

# TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy

[November 1, 2018](#)

## Moody's threatening to downgrade Utah's credit rating

Moody's Investors Service has [threatened to downgrade](#) Utah's credit rating in response to the state's [severe drought](#). The Moody's report specifically pointed to the state's near exhaustion of its reservoirs, and the fact that investors are increasingly concerned about Utah's water security. This follows a drought in the Colorado River Basin that has stretched out for [over the past decade](#). Currently, 16 of the state's 49 major reservoirs are under 20% capacity, and an additional five are below 5% capacity.

Normally, dear reader, right about now is when you would find a link to the actual report from Moody's, or, at least, analysis of the report. Well, what is apparently the only coverage of this news is behind a paywall, and the actual report is behind a much more costly paywall. It's a puzzling situation that with all that is going on in the world these days that a water-related report about a state's credit rating isn't front page stuff worldwide. But that's the situation we find ourselves in. If you happen to have a moodys.com subscription or \$200 burning a hole in your pocket, boogie on down and see the report for yourself.

This is not the first time that Moody's has warned regional governments that a failure to adapt to climate change will impact their credit ratings. Moody's released a report in late 2017 that described how environmental factors play into their ratings system, specifically calling out [New Orleans](#) as an area of high risk. Moody's uses [six criteria](#) for ascertaining exposure to climate change-related risk; [three of the criteria](#) are related to the hazards of living on the coast, like flooding, and the other three deal with the frequency of extreme weather. Moody's has also been taking environmental risks into account for some time; New Orleans was actually downgraded to a Baa3 rating after Katrina due to the scale of disruption to the local economy, and was not upgraded to an A3 rating until 2010. These areas [will have to find some way to make Moody's happy](#), as [oxymoronic](#) as that sounds, or else [face the consequences](#).

## New water infrastructure law passed

A new law [was signed](#) by President Trump last week that authorizes flood and coastal restoration projects nationwide. The [Water Resources Development Act](#) approved a number of new studies and projects, while also expediting Army Corps of Engineers projects that are currently in the works. The bill explicitly authorizes a number of projects and studies located in Louisiana, however they are only priorities; Congress still has to [make appropriations](#) in order to fund them. The bill doesn't only approve projects. It has also [deauthorized](#)

The **Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy** is a program of the Tulane University Law School.

The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and stewardship of water.

## Coming up:

[The International Water Conference](#)

November 4-8, 2018

Scottsdale, AZ

## Water jobs:

[Senior Modeler](#)

Edwards Aquifer Authority

San Antonio, TX

[Water Quality Scientist & Policy Analyst](#)

Heal the Bay

Santa Monica, CA

[Associate Professor/Professor \(Climate Modeling, Alabama Water Institute\)](#)

University of Alabama

Tuscaloosa, AL

[Strategic Communications Coordinator](#)

ClearWater Conservancy

State College, PA

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roughly \$4 billion in projects that Congress has found are no longer feasible.

This WRDA includes a provision for finding funding and expediting the Morganza-to-the-Gulf hurricane protection project. The Morganza project has already been [authorized by Congress](#) three times, but they have yet to actually appropriate any money for it. If the federal government doesn't start funding construction of the project by 2019, it could end up being [deauthorized](#).

We're still going through the final language here at Chateau d'Eau, but let's all agree to bring things to each other's attention, should we find anything interesting, shall we?

### **An entire island disappeared and no one noticed right away**

A small islet in Hawaii was wiped off the map recently by the massive [Hurricane Walaka](#). Walaka was the one of the strongest hurricanes ever recorded in the Pacific, a Category 5 with winds over 157 miles per hour. The islet formerly known as East Island used to be an 11-acre tract of land used as nesting ground for different types of wildlife. While it was uninhabited by humans, it did provide habitat for Hawaiian monk seals and Hawaiian green sea turtles, [two highly endangered and very charismatic species](#). Now, only two tiny stretches of sand are all that's left of East Island. The good news is that most of the animals that nest there missed the storm, as it hit in the later part of their breeding seasons. And, some monk seals have already come back to the tiny, 150 foot piece of sand that is left. The island, which was originally formed as sea levels fell, is likely to remain at least partially underwater, largely due to rapid sea level rise.

And, East Island is actually the [second island](#) in the French Frigate Shoals to become submerged over the last few months. Weirdly enough, it actually took people awhile to notice that East Island had disappeared at all, since it was so remote. It's located about 750 miles away from Oahu. [If only we could make less desirable things disappear so easily](#).

### **Rise of the water machines**

A group of sustainability experts in California have created [machines](#) that can generate drinking water from water vapor in the atmosphere. The so-called Skywater machines can create up to 300 gallons of potable fresh water per day- just from the moisture in the air. There is actually more water in the atmosphere than there is fresh water located on earth, meaning that there is plenty of water vapor from which to produce drinking water. The machines run on either biofuels or solar energy, and are set up inside [shipping containers](#). The cost of using the machines is 2 cents per quart of fresh water produced – orders of magnitude beyond what you're paying your water utility right now, but orders of magnitude less than what you're paying at the convenience store or your local [water bar](#) (yes, it's a real thing).

Maybe the folks in Utah (see above) should give the Skywater folks a call. Or maybe can just end up suing California for taking water out of the air that would have fallen in the Wasatch Mountains as snow. Surface water disputes are [a tale as old as time](#). Groundwater disputes are very [de rigueur](#). But atmospheric water fights? That's the future! Just something to ponder as you snack on your [water pickles](#) (yes, it's a real thing).