

SCIENCE

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CONSERVATION OF THE WATERS OF THE COLORADO RIVER FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE RECLAMATION SERVICE¹

THE Colorado River Basin includes the largest river system lying entirely within the arid region. Its average annual discharge is nearly 18,000,000 acre-feet and it drains 244,000 square miles of territory, nearly all in the United States, less than one per cent. of the area and an insignificant part of the water coming from Mexico. The basin lies in seven different states of the Union and all of them can and should receive benefit from the use of its waters. The trunk stream was navigated for many years from the gulf northward a distance of over 400 miles and before the advent of railroads this navigation was important. It has recently been largely abandoned but the stream is technically and actually navigable. Most of the course of the main stream is in the United States, but for a distance of about 20 miles it forms the boundary between Mexico and Arizona and for about 80 miles flows through Mexican territory. It is therefore an international stream, an interstate stream, and a navigable stream. The waters of the stream not heretofore appropriated to private use are the property of the United States government and the lands necessary for its proper development and use are mainly public lands. Its problems and their administration are therefore distinctly national.

Like most of the streams of the world the discharge of the Colorado River varies greatly in volume. Its low water discharge frequently falls below 5,000 cubic feet per second, and its flood sometimes peaks above 200,000 cubic feet per second. Numerous small valleys are

¹ Presented at the joint meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Pacific Division, Salt Lake City, June 23, 1922.