

USDA Planning Grant: Addressing Ag Water in the Colorado River Basin
Interim Progress Report at August 20, 2012

Colorado State University is leading the effort.

www.CRBagwater.colostate.edu

Team Development and Input

We facilitated two formal meetings with our multi-state planning grant team, which includes representatives from the land-grant universities in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Wyoming, and Utah:

- 12 hours over two days in Tucson, Arizona to get input on direction for the interviews, the survey, the GIS mapping
- 2 hours one evening in Santa Fe, New Mexico to report progress and get further input on the interviews, the survey, the GIS mapping

Interviews

[Fifty exploratory interviews are being carried out with farmers, ranchers and agricultural water managers in the seven Colorado River Basin states. The purpose of the interviews is to elicit local agricultural perspectives on the challenges facing farmers, ranchers and agricultural water managers, how they are responding individually and in organized ways, how they see the future of agriculture and its water, and how land grant universities might appropriately support them.

To prepare for the interviews, we first conducted half a dozen “scoping” interviews with key agricultural leaders with whom we were already familiar—to get a sense of whether our proposed strategy was feasible. We adjusted our strategy based on what we heard from them.

With support of our institutional partners, we conducted phone interviews with 2-5 key contacts in each of the states to get their recommendations on

1. Which areas of their state are most important in terms of ag use of water from the Colorado River and its tributaries.
2. Which ag water organizations manage that water
3. Which ag water organization managers they recommend we interview
4. Which ag producers they recommend we interview

We are currently conducting interviews with the managers of ag water organizations in all seven states, and with ag producers they recommend we interview. We have conducted 36 interviews, mostly in the states of California, Nevada, Utah and New Mexico. We have just begun interviews in Arizona and Colorado. We expect to have the interviews completed by the end of September, 2012; we anticipate the number of interviews to exceed 50.

Interviewees have generally been anxious to tell their story and have been open with examples. Virtually all those interviewed are involved in conflicts over their water.

We have received a wide range of responses:

- Some are proactively seeking to resolve conflicts, others are simply reacting to conflicts, trying to keep their heads above water
- Some are taking the offensive in regard to conflict, others are playing a defensive role
- Some are utilizing strategies that are effective, others are finding their strategies are not effective
- Some have a positive attitude about both the current situation and the future of farming in their area in regard to water; others have a negative attitude about both the future and the present.

- Some are actively pursuing or at least open to collaboration, others are following the path of either fighting their adversaries, or fretting over their circumstances without doing much if anything to act
- Some are farming/ranching highly productive lands, others are farming/ranching marginally productive lands
- Some are in areas where farming/ranching is still largely on large acreages, others are finding their areas increasingly divided into much smaller units, often called “hobby” or “lifestyle” farms
- Some are farming high value crops in water secure areas and making a substantial profit, others are farming commodity crops in water tight areas and having to rely on other sources of income than their farming/ranching operations for their livelihood

Conflict is generated primarily by:

- Tribal rights issues
- Environmental issues including instream flow, endangered species, and wildlife habitat
- Forest management issues
- Regulatory issues preventing or delaying storage projects
- Groundwater/surface water interaction issues

We are finding less of a need for more technology or even better application of available technology than a need for resolving difficulties that are economic and/or sociological in nature. At the same time, most respondents still see land universities' role in traditional terms of technical and natural science research rather than as positioned to help them work through and respond to the social and political processes that shape their problems and possible responses.

We are learning about strategies being employed in one area that could be considered for experimentation in other areas.

We are learning about individuals and organizations whose collaborative approach and vision could serve as a model for individuals and organizations in other areas.

We are seeing some efforts that could use some outside insights and help—and would welcome it. Others in the same position would probably not welcome an outsider role, either because they perceive themselves to be in relatively strong positions in relation to change in agriculture and agricultural water or alternatively, because they lack prior positive experience with outside support.

Mapping

We conducted a modified “participatory mapping” exercise with approximately 40 agricultural representatives from the Colorado River Basin.

We have collected significant quantities of geospatial data to assist in better understanding the administration and governance of ag water in the seven Colorado River Basin states, including:

- boundaries for political jurisdictions including but not limited to countries, states, tribal lands, counties, and municipalities
- hydrologic boundaries defined both by state and by hydrologic unit
- boundaries for agricultural water jurisdictions within the basin including but not limited to Bureau projects (including infrastructure and contractees), irrigation districts, water conservancy districts and conservation districts (that relate to water management and administration), water users associations, and private irrigation and ditch companies

- boundaries that demonstrate environmentally sensitive areas such as salinity control areas, wild and scenic stretches of the Colorado River and tributaries, and areas where endangered species are of concern or are actively being protected

From the basin-wide interviews with farmers, ranchers and ag water managers, we are verifying data already collected, identifying hot spots (areas of contention and/or collaboration) in each state, and learning about data that might be available and useful, but that has not yet been collected.

Survey

Based on what we have learned from the interviews, we are planning our survey of farmers and ranchers in selected counties of Colorado and Arizona who use Colorado River water.

The survey will be conducted online. It will address similar topics as those covered in the interviews, but will gather information from a greater number. Survey questions are being crafted to:

- identify perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of agricultural water users regarding the pressures they are or are not facing in regard to their water supplies
- identify opportunities and barriers to working cooperatively with others sectors and the seven CRB land-grant universities to address identified pressures
- pinpoint subsequent pilot projects to help address the pressures and uncertainty that agricultural water users are dealing with or will face with in the future.

