



CENTRAL UTAH PROJECT

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Water has always been a precious resource in the Intermountain West. Junius F. Wells wrote in 1889 that "water is just now agitating all people in this region, and it is also receiving attention in other quarters." Millions of people could be comfortably located in the arid West, he added, "through the storage and distribution of water that now goes to waste. Operations of such magnitude, however, are not likely to be attempted by private resources [but] if it is to be accomplished in any other way than by gradual progress of successive generations, "it must be undertaken by the Government." Later, conservation-minded President Theodore Roosevelt said about reclaiming the Colorado River: "The plan in general is to enter upon a broad, comprehensive scheme of development for all the irrigable land upon the Colorado River with needed storage at the head waters, so that none of the water of this great river which can be put in beneficial use will be allowed to go to waste." For some Utahns, the development of the Colorado River constitutes Utah's "Last Big Water Hole."

In 1919, at the urging of Utah Governor Simon Bamberger and others, civic and government officials from the seven states located along the Colorado River organized the League of the Southwest to find an equitable and fair means for dividing the waters of the Colorado River. In 1922 the United States Supreme Court hastened the League's work. The rule of prior use applied to all interstate streams, the Supreme Court decreed, regardless of state boundaries.

Representatives from Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, Arizona, and California gathered in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1922 to draft the Colorado River Compact. The compact's stated purpose is to equitably divide and apportion the use of the Colorado River's water among the seven Colorado River Basin states; to create interstate cooperation in order to avoid future costly controversies over Colorado River water; and to quickly and in an orderly manner divide the river for agricultural uses, to secure dam sites for the storage of water, and to secure protection of property and life from floods. R.E. Caldwell, Utah State Engineer, ably represented Utah at the conference, assisted by Dr. John A. Wiltsoe and attorney William A. Wallace. All of the states except Arizona promptly ratified the compact. Years later, Arizona also approved the compact. The compact divides the waters of the Colorado River between the lower basin states (California, Arizona, and Nevada) and the upper basin states (Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico), each basin receiving about 7.5 million acre-feet of water annually.

Construction of Hoover Dam and other reclamation projects on the Colorado River by California in the 1930s prompted the upper basin states to formulate their own water reclamation plan to assure their share of the water. As early as March 1930, U.S. Senator Reed Smoot and Utah Governor George H. Dern promoted the idea of constructing dams at Flaming Gorge and at Dewey, located in southeastern Utah, for the purpose of storing irrigation water and generating electric power for Utah.

In 1946 U.S. Senator Abe Murdock introduced a bill in Congress authorizing the Central Utah Project (CUP). However, Congress and the president refused to consider Murdock's bill until a comprehensive plan was formulated dividing the waters among the four upper basin states. CUP supporters were motivated by earlier success of the Strawberry Valley project funded by the Bureau of Reclamation, and by several private transmontane water diversion projects, including that of the Heber Valley farmers who in the 1880s privately built two diversion systems to transfer water from the upper Strawberry Valley in the Uinta Basin to Heber Valley.



Flaming Gorge Dam

Working with the Bureau of Reclamation, upper basin states drafted the Upper Colorado River Storage Compact and prepared plans to develop the water of the Colorado, and to meet their obligation of providing 7.5 million acre-feet annually to the lower basin states as agreed upon in the 1922 compact. The compact was signed October 22, 1948 at the Palace of Governors Museum in Santa Fe, the site of the 1922 Colorado River agreement. Utah's share of upper basin water is 23 percent with Colorado receiving 51.75 percent, Wyoming 14 percent, New Mexico 11.25 percent, and Arizona receiving 50,000 acre-feet annually. Utah's key negotiator was William R. Wallace, chairman of the Utah Water and Power Board and a representative to the 1922 negotiations. Noted water attorney Edward W. Clyde was appointed special assistant to the attorney general in 1948 to review all legal aspects of the Upper Colorado River Compact. Clyde later served as chief legal counsel for the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, the primary operator and manager of the Central Utah Project, until his death in 1991.



