

TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
March 29, 2019

How did you celebrate World Water Day? You didn't forget it, did you?

Well, even if you did forget, you probably thought about water more that day than your country's leaders did. World Water Day has been "[celebrated](#)" every March 22 since 1992, when the UN General Assembly declared it so. Writers at [phys.org](#) [noted](#) last week that among all country leaders in the past 50 years only one, Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, showed sustained interest in water other than at times of flood or drought. So, sit back, [relax](#), and ask yourself, "what are we, us really groovy water-interested professionals, doing wrong, and what can we do better to get our messaging across to our national leaders?" Maybe there's still hope for [playlists](#)!

Huzzah! Western states agree to reduce water use so the federal government doesn't force them to reduce water use!

The great thing about an interstate water compact is it gives you something to fight about other than the water itself, but maybe even a flawed compact can do some good beyond shifting the argument. The Colorado River Compact has the additional benefit of a hammer that has the federal government imposing mandatory water cuts on the states if the level in Lake Mead gets too low. At the beginning of this month, Lake Mead was just a few feet away from hitting that mark. So, [the seven compact states came to an agreement](#) to each voluntarily reduce use. Everything is saved... for now. The great concern is the water getting too low for Hoover Dam to provide electricity or even cease to release water downstream at all. Scientists are skeptical that the plan will be enough to close the 1.2 million acre/feet of water that the lower basin uses beyond what is supplied by the upper basin. So, expect the further mining of fossil groundwater until those resources are completely tapped out. Then, another convening of state powers to agree to another reduction in use. Or maybe just [another post-apocalyptic mess](#).

The plan puts a lot of hope into water conservation efforts from everyone but California's biggest water user (and the supplier of so many of our [fruits and veggies](#)), the Imperial Irrigation District, who didn't join the agreement. Besides fruits and veggies, the Imperial Valley is a big producer of alfalfa. More than just a reference that no one under the age of 50 will get, alfalfa is a major feed source for livestock around the world. And when push comes to shove on Colorado River basin water use, many are [questioning the wisdom](#) of exporting so much water in the form of countless bales of the stuff from one desert region halfway around the world to feed to dairy cows in a completely different desert.

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:

[Pointe-au-Chien Living Shoreline Project](#)
April 12 and 14, 2019
Pointe aux Chenes Reserve Boat Launch, LA

Water jobs:

[Fellowship](#)

Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC

[Postdoctoral Researcher](#)

US Department of Agriculture
Research Triangle Park, NC

[Sector Analyst](#)

Water.org
Kansas City, MO

[Wisconsin Water Resources Science-Policy Fellowship with a focus on groundwater-surface water interactions](#)

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Water Energy Nexus – even the green sometimes isn't clean

A closed loop, geothermal plant that harnesses superheated groundwater to produce 10 to 12 megawatts of clean energy before injecting the water back into the aquifer. What could be better? It's a zero carbon, zero water-consumption energy source! Well, neighbors in the Animas Valley of southwestern New Mexico have some thoughts about just what could be [better than the Lightning Dock plant](#). The plant accesses salty water from deep below the surface and brings it up to the plant through the shallow, drinkable and farmable groundwater layer, and sends it back deep down, passing it through the shallow groundwater layer. If everything goes to plan, no problem! But things haven't been going to plan, and leaks have sprung up, tainting farming and aquaculture operations near the plant. Accidents happen, sure, but what's most concerning has been the state of New Mexico's response. They've not investigated the leaks for just what's in the deeper, saltier water that is getting out of leaks in the closed system. And it goes beyond that, as the state has removed jurisdiction over hot water from the State Engineer to the state's Oli Conservation Division – hot water's now lumped in with minerals. Oh, and the feds are no help for the neighbors – geothermal injection wells are exempt from rules on degrading groundwater. The point here isn't to pick on this plant or geothermal plants in general. Newer sources for energy are important; harnessing them without placing strain on water resources is also important. However, if state and federal authorities are going to encourage these innovations, they've got to figure out how to properly regulate them as well as support them. Turning the neighbors and everyone else against innovation and progress like this undermines it like, well, [The Underminer](#)!