

Water shaped Arizona's past. It also is a controlling factor in where and how we live in our desert state.

A History of Water in Arizona and the Salt River Valley

- 1AD – 1450 Construction of canals and ditches by the Hohokam. The over 500-mile system was built on the north and south sides of the Salt River.
- 1450 Canals abandoned when Hohokam disappeared
- 1783 Plan de Pitic. Leading water document for New Spain. Ensures that everyone, including the Indians, shares the water when new towns are formed.
- 1862 Homestead Act. Settlers could acquire as many as 160 acres of land by living on it for five years, improving it, and paying \$1.25 per acre. This act encouraged Western settlement.
- 1867 Jack Swilling started the Swilling Irrigation & Canal Co. The Swilling Ditch reopened an old Hohokam canal. It was later called the Salt River Valley Canal. A branch of this canal became known as the Maricopa Canal. (Located on north side of river). In 1910, this canal served 19,000 acres.
- 1870 Phoenix townsite laid out.
- 1870 Tempe Canal (south side of river). Built by Tempe Irrigating Canal Co. In 1910, this canal served 24,400 acres.
- 1877 Desert Land Act. Settlers could acquire up to 640 acres by irrigating the soil within three years and paying \$1.25 per acre. This act led to large sections of valley land being claimed for settlement by land speculators. Much of this land was obtained fraudulently.
- 1877 Utah Canal (south side of river). In 1910, this canal served 11,200 acres
- 1878 John Wesley Powell published his *Report on the Lands of the Arid Regions*. Powell advocated the economic development of the West's water resources. He believed that vast areas of desert land could be reclaimed for agricultural development by capturing and storing seasonal floodwaters.
- 1878 Grand Canal started (north side of river). Built by Grand Canal Co. In 1910, this canal served 17,000 acres.
- 1878 Mesa Canal (south side of river). In 1910, this canal served 16,400 acres.
- 1883 Arizona Canal started (north side of river). Built by Arizona Canal Co and William J. Murphy. Peoria, Glendale, and Scottsdale were established on lands watered by this canal. In 1910, this canal served 38,000 acres.
- 1885 Suit over water rights on the Santa Cruz River (Tucson)

- 1888 The federal Irrigation Survey (1888-1893), directed by John Wesley Powell, located and surveyed reservoir sites in the West.
- 1889 Under the auspices of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors, a 3-man team surveyed prospective reservoir sites in the Salt and Verde River watershed. The recommended a site on the Salt River in the Tonto basin; the recommendation was forwarded to a US Senate committee.
- 1889 The Arizona Improvement Company gained control of a large portion of the Salt River Valley's water supply. The Arizona Canal Co. was a subsidiary.
- 1890s Major flooding damaged canals and destroyed brush dams. Severe droughts occurred later. Many leaders lobbied Congress for a national irrigation program because the costs of dam construction were extremely prohibitive.
- 1891 Consolidated Canal (south side of river). Constructed by A.J. Chandler & the Consolidated Canal Co.
- 1891 Highland Canal (south side of river). In 1910, this canal served 425 acres.
- 1891 First National Irrigation Congress held in Salt Lake City.
- 1892 Kibbey Decision (*Wormser et al. vs. Salt River Valley Canal Co. et al.*)
- 1899 US Geological Survey report favored construction of a reservoir in Box Canyon on the Gila River.
- 1900 The Phoenix and Maricopa Board of Trade formed a group, headed by Benjamin Fowler, to resolve the Salt River Valley water problems. The county offered to pay the US Geological Survey to make a study of the area's water flow and topography. The resulting report completed in April 1904 was titled, "Water Storage on Salt River, Arizona." The dam design in this report, with some modification, was the basis for the Theodore Roosevelt Dam.
- 1902 The Handsbrough-Newlands Act (National Reclamation Act). Created the US Reclamation Service; permitted money from the sales of public lands in the West to be used to fund reclamation projects; required that farms benefiting by the irrigation be 160 acres or smaller in size; and allowed land already in private ownership to receive water from reclamation projects.
- 1903 Salt River Valley Water Users' Association (SRVWUA) formed. Landowners pledged their land as collateral for a federal loan to build a dam in the Tonto Basin.
- 1904 The SRVWUA signed a contract with the Reclamation Service to build the dam. Water users would repay the cost of the loan at no interest. Hydroelectric power was an unplanned benefit.
- 1904-05 Pre-dam construction work; building of roads to site; establishment of camps; construction of diversion dams.

