

REFERENCE TITLE: Colorado River; cause of decline

State of Arizona
House of Representatives
Fifty-seventh Legislature
First Regular Session
2025

HCR 2046

Introduced by
Representatives Griffin: Diaz, Lopez

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

RECOGNIZING FOREST MISMANAGEMENT AND SALT CEDARS AS THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF WATER DEPLETION OF THE COLORADO RIVER AND SUPPORTING ERADICATION OF THESE CAUSES.

(TEXT OF BILL BEGINS ON NEXT PAGE)

1 Whereas, the Colorado River system has experienced declines in
2 annual inflow from runoff; and

3 Whereas, this reduction in annual inflow has reduced water supplies
4 for people, agriculture and businesses; and

5 Whereas, the causes of the declines are historic drought,
6 evapotranspiration and salt cedars; and

7 Whereas, the Colorado River Basin has been in a drought since 2000,
8 resulting in decreased precipitation in the Upper Colorado River Basin
9 watersheds and tributaries that feed the main stem of the Colorado
10 River; and

11 Whereas, public land managers have allowed forests to grow
12 unnaturally, becoming clogged with far too many trees; and

13 Whereas, water evaporates from the trees before ever reaching the
14 river; and

15 Whereas, the United States Bureau of Reclamation estimates that the
16 Colorado River loses almost 4 million acre-feet of water per year to
17 evapotranspiration. Arizona's share of the Colorado River is only 2.8
18 million acre-feet; and

19 Whereas, state and federal forest mismanagement has allowed this
20 evapotranspiration to increase, reducing this state's gains in water
21 conservation. More needs to be done to address the overgrown forests in
22 the Colorado River watershed; and

23 Whereas, the salt cedar tree, also known as the tamarisk, was
24 brought to the United States in the 1800s as an ornamental plant. It is
25 now listed as an invasive species by the United States Department of
26 Agriculture; and

27 Whereas, this invasive plant out-competes native cottonwood,
28 mesquite and willow, altering the ecology and hydrology of native systems.
29 One tree can drink more than 200 gallons of water per day; and

30 Whereas, salt cedar trees have spread across virtually every river
31 system in half of the United States, consuming unfathomable amounts of
32 water; and

33 Whereas, salt cedars now cover nearly two million acres of river
34 banks; and

35 Whereas, salt cedars often grow in stands of over 3,000 trees per
36 acre, constituting nearly 672 acre-feet of water consumed per acre per
37 year; and

38 Whereas, salt cedars remain one of the most difficult of all
39 nonnative species to control and are perhaps the nation's most insidious
40 water problem. Eradicating them from American rivers would constitute one
41 of the largest water projects in history; and

42 Whereas, in 2003 and 2006, Congress gave over \$50 million to
43 research universities to conduct studies and to nonprofit organizations to
44 conduct demonstration projects, yet salt cedars still thrive; and

1 Whereas, organizations have raised awareness and made progress in
2 organizing eradication efforts but they are woefully underfunded, raising
3 less than \$4 million per year and restoring less than 2,000 acres per
4 year. More needs to be done to address and eradicate salt cedars from the
5 American West.

6 Therefore

7 Be it resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of Arizona,
8 the Senate concurring:

9 1. That consumption is not the problem causing reduction of
10 Colorado River water.

11 2. That mismanagement of overgrown and water-depleting plants in
12 American watersheds reduces annual flows in the Colorado River.

13 3. That the Members of the Legislature determine that until the
14 principal causes of the limited Colorado River water are addressed, any
15 proactive conservation efforts or investments that state or private
16 organizations make will be in vain because the gains will be consumed by
17 the additional proliferation of forest stands and salt cedars.

18 4. That the Members of the Legislature support the focus on
19 eradicating salt cedars and the overgrowth of forests, which would provide
20 substantial volumes of water.

21 5. That the Members of the Legislature determine that eradicating
22 salt cedars and responsibly managing forests in the West presents an
23 opportunity to substantially increase the availability of water in the
24 Colorado River.