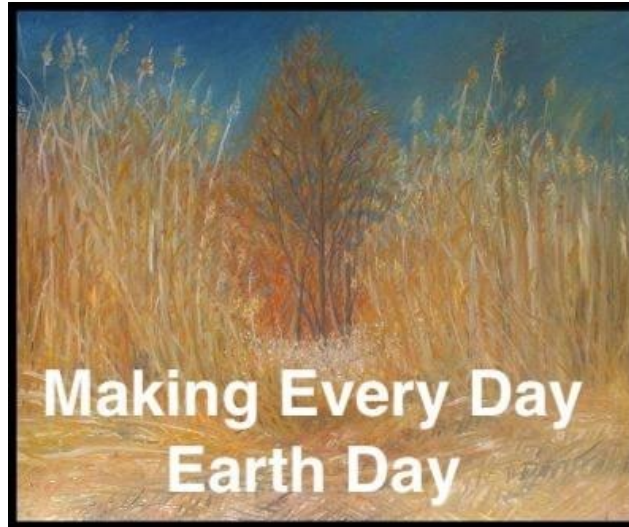


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October 15, 2020

Water Scarcity



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Special Request: Please Vote On or Before November 3

The assault on climate and environmental regulations and threats of violence at home and abroad cannot continue. Our democracy, science, health care, national parks, air and water quality, literally our future, are all on the ballot.

*To help make every day earth day, we at PSR Iowa implore you to vote--early, by mail, or in person--**But Vote.***

In our last [edition](#), we discussed the connections between food production and water. Without sufficient water for food production and safe drinking water, human conflicts increase and intensify, and climate refugee rates rise.

Global Water Data

- 2 billion people live in countries experiencing serious water stress.
- More than 80% of wastewater resulting from human activities is discharged into rivers or seas without any pollution removal.
- 2.2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water services.
- 1 in 4 healthcare facilities lack basic water services.
- Floods and other water-related disasters account for 70% of all deaths related to natural disasters.
- Water scarcity affects more than 40% of the global population and is projected to rise.

Source: United Nations

Freshwater scarcity increasingly impacts the United States (US) along the West Coast and particularly along our southern border. The causes are various, but the effect is the same: people leave their homes to survive. Water scarcity is a driving force for immigration to our country from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. It is also a major factor in the displacement and migration of people within the US.

The arid and semi-arid areas along the border between the US and Mexico are experiencing burgeoning population growth, accompanied by increased industrialization, pollution and crop irrigation. Simultaneously, as temperatures rise and droughts become more frequent and prolonged, climate change exacerbates water shortages.

There have been unprecedented conflicts in the past year as Mexican farmers challenge water distribution practices. Mexico is behind in its “water payments” to the US. A 1944 [treaty](#) obligates each nation to direct certain amounts of water to border rivers. Every five-year period, Mexico must direct 2.158 billion cubic meters of water for US consumption.

According to Mexico's national water regulation entity CONAGUA, Mexico still must deliver [230.5 million cubic meters](#) of water in this current five-year cycle ending October 24th this year. To meet the deadline, the Mexican government ordered large withdrawals from reservoirs in Chihuahua, despite their extraordinarily low levels.

Chihuahua experienced record-low rainfall this summer on top of an almost decade-long drought. Farmers are suffering from devastating impacts to their livelihoods. People in the region fear a new generation of men may have to leave home in search of work even as the collective trauma resulting from the mass emigration of men to the US in the mid-1990s due to drought still impacts families and communities.

Local farmers are extremely concerned that the withdrawals from their agricultural water reserves this year will not leave them with enough to successfully start their crops in the spring. Meanwhile, the Governor of Texas is pressuring the US federal government to make sure Mexico delivers the agreed upon amount of water, upon which the state depends for municipal, industrial and agricultural uses.

"Texas Relies on 1944 Treaty Water"

The United States continues to meet Colorado River Treaty delivery obligations, but Mexico is not meeting Rio Grande River Treaty delivery obligations. As the manager of state (surface) waters, [the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality] understands the importance of Treaty waters to Texas water right holders.

[Source: Texas Commission on Environmental Quality](#)



[Map: The Rio Grande and its tributaries; Rio Conchos Drainage Basin](#)

Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obradors has consistently denied there being any water shortage, or future water scarcity in Chihuahua resulting from planned water deliveries to the Rio Grande. He warns the public of possible US reprisals if the nation fails to deliver the rest of the water. Nevertheless, people in the Rio Conchos basin have taken extraordinary measures to stop the release of water north to Texas. With only one exception, protests this year have failed to prevent the federally planned releases of this valuable resource from the region's reservoirs.

