

FACT SHEET ON COLORADO RIVER SALINITY
AGREEMENT WITH MEXICO

BACKGROUND

The 1944 Water Treaty between Mexico and the United States allotted 1.5 million acre-feet of Colorado River water to Mexico annually, but made no specific provision regarding its quality.

Water quality became a practical issue in 1961 due to:

-- termination of delivery of water in excess of the Mexican treaty allotment following completion of Glen Canyon Dam;

-- the beginning of pumping of saline drainage into the Colorado River by the 65,000 acre Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District near Yuma, Arizona to avoid water logging and salt accumulation in irrigated lands.

As a result, the average annual salinity of Colorado River waters delivered to Mexico at the main diversion point, Morelos Dam, doubled to about 1,500 parts per million.

STEPS TAKEN TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM

Following protests of the Government of Mexico, scientific studies and interim measures were undertaken. These were followed in 1965 by a five-year agreement by the terms of which the United States:

-- selectively pumped Wellton-Mohawk drainage wells to alleviate salinity at the times most critical to Mexico;

-- built a conveyance drain to segregate and bypass a part of the drainage to the Colorado River below the point where Mexico diverted its waters;

-- gradually reduced the salinity at Morelos Dam to an average annual figure of 1,245 parts per million.

The five year agreement expired in November 1970, but was twice extended for one year periods, while discussions for a new agreement were in progress.

PRESIDENTS NIXON AND ECHEVERRIA PROVIDE IMPETUS TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM

In June 1972, Presidents Echeverria and Nixon met in Washington and issued a Joint Communique, bringing the search for a solution to a new phase. In accordance with the Communique, President Nixon:

- ordered measures which within a month improved the quality of water delivered to Mexico at Morelos Dam by more than 100 parts per million,

-- designated former Attorney General Herbert Brownell to be his Special Representative for Resolution of the Salinity Problem with Mexico,

BROWNELL TASK FORCE

A Task Force headed by Mr. Brownell systematically considered every conceivable option to resolve the problem.

Mr. Brownell submitted his recommendations to President Nixon on December 29, 1972.

President Nixon approved those recommendations, and on May 13, 1973, Secretary of State William Rogers gave President Echeverria a proposal based on the approved recommendations.

Negotiations with Mexico were concluded and an agreement was signed on August 30, 1973, in Mexico City. The agreement is in the form of a Minute of the International Boundary and Water Commission. By a simultaneous exchange of diplomatic notes, the two Governments formally express their approval.

MAIN POINTS OF THE AGREEMENT

The agreement provides:

-- that by July 1, 1974, subject to Congressional authorization of the necessary works, the salinity of Mexico's guaranteed allotment of Colorado River water delivered at Morelos Dam will not exceed the salinity of the Colorado River at Imperial Dam (where the major downstream U.S. users divert their water) plus a differential of 115 parts per million (plus or minus 30 parts per million) calculated on an annual basis. This eliminates any adverse consequence of Wellton-Mohawk drainage.

-- for the continued delivery of 140,000 acre-feet of Treaty water below Morelos Dam;

-- for the extension at U.S. expense of a lined bypass drain to carry Wellton-Mohawk drainage to the Gulf of California;

-- that the United States will support Mexican efforts to obtain appropriate financing for the improvement and rehabilitation of the Mexicali Valley, and will provide on a mutually acceptable basis to be negotiated non-reimbursable assistance for aspects of the Mexican rehabilitation program in Mexicali Valley relating to salinity, including tile drainage and technical assistance;

-- that there will be a mutual limitation on groundwater pumping to 160,000 acre-feet annually within five miles on each side of the Arizona border;

-- that the agreement constitutes the permanent and definitive solution to the salinity problem contemplated in the Joint Presidential Communique of June 1972.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

In order to carry out the terms of the agreement, the United States:

-- began making releases from upstream storage (Lake Mead) on June 25, 1974 to reduce the salinity of water delivered to Mexico to the levels specified by the agreement;

-- has engaged in preliminary engineering efforts in connection with the design of a desalting plant to treat the irrigation drainage from the Wellton-Mohawk project. This plant, when constructed, will have a capacity of 100 million gallons per day and will be the largest in the world.

-- The 1975 budget includes about \$28 million to begin implementing the measures necessary for the U.S. to comply with this international agreement. The total cost of such works is estimated at about \$155 million.