Strawberry Reservoir

Concerned about the management and control of the Colorado River, basin states opposed developing and managing the river system based on the earlier model of the Tennessee Valley Authority and its management of the natural resources of the Tennessee Valley. Yet, the basin states needed federal funding to develop fully the water resources of the Colorado River. However, the states insisted on local management and control of the river and its resources.

Senator Arthur V. Watkins from Utah, along with several other U.S. senators, introduced the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP) bill in Congress in January 1948. A key element of CRSP (and Utah's own CUP) was the construction of the Echo Park and Split Mountain dams on the Green and Yampa rivers in northwestern Colorado. The CUP's objective is to store and divert water from the Colorado River Basin through a series of diversion and storage dams, aqueducts, and tunnels to the Bonneville Basin (Wasatch Front and areas south), where superior farm land is available and the bulk of the state's population is located. The smaller Emery County and Gooseberry projects were also included in CRSP as participating projects. Gooseberry was to divert water from the Colorado drainage basin to Sanpete County in central Utah. Joe's Valley Reservoir (an Emery County project), completed in 1966 at a cost of \$13 million, furnishes supplemental irrigation water to 28,000 acres of farmland as well as water to 800 acres of new farmland. U.S. involvement in the Korean War as well as economic and environmental problems with CRSP delayed congressional and presidential action. In 1956 Congress appropriated about \$760 million for CRSP and its participating projects in Utah.

The location of Echo Park and Split Mountain dams inside Dinosaur National Monument drew nationwide attention from conservationists, reclamationists, economists, and concerned citizens. Noted historian and author Bernard DeVoto was a leading opponent of the two dams. In addition to impounding excess spring runoffs, Echo Park and Split Mountain dams were to generate electricity for the Intermountain West. In that capacity, the two dams were to serve as the cash register for CRSP, helping repay the costs to allow future reclamation projects in the upper basin states.

Public opposition to CRSP centered on the economic feasibility of the massive reclamation project, long-term costs to the American people, and the production of additional agricultural commodities when the country already had large surpluses and was spending millions of tax dollars for storage. The Colorado River Basin states along with their arid sister states formed an impressive voting block in Congress to win support for CRSP and other western reclamation projects. National defense was one argument used to win congressional support. A grassroots organization, Aqualantes (water vigilantes), raised thousands of dollars in 1955 for a national publicity campaign and congressional lobbying effort. On 11 April 1956 President Dwight Eisenhower signed the Colorado River Storage Project bill authorizing the Upper Colorado River Storage Project. The CUP is the largest single participating unit in CRSP. On 15 October 1956 ground was broken at the Flaming Gorge and Glen Canyon dam sites. Flaming Gorge Dam was dedicated 17 August 1964, and Glen Canyon dedicated two years later on 22 September 1966.

The CUP is designed to provide water for 200,000 acres of new farmland and supplemental water for an additional 239,000 acres. In addition, the CUP is to provide water for industrial and municipal uses along the Wasatch Front. To manage water distribution and repayment to the federal government, the Central Utah

Water Conservancy District was organized by Utah's Fourth District Judicial Court in March 1964. A seven-man committee representing the counties of Uintah, Duchesne, Wasatch, Utah, Salt Lake, Summit, and Juab was appointed to direct the conservancy district. The board was later expanded to nineteen members with additional counties participating in CUP.

The Central Utah Project is broken into seven units. The first unit constructed was the Vernal Unit. Its principal feature is Steinaker dam. The dam, begun in May 1959 and completed in 1962, impounds about 37,000 acre-feet of water. Water from Ashley Creek is diverted to the off-stream reservoir. The dam provides supplemental water for 15,000 acres of farmland in Ashley Valley. The Vernal Unit was completed in 1962 at a total cost of \$8 million.

