

## The Colorado River

The Colorado River is the largest river in the American Southwest. The river runs 1,450 miles from the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of California. The Colorado is the seventh longest river in North America. It also has the most salt and silt of any river, anywhere. The river has the greatest drop in elevation in North America. It has carved and continues to carve the Grand Canyon and other beautiful natural wonders. People in seven states and Mexico rely on the Colorado River for a large portion of their daily water supply. These states are Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, Utah, and Wyoming. The Colorado River basin covers an area larger than the country of France but the river supplies water to an area much larger. In fact, the demands humans have put on the Colorado River have exceeded its capacity to support the people of the region.

For many years, people have been diverting water from the Colorado River to meet their water needs. Canals, aqueducts, and dams have been built to maximize the water supplied by the river. Near the river's source, the Grand Ditch cuts into the Rocky Mountains and diverts water to Fort Collins, Colorado. Further down river the Glen Canyon Dam blocks the Colorado, creating Lake Powell, a 186-mile long lake at the Utah-Arizona border. At the Nevada-Arizona border, the river meets the Hoover Dam, a structure that collects water that is sent to Las Vegas. At the Arizona-California border, the Parker Dam holds back water that is diverted to San Diego and other communities in southern California and to Phoenix and other cities in Arizona. Finally, a last major diversion carries water to Tijuana, Mexico to meet the needs of the people living there. By the time the river reaches its mouth at the Gulf of California, what was once a mighty river has dwindled to a tiny trickle. In fact, when droughts occur, the Colorado River dries up before it even reaches its end.

The Colorado River is used in a variety of ways. At Fort Collins, it is used to irrigate the crops in the area. At Lake Powell, it is used for recreation. The water from the Hoover Dam is used to supply the energy and water supply for the city of Las Vegas. This continues down the length of the Colorado and its tributaries. The complex of dams, aqueducts, and canals has brought water to areas once thought uninhabitable.

The biggest concern to environmentalists is the loss of habitat to wildlife and the excessive use of water from the river. One of the biggest problems faced by the Colorado River Basin is the fact that much of the water diverted from the river is taken completely out of the drainage basin and is gone from the region forever. The region has been experiencing rapid growth for many years and the demands on the resources of the river have continued to increase. Environmentalists, farmers, and city dwellers are all concerned with the excessive use of the water but usually expect others to cut back on their own use. This has created controversy among the inhabitants of the region. With rapid growth expected to continue for some time, there are many problems to be faced and solved if the river is to survive.



