

Green Notes: Weekly tips for reducing your carbon footprint from First United Methodist's Green Team:

Westerners Must Reckon with Overconsumption of Water

How could you reduce your household's use of water? How could our community do the same? Those are questions all Westerners should ask ourselves after this week's federal declaration of a critical water shortage in the Colorado River.

While the declaration doesn't directly affect Montana, it should be a wakeup call. Sooner or later, each of us must reckon with our overconsumption of water and other finite resources.

It is past time to open our eyes to the truth: Climate change and its devastating impacts are here.

"We are seeing the effects of climate change in the Colorado River Basin through extended drought, extreme temperatures, expansive wildfires, and in some places, flooding and landslides," Tanya Trujillo, the Interior Department's assistant secretary for water and science, told reporters on Monday. "And now is the time to take action to respond to them."

Brad Udall, a senior water and research scientist at Colorado State University, told the [Washington Post](#) that about half the decline in the Colorado River's average annual flow — which has fallen 20 percent compared with the past century — is attributable to rising temperatures and half to declines in precipitation.

He and other scientists believe "drought" is no longer the appropriate word to describe the climate in the West. Instead, they say, it is [aridification](#) — a long-term, more permanent desiccation of a region.

Under this week's emergency declaration, water users in Arizona, Nevada and Mexico must cut their consumption. Users in Arizona must use 512,000 acre-feet less water in 2022. That's about 20 percent of the water Arizona receives from the Colorado River each year. Most affected by the first round of cuts will be Arizona farmers, who produce most of the seeds used by American cotton farmers.

Nevada's share of the Colorado River water will drop to 279,000 acre-feet, a 7 percent reduction, in 2022; Mexico's allocation will be cut by about 5 percent. (An acre-foot is about 325,000 gallons, enough water for two or three households for a year.)

If the drought continues, seven Western states will face extreme cutbacks within the next few years. Farm and ranch land will be left without sufficient irrigation, including California's central valley. Businesses and homes will face severe limits on water use. And the massive hydroelectric plant at Glen Canyon Dam (which generates 5 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually) will cease operation for lack of water to run the turbines. The social and economic impacts will be immense.

Here are three excellent articles to help you better understand the situation, one from the [New Yorker's Elizabeth Kolstad](#), plus coverage from the [Washington Post](#) and [New York Times](#).

Share your thoughts and suggestions for how we can reduce our individual water usage in response to climate change. Email sherrydevlin@gmail.com and we'll include your ideas in future "Green Tip" stories. Thank you!