

# California Loses Colorado River Water

Water rights have always dominated politics in the Western U.S., and this year more than ever. The Interior Department has decreed that California will receive 13% less Colorado River water this year than in previous years.

## What happened?

The Colorado River originates high in the Rocky Mountains and supplies water to Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, and California. Rights to use Colorado River water have been tightly regulated since the Depression, with large allocations supporting California agriculture.

In recent years, the Interior Department has asked California to cut its dependence on the Colorado River. However, in early December, negotiations between the Imperial Valley and coastal cities collapsed, and the Imperial Valley announced that it would not sell a drop of water. This motivated the Interior Department's decision to decrease California's water allocation and has left state officials scrambling to come up with a solution.

## What does this mean?

The lost water is sufficient to grow \$1 billion worth of food.

It would also support 1.5 million households for a year (and 800,000 people in Southern California).

Without freshwater input from agricultural run off, the Salton Sea could become too salty for fish or birds.

## Seeking solutions

The Metropolitan Water District has appointed you to an advisory committee to decide how best to address this crisis. Your committee consists of:

- A naturalist who studies the ecology of California's lakes.
- An Imperial Valley farmer.
- A San Diego real estate developer.
- The CEO of a silicon chip manufacturer<sup>1</sup>

## How would your committee address the following questions?

1. What personal biases do you bring to the table?
2. Can you reach consensus?
3. What do you recommend?

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<sup>1</sup>According to recent estimates, 32 kilograms of water are required to manufacture a silicon chip weighing 2 grams.