

A Colorado River Basin shortage did occur this year -- in New Mexico

20 HOURS AGO • [TONY DAVIS](#)

While the first shortage of the Central Arizona Project has been delayed a couple of years by a groundbreaking, three-state water conservation agreement, New Mexico's San Juan-Chama water diversion project, which serves farmers and the city of Albuquerque, wasn't so lucky.

The project, which like CAP was built as a way to lessen dependence on groundwater supplies, had the first shortage in its four-decade history this year, the Albuquerque Journal reported today.

Just like the still-delayed first CAP shortage, this one won't have a major impact on water use of operations there. But Journal water reporter John Fleck made it clear that the biggest significance is that it happened at all. The San Juan-Chama project, like CAP, diverts water from the Colorado River Basin, although unlike CAP not from the Colorado itself.

Quoting Fleck's [story](#):

Water managers say the impact on Rio Grande Valley water operations was small, but the implications are significant – a demonstration that a supply once seen as dependable backup to a faltering Rio Grande might not be as reliable as once thought.

'It's one of those things that was always a theoretical possibility, but nobody thought it would come to pass,' said David Gensler, water manager for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, which serves farmers.

When I lived in Albuquerque from 1987 to 1996 and wrote about water for the since-deceased Albuquerque Tribune, I felt New Mexico's water supplies were more fragile than Arizona's, although New Mexico water officials used to say the reverse was true.

Albuquerque typically gets less rain than does Tucson -- about 9.45 inches v. about 11.5 inches annually.. The San Juan-Chama project doesn't deliver nearly as much water as does the CAP--although of course Arizona's water project has far more customers since this state has far more people.

Anyway, in the contest over which state's water project would run short first, New Mexico has apparently won -- or lost, depending on your viewpoint.

Arizona and federal water officials had thought CAP's first shortage could come by 2016 or 2017. But that's been delayed one or two years by the new agreement in which Arizona, Nevada, California and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation agreed to conserve 740,000 acre feet of Colorado River water over three years to prop up Lake Mead.

