

## Theodore Roosevelt Dam



**Background** In much of the American West, 19th century settlers encountered scarce water supplies. With little rainfall available, they tended to farm near rivers for easy access to the valuable resource of water. Along the Salt River in the Arizona Territory, they followed in the footsteps of ancient native farmers and built irrigation systems to deliver river water to their crops. However, they could not control the rivers.

Times of drought, when the rivers ran low, were countered by times of flood, which could wipe out farms and communities. Throughout the west flood control, water storage and large-scale irrigation projects were attempted by various groups and organizations only to be abandoned due to lack of funding or expertise.

President Theodore Roosevelt realized that harnessing water was the key to supporting Western growth and development. The federal government had the resources to provide both funding and expertise for water projects the west desperately needed and wanted. Congress agreed and passed the Reclamation Act of 1902, creating the U.S. Reclamation Service, later named the Bureau of Reclamation.

**Salt River Project** One of the first federal projects authorized under the Reclamation Act, the Salt River Project (SRP) improved existing dams and irrigation canals and built new dams. Reliable water and power flowed into the Phoenix area. Reclamation's eventual construction of the final feature of the SRP, Bartlett Dam in 1940, marked control of the Salt and Verde Rivers.

Between 1902 and 1940, the Phoenix area population increased by 60,000 people, primarily because water and power had become readily available. The major feature of the Salt River Project was, and remains, the Theodore Roosevelt Dam.