



Site Navigation

You are here: [Home](#) → [Publications](#) → [Periodicals](#) → [Natural Outlook](#) → [Fall 2003](#) → [Western States Face Water Woes](#)

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- [Cleanups, Remediation](#)
- [Emergency Response](#)
- [Licensing](#)
- [Permits, Registrations](#)
- [Preventing Pollution](#)
- [Recycling](#)
- [Reporting](#)
- [Rules](#)

Western States Face Water Woes

Growing state populations are putting increasing pressure on a part of the country known for having limited water resources.

Many states in the western half of the country hold the distinction of being the driest in the United States. But for more than a decade, that's been a primary direction of population migration--to the West.

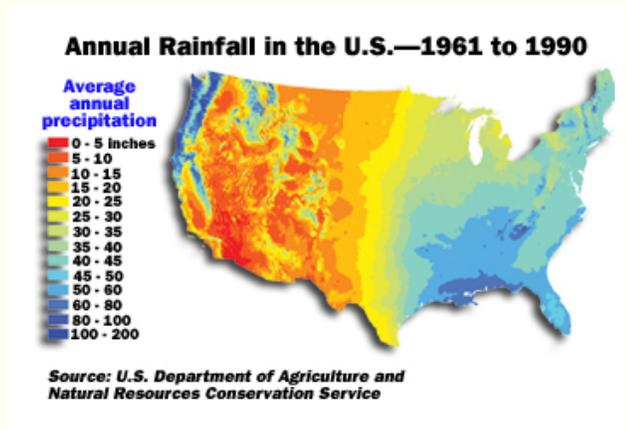
The result is unprecedented demand on limited water resources. Fast-growing urban areas are beginning to compete with farms and ranches--the traditional users of water.

In the 1990s, movement accelerated to western states. Growth sizzled in Nevada (66 percent) and Arizona (40 percent). Not far behind were Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Texas, Washington, Oregon, and New Mexico, with growth in the 20-to-30 percent range.

The Department of the Interior has determined that current water supplies in parts of the West are inadequate to meet the future demands of cities, farming interests, and the environment.

Seeing the potential for conflicts over water availability, Interior officials have been holding conferences in several western states, including Texas, to examine the potential of chronic water shortages. The goal is to identify the watersheds facing the greatest potential risk.

The federal agency is urging governors, local officials, and public interest groups to evaluate the most effective ways to address water shortages and to recommend cooperative planning approaches.



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