La Boquilla (Chihuahua, Mexico)



[Image: La Boquilla \(September 2020\) by Victor Yanez](#)

Following failed negotiations last year between the federal government, Chihuahuan state officials, local authorities and farmer organizations, the national dams in the Rio Conchos basin were federally mandated to release large water payments this year. In January, protesters broke in and took over La Boquilla, the largest dam on the Conchos River, which is the main tributary of the Rio Grande. The National Guard was deployed, along with active members of the military, and quickly reinstated federal control.

In the months since, protestors have periodically engaged in a variety of direct actions, including blockading transit routes, and occupying dam installations. Violence has broken out between federal troops and civilians, resulting in injuries and death. National and international news media have reported throughout this year that the protestors were either unarmed, or armed almost exclusively with sticks and/or rocks. The National Guard forces, on the other hand, are equipped with military-grade weapons.

On September 8th, thousands of protestors at La Boquilla overwhelmed hundreds of National Guard troops, and regained control of the dam. Since then, water payments to the US from the reservoir have halted.

There is widespread mistrust and disagreement between state and national authorities in Mexico over how much water actually goes where, resulting in the current political deadlock. According to Chihuahua's Governor Javier Corral Jurado, the state has already paid what it owes, and the federal government has other options to pay the water debt. Corral and the Association of Irrigation Users of the State of Chihuahua are calling for an improved, more just distribution of federal water resources to end the conflict.

Several of Chihuahua's state representatives have announced that they will seek judicial action to revise the 1944 treaty. Doing so may open the way for the addition of groundwater to the agreement.

Some fear that Mexico's failure to pay its remaining water debt in coming days will become a major flashpoint in the US general election. Whether or not that happens, this case highlights the need for water agreements to be more climate-responsive.

What You Can Do

Conflict over climate and population induced scarce water resources increasingly threatens people and farmers at home and around the globe. Learn more, then vote for, promote and support immigration and water policies that recognize our shared responsibility to cross border farming and farmers.

Learn More

["México busca acuerdos para cumplir Tratado de Aguas con Estados Unidos"](#) (October 14, 2020) *EFE*

["Farmers, governor remain defiant as time runs out for Mexico to settle water debt with US"](#) (October 8, 2020) *KRQE*

["Mexico's water crisis heats up as transfer to US looms"](#) (October 8, 2020) *Aljazeera*

["Mexican farmers revolt over sending water to US during drought"](#) (September 25, 2020) *The Guardian*

["Army of Mexican Farmers Clash With National Guard Over Paying Water to the US"](#) (September 25, 2020) *VICE World News*

["El tratado por el que México le debe agua a Estados Unidos \(y por qué ahora genera enfrentamientos en la frontera\)"](#) (September 18, 2020) *BBC*

["Mexican farmers occupy dam to stop water payments to the United States"](#) (September 14, 2020) *The Washington Post*

["Llevarán diputados tema del agua a tribunales internacionales"](#) (September 13, 2020) *El Heraldo de Chihuahua*

["Mexican water wars: Dam seized, troops deployed, at least one killed in protests about sharing with U.S."](#) (September 11, 2020) *Los Angeles Times*

["Policía militar mexicana, investigada tras muerte en protestas por agua"](#) (September 10, 2020) *Reuters*

["El cambio climático obligará a revisar los tratados de agua en el mundo"](#) (September 10, 2020) *DW*

["Where Will Everyone Go?"](#) (July 23, 2020) *ProPublica*

["With Coronavirus Spreading, Mexico Vowed to Empty Detention Centers - But Migrants Were Thrust into Chaos and Danger"](#) (May 11, 2020) *The Intercept*

["Fleeing not Migrating"](#) (December 6, 2019) *The Progressive*

["How water scarcity triggers the refugee crisis – and what tech can do to solve it"](#) (June 4, 2019) *World Economic Forum*

["On the U.S.-Mexico border, water shortages loom as the region races for solutions"](#) (August 25, 2018) *PBS NewsHour*

["Keeping global warming within 1.5 °C constrains emergence of aridification"](#) (January 2018) *Nature Climate Change*

["Assessing Basin-wide Water Availability to Meet Treaty Obligations: Rio Conchos, Mexico"](#) (December 9, 2017) *University of Texas at Austin*

["1944 Water Treaty Between Mexico and the United States: Present Situation and Future Potential"](#) (2016) *Frontera Norte*

["Water Conflict Between the US and Mexico"](#) (2006) *United Nations Development Programme*

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