

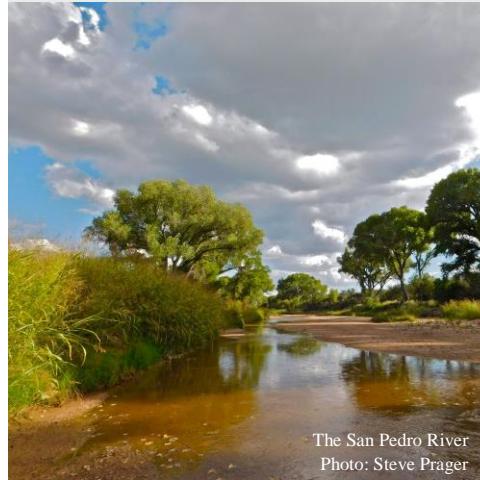
# Western Rivers Action Network

Why is Audubon working to protect flow in the Colorado River Basin?



Ridgway's Rail.

Photo: Emerald Louise, Great Backyard Bird Count



The San Pedro River

Photo: Steve Prager



Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

Photo: Mary Miguez/Audubon Photography Awards

**88 percent of Arizona voters see the Colorado River as critical to the state's economy, and over 80 percent of Arizona voters think inadequate water supplies and low levels of water *in rivers* are serious problems.<sup>1</sup>**

The Colorado River and its tributaries...

- **Provide drinking water** to tens of millions of people, including Native American tribes and the major cities of Albuquerque, Denver, Phoenix, and Tucson.
- **Support 16 million jobs** in agriculture, energy production, recreation and more.
- **Supply irrigation** water to 5.5 million acres of farms and ranches that generate some 15% of United States agricultural output.

- **Provide habitat** for diverse wildlife including the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Bell's vireo, Lucy's warbler and more .
- **Provide migratory corridors** for the vast majority of migrating birds in the intermountain west.
- **Are over-allocated.** There are more water rights in the basin than there is actual water in the river - this is what's referred to as a structural deficit.
- **Are at risk.** Drought, diversions, population growth, and a changing climate affect the arid West's water resources.
- **Are counting on us.** We know there is much work to do to protect water resources for people, our economy, and the birds, fish and other wildlife that depend on water to survive.

# Western Rivers Action Network

## Why did Audubon Arizona activate the Western Rivers Action Network to support the passage of the Drought Contingency Plan (DCP)?

- **Lake Mead is suffering from a structural deficit** - meaning more water is withdrawn from the system annually than is recharged into it. This, coupled with less snowpack and less runoff coming from the headwaters of the Colorado River, have led Lake Mead and the river's other main reservoir, Lake Powell, to decline rapidly.
- **The DCP addresses part of these issues** by reducing Arizona, California, and Nevada's water use by 1.5 million acre feet per year as Lake Mead approaches critical elevations.
- **DCP is an insurance policy against catastrophic shortages** at Lake Mead. It does not solve all our water issues, but it reduces the risk to Lake Mead and increases the likelihood of maintaining a flowing Colorado River.
- **Shortage on the river is imminent, but a catastrophic one is not.** We know the shortages are coming— however, by passing the DCP and the corresponding legislation that made the deals within Arizona work, we greatly reduced the risk that Lake Mead would crash to levels where no water can be released from the lake.
- **River is important bird and wildlife habitat.** Along the Colorado River in Arizona alone, there are nine Important Birds Areas - these are places that birds rely on for migration, foraging, and rest. These Important Bird Areas along the Colorado River are threatened if the Colorado River and Lake Mead continue to decline.

## To protect the Colorado River and its tributaries we must....

- Continue Arizona's tradition of developing new, innovative new tools to protect rivers, lakes, streams, and groundwater in order to ensure a sustainable water future.
- Collaborate with stakeholders and water users through the development of new partnerships.
- Incentivize water placed in river channels and integrate protection and restoration of rivers into solutions for water supply reliability.
- Support commitments made in Minute 323, the newest U.S. - Mexico Colorado River agreement adopted in 2017. Mexico has committed to more water conservation in Lake Mead, once Arizona, California, and Nevada sign the DCP. Minute 323 is the same agreement that commits the two countries to habitat restoration in the Colorado River Delta.
- Ensure that water for natural areas is considered in ongoing water planning efforts.

**Audubon is working to protect the Colorado River and the West's network of Saline Lakes. With a diverse coalition of 65,000 birders, hunters, anglers, brewers and business leaders, the network advocates for science-based, non-partisan, water policies and management that benefit rivers, lakes, and streams for the birds, wildlife, natural habitats, people, and economies they support.**

To learn more, visit [audubon.org/westernwater](https://audubon.org/westernwater)