

# Environmental Studies 305 : Water in the West

A central narrative to the history of western North America is the pursuit of water. The climate is dry and droughts are common, yet some of the most productive agricultural lands in world reside here. Many of the defining features of the West: snowy mountains, raging rivers, large multiuse reservoirs, livestock grazing, potatoes, avocados, fine wine, and growing metropolises depend upon a continual supply of fresh water and cheap power. Technological innovations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have brought more and more water to the people, which have allowed large population increases and expansion into formerly inhospitable terrain. Recent extreme droughts, however, are forcing a reevaluation of the western growth model, which is rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of Manifest Destiny. Furthermore, the prospect of perpetual drought, driven by global climatic change, further questions capability of the West to sustain permanent growth. This course will cover the West's tangled history with water, climate, landscapes, and people. We will use a diverse suite of case studies to highlight western water issues including water resource management, power generation, water law, water economics, and climate change. Ultimately, this course will foster the exploration of human-landscape interactions and contemplate strategies for a sustainable path forward.

**Credits** 4

**Prerequisite Courses**

[Environmental Studies 120: Introduction to Environmental Studies](#)