

Rio Grande Compact Fact Sheet

The **Rio Grande Compact** is a legally binding agreement between Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas that divides the river's water among the three states. Compliance with the Compact protects water uses in New Mexico, including senior and groundwater rights. Given increasing water scarcity, the State of New Mexico is taking pro-active steps to engage New Mexicans throughout the basin to ensure our communities and economies that rely on the river can continue to thrive.



NEW MEXICO'S COMPACT OBLIGATIONS

The Compact requires New Mexico to take the following actions throughout the river:

Upper Rio Grande

Water use must be maintained at 1929 levels.

Middle Rio Grande

New Mexico must deliver a portion of river flows (this excludes imported San Juan-Chama water) entering the Middle Valley near Espanola to Elephant Butte Reservoir. In dry years, approximately 60% of flows must be delivered; in wet years, more than 80%.

Lower Rio Grande

Water stored in Elephant Butte Reservoir is delivered to users in southern New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico, with water apportioned based on the Compact and international treaties. New obligations below Elephant Butte reservoir may result based on the proposed settlement in the U.S. Supreme Court litigation. The settlement clarifies how water is apportioned below Elephant Butte, protects groundwater uses and the state's ability to administer, and provides greater long-term certainty to water users.



CHALLENGES

Compact Debt

New Mexico must carefully manage deliveries to avoid Compact debt—a running balance of under-deliveries to the Compact. If debt exceeds 200,000 acre-feet, it is considered a violation that could result in litigation. Compact rules restrict upstream storage when New Mexico carries debt (Articles VI & VIII) and when Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs hold less than 400,000 AF of usable water (Article VII).

Hydrologic Changes and Aridification

A warming, drying Southwest makes compact compliance more challenging. Reduced snowpack, variable monsoons, and higher evaporation all reduce flows in the Rio Grande. Meanwhile, demands from agriculture, riparian vegetation, sedimentation and channel conveyance issues, and domestic, commercial, municipal, and industrial (DCMI) uses, continue to rise while Compact delivery requirements remain constant.

Management Complexity

Balancing water use with available supply, while meeting compact obligations, requires collaboration, flexibility, and innovation. Together we can conserve water, improve conveyance efficiency, adapt to hydrologic variability, and protect local economies through efficient use of water in all sectors.

NEW MEXICO'S RESPONSE

Projects & Investments

- ~\$45 million in the Middle Rio Grande for channel maintenance, habitat improvements, cooperative agreements including with the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, sediment management, and water conservation programs.
- ~\$65 million in the Lower Rio Grande for groundwater conservation, stormwater management, aquifer recharge, cooperative agreements including with the Elephant Butte Irrigation District, and long-term planning with local stakeholders.

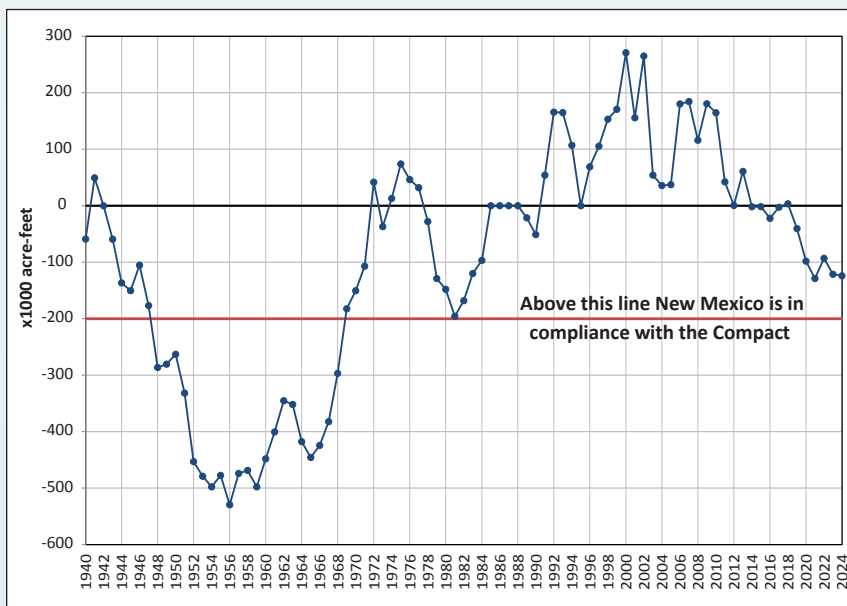
Administration & Tools

- **Conjunctive Use:** management of surface and groundwater to protect Compact deliveries.
- **Active Water Resource Management (AWRM):** proactive rules and regulations for water sharing and administration.
- **Strategic Water Reserve:** acquiring and managing water rights to support flows for Compact compliance and environmental needs.

Planning

- The Water Security Planning Act modernizes regional water planning combining the best-available science, public involvement, and prioritizing funding for project implementation.

Figure 1. Rio Grande Compact Cumulative Departures from 1940 to 2024



LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next 50 years, New Mexico is projected to have **25% less water** due to rising temperatures. A secure water future depends on careful management, collaborative planning, and statewide conservation. **Everyone—from farmers to municipalities to state agencies—must play a role in sustaining the Rio Grande and meeting Compact obligations. Together, we can protect this vital resource for generations to come.**

