of all spending

For FY16:
Reject any new cuts to ACEP