In a major show of cooperation between the United States and Mexico, representatives from the Colorado River Basin states, the United States government and the government of Mexico signed a historic agreement that furthers the commitments of both countries to the 1944 Water Treaty between the U.S. and Mexico, while recognizing that increasing water demands on the Colorado River will require creativity and flexibility.

Under this five-year agreement, Mexico has committed to accept voluntary shortages when Lake Mead reaches certain levels, while gaining opportunities to receive surplus water under certain conditions.

The agreement, known in treaty parlance as “Minute 319,” also includes a water conservation demonstration project, salinity management language, potential opportunities for Mexico to release its storage for environmental flows in Mexico and the opportunity for Mexico to store some of its treaty allocation for delivery in subsequent years.

Jennifer Gimbel, director of the Colorado Water Conservation Board, called the agreement “monumental” and said it’s important to Colorado for furthering the state’s ability to work collaboratively with the entire river basin—including Mexico—”to use our water resources in an equitable and appropriate manner pursuant to the Law of the River.”

“This agreement is monumental. It is important because the agreement recognizes the finite resources of the Colorado River, but it is monumental because it allows both countries, along with the states and other entities in both countries, to work together and use infrastructure to allow the finite resources to be shared during surplus conditions and reduced in times of shortages,” Gimbel said.

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