

Geopolitical Issues

Hydro-politics - political negotiations centred on conflicts over the shared use of water sources, especially rivers that form and international border

Agreements over water supply, distribution and use are often placed along many rivers. International law does not provide a clear solution to trans-boundary problems unless it is a navigable waterway.

Even then, often countries upstream will assert their right to **territorial sovereignty** ('its our water, so decide) and countries down stream claim **territorial integrity** ('it is our right to have the same amount of water as in the past).

Helsinki Rules:

These are international guidelines which dictate how rivers and their ground water supplies that cross border may be used. This has been adopted under the International Law Association in Helsinki, Finland however it is currently not enforceable anywhere in the world. Using the Helsinki Rules a criteria has been drawn up that should be used in order to ensure that water is shared equally. The criteria is shown below:

- **Downstream flow** – Consideration of downstream impacts such as flow, lowering water tables and pollution
- **Efficiency** – ensuring that water is not being wasted unnecessarily
- **Natural factors** – consider how much rainfall an area receives, the water sources available to the area and what access they have to the shared basin
- **Social and economic factors** – the population size, development and welfare of the population
- **Dependency** – the need for the water, and whether they have access to other water sources

CASE STUDY: Colorado River, California

The Colorado River in California is an example of a trans-boundary river in which there are a number of different stakeholders involved. The stakeholders are:

1. **Farmers** – Irrigation for agriculture is one of the biggest uses of water from the river, with 80% being allocated to this. In order to encourage agricultural development the government here supplies farmers with water at a low cost. Water is often waste on flood irrigation methods and the growing of inappropriate crops.
2. **City dwellers** – the southwest states of the USA have become increasingly urbanised. As a result water usage from the Colorado River has increased significantly over the past decades. Water is being used for domestic use such as golf courses and swimming pools, and therefore has resulted in frequent droughts in this region.
3. **Environmentalists and recreationalists** – People are increasingly using lakes and wetland areas for recreation which is a problem according to environmentalists because it is threatening the environment and wildlife in this water ways e.g. Lake Powell by tourists.
4. **Indigenous groups** – Native Americans along the Colorado River have claims of water rights based on treaties and agreements made between their tribes and federal governments in the 1880s.
5. **Mexican People** – The Colorado River reaches the ocean once it has flowed through Mexico. The river though is being used so heavily in the USA it means that it no longer reaches the sea as 90% is taken before it reaches Mexico. The wetlands that once lined the river in Mexico are now barren mudflats, with most of the local fishermen leaving the area due to the loss of fish in the river.



