

A dry Colorado River has some people sweating

By Jonathan Waterman, National Geographic

During a recent discussion of water at the Aspen Institute's Environment Forum In Colorado, former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt told a packed house: "The American Southwest is not one of those regions where there is water scarcity. It's hard to believe, given all the hyping in the national and local and regional press."

The audience and his copanelists – Sandra Postel, director of the Global Water Policy Project and freshwater fellow for the National Geographic Society, and Pat Mulroy, general manager of Southern Nevada Water Authority (overseeing Las Vegas water) – were taken aback by these statements.

Throughout the Southwest, and particularly in a region that I know, the Colorado River Basin, the so called "water buffalos" (those who line their pockets with virtual water) commonly talk about this river as though it has not run dry. If only because the water continues to irrigate 2,000,000 acres of agriculture, run 336 miles into Phoenix and Tucson, 224 miles to Los Angeles, or under the Rockies toward Denver through no less than 12 tunnels. So water-related business certainly isn't scarce. That includes Kentucky Blue Grass lawns, water-consumptive cotton, and a mega dairymed of cows eating Colorado River grown hay to produce countless gallons of milk.

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