- 1906 Cornerstone of Roosevelt Dam laid.
- 1906 Town site Act revised Newlands Act. Federal government could now contract with municipalities within or near reclamation projects for delivery of irrigation water. Clarification in 1913 stated that reclaimed water would be contracted to cities for a municipal water system but not to individuals within a town.
- 1907 City of Phoenix purchased the Phoenix Water Company.
- 1908 Granite Reef Diversion Dam completed.
- 1908 South Canal (south side of river). Built by federal government.
- 1908 The US Supreme Court case, *US vs Winters*, guaranteed that when an Indian reservation was established, the federal government implied an intent to reserve adequate water for the inhabitants to meet the purpose of the reservation.
- 1909 Eastern Canal (branch of South Canal). Built by federal government to replace the Highland Canal.
- 1909 First electric power from Roosevelt Dam. Transmitted to Phoenix Light and Power Co.
- 1910 Kent Decree. Affirmed and refined the Kibbey Decision. Also stipulated some water was to be distributed to the Salt River Indian Reservation.
- 1911 Roosevelt Dam completed and dedicated.
- 1912 New Crosscut Canal. Built by Salt River Water Users' Association.
- 1912-13 Western Canal (south side of river). Built by federal government & Western Canal Construction Co.
- 1914 Reclamation Extension Act ("Smith Bill"). Provided that water users on government projects had twenty years to repay the project construction costs to the reclamation fund.
- 1917 SRVWUA took over care, operation, and maintenance of the Roosevelt Dam irrigation system from the federal government.
- 1919 The Colorado Basin States organized the League of the Southwest to promote development of the Colorado River. The League wanted to negotiate a compact to divide the Colorado River water as many of the Southwestern states felt that California would take so much of the water that they could not plan for their own needs.
- 1920 The Phoenix City Commission approved the development of the Verde River gravity water system.
- 1921 The US Supreme Court case, *Wyoming vs. Colorado*, ruled that the doctrine of prior appropriation must be given interstate effect.

- 1923 Arizona Legislature refused to ratify the Colorado River Basin Compact.
- 1923 New contract between SRVWUA and US. Association now allowed to undertake additional dam construction at its own expense. \$1.8 million in bonds sold between 1923 and 1930 to finance construction of Mormon Flat, Horse Mesa and Stewart Mountain dams.
- 1923 Cave Creek Flood Control Dam built.
- 1924 San Carlos Project Bill signed by President Coolidge. Led to construction of Coolidge Dam on the Gila River.
- 1925 Mormon Flat Dam completed on Salt River.
- 1927 Horse Mesa Dam completed on Salt River.
- 1928 Congress authorized the Boulder Canyon Project Act. Provided federal consent to the Colorado River Compact which Arizona had still not ratified. Allocated specific amounts of water from the Colorado River to California, Arizona, and Nevada.
- 1930 Steward Mountain Dam completed on Salt River.
- 1930 Coolidge Dam (Gila River) dedicated.
- 1934 California begins construction of Parker Dam. Arizona Gov. B.B. Moeur protested by sending troops to the Colorado River. Congress authorized Parker Dam in 1935.
- 1935 Arizona's petition for court apportionment of Colorado River water among the states is denied by the US Supreme Court.
- 1935 Boulder (Hoover) Dam completed
- 1937 Arizona Legislature authorized the formation of the Salt River Project Agricultural Improvement and Power District in order to reduce debt payments. The power district was a government entity while the Water Users' Association was a non-profit corporation.
- 1939 Bartlett Dam completed on the Verde River.
- 1944 Arizona Legislature ratified the Colorado River Basin Compact.
- 1944 Mexico and the US signed a treaty allocating an annual portion of the Colorado River water to Mexico.
- 1945 Horseshoe Dam completed on the Verde River. Built as a result of a contract to provide a permanent supply of water for a new Phelps-Dodge mill.

