

# Report: Half of the West's rivers altered by development, diversions

By Matt Weiser, Water Deeply

Many Americans may not realize it, but rivers throughout the West are increasingly under siege. The threats are not as apparent as they once were in the era of big dam building, which makes them that much more troubling. Climate change, land development and catastrophic forest fires are the big concerns today. These are relatively slow-moving threats, but no less transformative.

Water development is still a player. Colorado, Utah and California are all entertaining big new dam proposals. All three states are also pondering major pipelines to divert river flows, even as those flows diminish due to persistent drought and a warming climate.

A new report by the Center for American Progress helps put all this in perspective. The report, produced in partnership with Conservation Science Partners, found that 49 percent of all river miles in Western states have been modified from their original condition, either by changes in flow or adjacent land development. High-elevation headwaters have not been spared, with 35 percent disturbed by some form of development. The report includes an interactive map that illuminates conditions on thousands of western rivers.

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