The Upalco Unit, also located in the Uinta Basin, is designed to provide supplemental irrigation water to Indian and non-Indian lands in Duchesne and Uintah counties. Big Sand Wash Dam (constructed in 1963 at a cost of \$650,000) is the major storage facility of the Upalco Unit.

The Jensen Unit with its primary facility, Red Fleet Reservoir, provides supplemental water for 4,000 acres of farmland and 18,000 acre-feet for municipal and industrial uses in the Jensen area in eastern Uintah County.

Throughout their histories, CRSP and the CUP faced numerous challenges forcing many delays. Early in 1961 the Colorado River Storage Project came under fire from private electrical companies in the region and from various senators and congressmen. In addition to storing water, Flaming Gorge and Glen Canyon dams also generate electricity. In 1961 the Bureau of Reclamation wanted to construct a major electric power distribution system throughout the region. Private utility companies feared competition. The Bureau of Reclamation argued that its generation and distribution of electricity would increase the repayment rate for the Colorado River Storage Project and that therefore the distribution system was needed. Utah Senator Wallace Bennett and Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater attacked the Bureau's proposal, arguing that the Bureau was creating a socialistic electric network with the intended goal of nationalizing all private utilities. On the other hand, consumer groups like the Intermountain Consumers Power Association strongly supported the Bureau's plan.

Work on the Bonneville Unit, the largest unit of the CUP, was begun in 1967 following voter approval of the Utah Water Conservancy District repayment contract with the Bureau of Reclamation. Funding for the Bonneville Unit was \$302 million (1965 dollars). By 1985 costs for the Bonneville Unit exceeded \$2 billion. Groundbreaking for the Starvation Dam, the first major dam in the Bonneville Unit, was in June 1967. The rolled earthfilled dam (2,920 feet long and 155 feet high) was completed in the summer of 1970 at a cost of \$8.2 million.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s other more pressing national demands including the Vietnam War, national defense, inflation, and increased federal funding for national social programs restricted federal funds for the CRSP and the Central Utah Project. Congress did, however, authorize and fund the Weber Basin Project, and also funded a feasibility study of the Dixie Project in southwestern Utah which was never built with federal funds. Other units of the CUP were authorized and some elements funded. The Uintah Unit provides supplemental water for Indian and non-Indian lands in the Uinta Basin as well as flood control measures. In 1968 a compromise was struck in Congress deleting the \$620 million Ute Indian Unit but including some of its features in the Uintah Unit. As authorized by Congress in 1968, the Uintah Unit supplies water to 7,800 acres of new Indian lands, 11,000 acres for non-Indian lands, and supplemental water for 34,152 acres of Indian land. A major undertaking of the Uintah Unit is to stabilize upstream lakes on the Uinta and Whiterocks rivers.

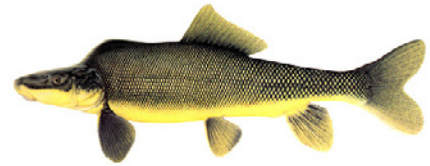
Congressional appropriations for various units of the CUP and CRSP were generally lower than what Utah and the other Colorado River Basin states desired. President Gerald Ford, among other presidents, was less than enthusiastic with the CUP and in 1974 deferred budget action for continuation of the project. The election of President Jimmy Carter further reduced federal appropriations. In 1978 Carter issued his reclamation hit list, which included the Central Utah Project and other water projects in the West.

Other problems delayed CRSP and CUP. The Department of Interior, concerned with providing subsidized water to corporate farms, undertook an extensive legal review of existing reclamation laws. Increased salt content of the Colorado River caused the Bureau of Reclamation and Congress to take a new look at water development in the Colorado River Basin. The Uinta Basin in the 1970s contributed as much as 450,000 tons of salt annually to the Colorado River.

