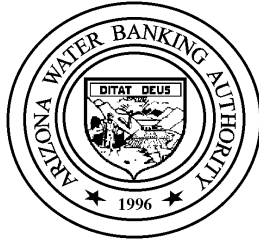


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NEWS

RELEASE

INTERSTATE WATER BANKING RULE ISSUED

Arizona now can begin discussions to help secure future water supplies for millions of people in the Lower Colorado River Basin, Arizona Department of Water Resources Director Rita P. Pearson said today.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt announced the federal rule governing interstate water banking today. It will appear in the Friday, October 29 edition of the *Federal Register*. Director Pearson said she hopes the rule will address the concerns Arizona, Nevada and California water officials have expressed to the Interior Department.

"This is a necessary second step that will enable the state to manage the water that comes down the Colorado more efficiently for the benefit of the people of Arizona and, if they choose, other Lower Basin states," Director Pearson said. "The first step, of course, was creation of the Arizona Water Banking Authority in 1996." In its first two years of operation, the Arizona Water Banking Authority has stored more than 500,000 acre feet of water for Arizonans.

Governor Jane Dee Hull said: "I am pleased at the direction our visionary water banking program has taken in its first two years. It is essential that we provide the people of Arizona with water sufficient to meet their needs today and tomorrow.

"The Arizona water bank is a key element in securing the state's water resources. And we can enhance this security if we use the interstate banking program wisely to assist in firming up water supplies across the Lower Colorado Basin."

Discussions to arrange for Arizona to store water for other states have been on hold awaiting a federal rule consistent with Arizona's water banking program. Water officials want to be certain the rule does not threaten the long-term water supplies of the three states to which the rule will apply: Arizona, Nevada, and California.

In creating the Arizona water bank in 1996, the Legislature prohibited interstate water banking negotiations until the Director of ADWR was satisfied the state's interests were safeguarded.

"After careful review of the federal rules, I hope to be able to recommend to the Governor and the Legislature that discussions with Nevada begin in the near future," Director Pearson said.

The Director stressed that Arizona isn't seeking to become the Southwest's first interstate water banker simply to benefit its neighbors. Rather, she explained, "firming" water supplies in the Lower Basin benefits Arizona, as well as everyone who shares in this vital resource.

In a normal year, the Colorado River carries between 14 million and 15 million acre feet (maf) as it flows 1,400 miles from its headwaters in Wyoming's Green River to the Sea of Cortez. The river has been in a "surplus" condition for the past three years, but there also are times when its annual flow is less than 15 maf.

"We need to capture as much water as we can in the times of high flow," Director Pearson said. "The water bank is a perfect mechanism to do this."

The River is divided into the Upper Basin (Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico) and Lower Basin (Arizona, Nevada, and California), and each basin has a maximum allocation of 7.5 million acre feet (maf) annually.

Water Facts

An acre-foot, about 326,000 gallons, is enough water to serve a family of five for one year. It is approximately enough to cover a football field 12 inches deep.

In normal years:

- Arizona is entitled to 2.8 maf from the Colorado River;
- California's allocation is 4.4 maf; and
- Nevada's is 300,000 af.

In times of surplus:

- California is entitled to 50 percent of the excess flow,
- Arizona 46 percent and
- Nevada 4 percent.

"Fifteen million acre-feet may seem like a lot of water, but it really isn't, especially when that water must serve all or part of the needs of 25 million people," Director Pearson explained.

"When you compare the Colorado to the Columbia River, which is a little shorter but which carries an annual flow of 130 million acre feet, you see that we who live in the Southwest need to be extremely careful about our water use.

"Water banking is in everyone's best interests when the water is there," she added.

Water Banking 101

The water banking concept is fairly simple. Water is carried from the Colorado River to central and southern Arizona by the Central Arizona Project canal. It is then recharged into underground aquifers and recovered at a time in the future when water is needed to relieve drought conditions or to meet growing demand.

Interstate water banking is a process by which a state such as Nevada will pay Arizona to store excess Colorado River water when it is available. When Nevada wants to redeem its storage credits, Nevada users will take water from Lake Mead, which constitutes Arizona's northwestern border with Nevada. Arizona water users then will recover and use water that Nevada had put in storage in Arizona's aquifers.

"We think it is important to remind people that Arizona's water supply will be fully protected before any interstate banking agreements take place," Director Pearson added.

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