



# NEWS

## U.S. Department of the Interior

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### **Regional Consulting Conferences to Discuss Water 2025: Preventing Crises and Conflict in the West**

**(WASHINGTON)**-The Department of the Interior will conduct a series of conferences this summer aimed at expanding the dialog on ways of preventing the critical water supply problems facing many communities in the West, Interior Secretary Norton announced today.

The regional conferences are set for Phoenix, Arizona on July 8; Las Vegas, Nevada, July 9; Sacramento, California, July 10; Salt Lake City, Utah, July 16; Boise, Idaho, July 17; Billings, Montana, July 29; Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 12; and Austin, Texas, August 14. The Secretary earlier announced the kickoff conference for Water 2025: Preventing Crises and Conflict in the West, which will be held in Denver on June 6.

"The communities facing the greatest water supply shortages in the coming decades should have a leading role in this effort, and collaboration is critical to develop locally driven, practical solutions," Norton said, noting the importance of working closely with state and local officials, environmental organizations, tribes, and public interest groups.

The goals of the conferences are to identify the watersheds facing the greatest potential risk in the next 25 years, evaluate the most effective ways of addressing water supply challenges, and recommend cooperative planning approaches and tools that have the most likelihood of success.

"The Water 2025 proposal is a commitment to work with and support western governors and local communities as they carry out realistic, community-based solutions," Norton emphasized. Interior can focus scarce federal dollars and technical resources where they provide the greatest benefits. President Bush's FY 2004 budget calls for an initial investment of \$11 million for these efforts.

Significant amounts of water can be conserved by modernizing water storage and delivery systems, working with state and local partners to improve water management with new technology, and targeting technical and financial assistance to help farmers, ranchers, and municipalities make more efficient use of their irrigation and drinking water.

Water 2025 also proposes spurring research and concentrating investment in critically needed areas, such as reducing the cost of desalinating sea water and impaired inland water, providing a more affordable water source for some coastal communities and rural and tribal communities.

The Secretary's blueprint encourages voluntary water transfers through water banks or other water marketing tools. These include agreements that allow agricultural producers the option to rent or lease their water to cities and towns or other users in times of drought, and still have the ability to farm in most years.

"Failing to strategically address long-term, systematic problems caused by competing demands for a finite water supply can have significant consequences," Norton said, noting the conflicts that have developed because of water shortages in the Klamath River and Middle Rio Grande River basins.

"Crisis management is not an effective solution," she said. "This effort aims to speed up the resolution of water supply problems and ensure that the solutions are balanced and durable." A report on the recommendations of

the meetings will be submitted to Secretary Norton and other Administration officials.

The entire proposal may be found at [www.doi.gov/water2025](http://www.doi.gov/water2025). Information on the conferences also will be posted to this website. For information on specific conferences, please contact the appropriate Bureau of Reclamation official listed below:

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