The survey will be administered in October or November.

Stakeholder Communication

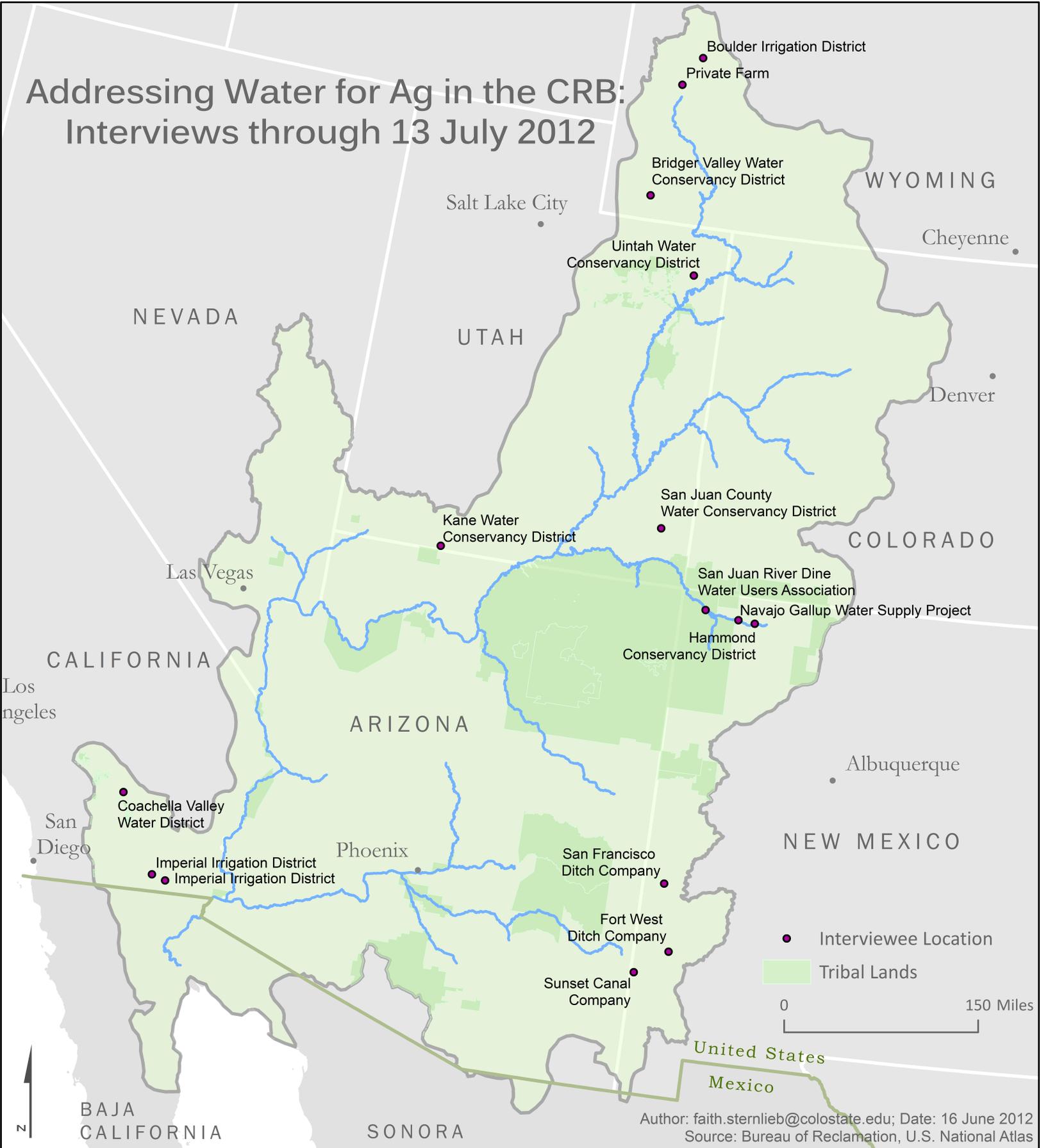
We developed a website www.CRBwater.colostate.edu for purposes of:

- Communicating the goals and activities of the project to advisors, interviewees, survey takers, and the interested public
- Communicating what we learn
- Educating ag water managers and ag producers as well as the general public about strategies being employed in the basin and throughout the western U.S. to encourage cooperation between agriculture and other sectors to resolve conflict and optimize water use

Next Steps

We will complete the interviews, the survey, and the mapping, resulting in a report that can be used to guide us and others as we attempt to pinpoint areas for pilot projects and initiatives. We will strategize the best way to generate stakeholder and public dialogue around the issue to fuel interest in potential projects and initiatives and determine how to leverage that interest into funding and participation.

Addressing Water for Ag in the CRB: Interviews through 13 July 2012



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Source: Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. National Atlas

NOTE
Points indicate general locations where interviews have been conducted with agricultural water managers, users and their respective agricultural water supply organizations. These interviews are part of data collection for a USDA Planning Grant Project: Addressing Water for Agriculture in the Colorado River Basin. Interviews will cover a geographic range that includes the seven U.S. basin states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.