- 1946 The Central Arizona Project Association (CAPA) formed to bring Colorado River water into central Arizona.
- 1947 California introduced legislation to force adjudication of Colorado River water rights by the US Supreme Court. Senator Ernest McFarland introduced Senate Bill 1175 authorizing the CAP.
- 1952 Domestic Water Contract between the city of Phoenix and SRP signed. Phoenix agreed to pay water assessments on land taken out of production (agriculture) for urban development in exchange for water belonging to the land. This agreement served as a model for other communities in the valley.
- 1953 US Supreme Court agrees to hear the complaint between Arizona and California regarding use of the Colorado River water.
- 1956 *Arizona vs. California* trial begins. Arizona argued that the waters of the Gila River were NOT part of the state's portion of the Colorado River water as California contended.
- 1963 The US Supreme Court decision affirmed the water requirements of the Boulder Canyon Project (1928) and that the Gila River water was not part of that allocation. The court also ruled that the amount of water Indian reservations were entitled to would depend on the amount of water necessary to irrigate the acreage on their reservations. Indian tribes began to make water claims based on the practicably irrigable acreage principle.
- 1964 *Arizona vs. California* decree handed down, officially ending court litigation of water rights affecting the CAP. To gain California's support of the CAP, Arizona's congressional leaders agreed to the "California Guarantee" – if water shortages occur on the Colorado River, California is guaranteed its entire entitlement of water before the CAP takes any water.
- 1968 President Lyndon Johnson signed the Colorado River Basin Project which authorized construction of the Central Arizona Project. The Bureau of Reclamation would build the project and the federal loan was to be repaid 50 years after construction was completed. Farmers using water from the project were exempt from interest payments.
- 1971 The Central Arizona Water Conservation District created. Made up of members from Maricopa, Pinal, and Pima Counties, the district would repay the costs of constructing the CAP.
- 1976 US Supreme Court ruling (Pupfish decision) encouraged Indian tribes to assert ownership of groundwater.
- 1978 Reclamation Safety of Dams Act. Roosevelt Dam identified as needing to be raised.
- 1980 Ground Water Management Act. Set restrictions on pumping Arizona groundwater and developing conservation goals. The groundwater situation had to be controlled before the federal government would deliver CAP water.

- 1980 Arizona Department of Water Resources established. It's responsible for securing long-term water supplies for Arizona; administering all state water laws except those related to water quality; and developing public policies which promote efficient use and equitable distribution of water in an economically and environmentally sound manner.
- 1984 Ak-Chin Water Settlement Act. Provides a permanent water supply for the Ak-Chin community provided by CAP beginning in 1988. Embodies three policies: first, that Indian tribal governments can and should decide what is best for their people; second, that the complex issue of Indian water rights is better handled through negotiation rather than litigation; third, that the US government will fulfill its commitments in a fiscally responsible fashion.
- 1985 First Colorado River water reaches Phoenix area.
- 1986 Arizona Water Quality Act.
- 1991 CAP water arrives in Tucson.
- 1992 New Waddell Dam dedicated replacing an earlier dam. Lake Pleasant provides regulatory storage for the CAP.
- 1994 Arizona Water Protection Fund and Commission. Funds public grants for projects assisting in the maintenance and restoration of Arizona's rivers and streams and associated riparian habitats.
- 1996 The project to raise Roosevelt Dam completed.
- 1997 Arizona Water Bank designed to store Arizona's unused portion of Colorado River water. Water for direct recharge is put into spreading basins and is allowed to soak or percolate into the ground for future use.
- 1998 Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project begins construction. Will provide agricultural, municipal, industrial, and recreational water use.
- 1999 US Interior Secretary approves new interstate water bank program for Colorado River water. Nevada and California are allowed to store excess river water in Arizona's underground aquifers. Arizona can collect fees for this storage to help defray operating costs for CAP.
- 1999 Arizona Supreme Court rules that "federal reserved water rights extend to groundwater" and that holders of such rights are "entitled to greater protection from groundwater pumping than are water users who hold only state law rights." Application to Arizona Indian reservations would be determined "on a reservation-by reservation basis."
- 2000 The US and the Central Arizona Water Conservation District reached an agreement approved by the US District Court in Phoenix. This settled a lawsuit brought by the district over how much it must repay the federal government for the construction of the CAP. The settlement requires congressional action.

- 2002 Driest year on record at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.
- 2003 Phoenix residents asked to cut water consumption by 5%.
- 2003 Interior Secretary Gale Norton cut off California's access to surplus Colorado River water.