In 1974 the Sierra Club, Trout Unlimited, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and other organizations challenged the CUP with having provided an inadequate environmental study. The Ute Indian tribe contested certain water rights associated with the CUP as well as delays in developing Indian water plans. "We are not going to give up our water to let it flow over to the Wasatch Front," stated a Ute Indian spokesman. Future water developments and exchanges in the Uinta Basin are closely linked to Indian hunting and fishing rights on the Ute Reservation. Environmentalists claimed that the Bonytail Chub and the Razorback Sucker were in danger because their critical habitat was being disrupted by the CUP.



Bonytail Chub



Razorback Sucker

The Bonneville Unit's chief purpose is to transfer 136,000 acre-feet of water annually from the Uinta Basin to the Bonneville Basin. Central to the Bonneville Unit is the enlarged Strawberry Reservoir. Work began in July 1971 on Soldier Creek Dam, located several miles downstream from the Strawberry Dam. The enlarged Strawberry Reservoir holds about four times the water and has twice the surface area of the older Strawberry Reservoir. Water from the reservoir is diverted through the Wasatch Mountains via the 6.5-mile-long Syar Tunnel to the Bonneville Basin. Other important divisions of the Bonneville Unit are the Current Creek Dam, begun in 1974 and completed in 1979; the Upper Stillwater Dam, located on Rock Creek in Duchesne County, and completed in 1987; several hydroelectric generating plants located on the west flank of the Wasatch Mountains; and various water distribution systems located along the Wasatch Front. An important part of the Bonneville Unit never constructed was the diking of Provo and Goshen bays on Utah Lake. An alternative to diking the two bays was the construction of the Jordanelle Dam in the Heber Valley.

This last major dam to be built was also an alternative to other storage dams on the Provo River, and was selected as the most economically feasible. When filled, waters impounded from the Jordanelle Dam will inundate the two small hamlets of Hailstone and Keetley.

The Jordanelle Dam site was challenged by various interests. One concern was that the site was geologically flawed. This argument was strengthened following the Teton Dam failure in 1976. There was concern from Park City mining interests that construction of the Jordanelle would flood sections of the Ontario Mine, prohibiting future mining there. Within Salt Lake County there was opposition to the Jordanelle and the whole Central Utah Project. A Salt Lake County Attorney's report suggested that backers of the CUP artificially created the need for the very expensive reclamation project. The report added that more efficient use of available water and increased development of ground water would solve the water crisis in Salt Lake and Utah counties. Other concerned citizens questioned the constitutionality of the CUP as well as the high cost of the Bonneville Unit.

Further opposition to the CUP and the Bonneville Unit came from various interests in California in the mid-1980s. California Congressman George Miller argued that the American taxpayer was subsidizing Utah reclamation projects far beyond what was reasonable and fair. "If people knew what their actual price of [CUP] water would be, they would say it is too much," stated a staff member of Miller's congressional subcommittee on Water and Power Resources. Costs for the CUP continued to climb. In an election held in 1985, voters in the Central Water Conservancy District agreed by a vote of 73 percent in favor to increase their repayment to the federal government by an additional \$140 million. However, several counties in the water conservancy district, discouraged with delays and the increased repayment plan, threatened to pull out of Central Utah Water Conservancy District and the CUP. This development promises to add controversy to the project in the 1990s.

Although its history has been long and controversial, when completed, the Central Utah Project will provide water for farms, industry, and municipal use well into the twenty-first century.

See: Thomas G. Alexander, "An Investment in Progress: Utah's First Federal Reclamation Project, The Strawberry Valley Project," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 39 (1971); Norris Hundley, *Water and the West: The Colorado River Compact and the Politics of Water in the American West* (1975); Kathryn MacKay, "The Strawberry Valley Reclamation Project and the Opening of the Uintah Indian Reservation," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50 (1982); Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and its Disappearing Water* (1986); John Upton Terrell, *War for the Colorado River* (1965); and Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity & the Growth of the American West* (1985). Craig Fuller