

Lohman, L. C. 1996. The salt connection: Fighting for states' rights over water in the Colorado River Basin. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Denver. Denver, Colorado. 373 pp.

Subject to international treaty, interstate compacts, and the laws of two countries and seven states, the Colorado River flows from Wyoming to Mexico, getting saltier with each mile. With a comparatively meager supply of water, the Colorado serves about 22 million people and irrigates more than three million acres of land in the United States and Mexico. When water in the lower river became too salty for some domestic and agricultural uses the City of Yuma, Arizona and the Republic of Mexico both protested to the federal government. To protect their water rights the seven Colorado River Basin states reactivated the Committee of 14 to intervene in U.S. negotiations with Mexico while water quality officials of the same states met for twelve years to discuss the domestic salinity issue. After a costly agreement with Mexico, the states found that the Environmental Protection Agency's interpretation of how salinity should be managed under the Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972 threatened their sovereignty over water resource development. They joined together again as the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum to preserve their states' water rights by fighting for a domestic salinity control program. For twenty years the Forum, operating on a consensus basis, shepherded the salinity control program. The only interstate cooperative entity addressing water quality and nonpoint source pollution in an affirmative manner, its success was based on the determination and skill of the original members in avoiding fragmentation by focusing on the single problem of salinity. Strong support from the Forum's Work Group enhanced its technical capabilities and personal bonds to create collegiality among the states in the face of opposition from the federal executive branch and environmental groups. In maturity the Forum's cohesiveness was threatened by retirements, loss of institutional memory, and status weakened by twenty-five years of anti-government rhetoric. As a result, the unity achieved through focusing on salinity is splintering, reducing the Forum's effectiveness and ability to shape the federal program and to guide policy changes.