Inventory of the Records of the Colorado River Board of California

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Inventory of the Records of the Colorado River Board of California

Collection number: R114

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Inventory of the Records of the Colorado River Board of California
Dates: 1949-1966
Collection number: R114
Creator: Colorado River Board of California
Collection Size: 1.50 cubic feet of textual records
Repository: California State Archives
Sacramento, California

Abstract: The Colorado River Board of California was created by legislation in 1937 (Chapter 838). The records of the Board consist of two series: Office Files (1949-1953), which document the activities and functions of the Board, and Newspaper Clippings (1960-1966), which highlight significant news stories pertaining to actions of the Board and to Colorado River water rights and access issues.

Physical location: California State Archives
Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access
While the majority of the records are open for research, any access restrictions are noted in the record series descriptions.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Colorado River Board of California Records, R114.[Series Number], [box and folder number], California State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento, California.

Acquisition and Custodial History
The State Archives received these records in a series of transfers according to state law.

Administrative History
The Colorado River Board of California was created in 1937 (Chapter 838) to protect the rights and interests of the State of California, its agencies and citizens, in and to the waters of the Colorado River system. The maximum use of Colorado River water is essential to the development of nearly one million acres of agricultural land in the Palo Verde, Imperial and Coachella valleys, and to the domestic, industrial, and municipal water supply for the metropolitan areas of coastal southern California.

California’s interest in the water system of the Colorado River has a long history. In 1921, the Governor was authorized to appoint a representative to an interstate commission for the purpose of negotiating a compact relating to the Colorado River. This resulted in the Colorado River Compact, which was signed on November 24, 1922, and settled some of the
general issues, such as division of water between the upper basin and lower basin, but left unresolved the division of water among the states. In 1925, an attempt was made to divide the water rights among the lower basin states (California, Arizona, and Nevada), but this failed.

As the Boulder Canyon Project Act neared completion, the urgency to reach an agreement increased. A Colorado River Commission was created in 1927 (Chapter 596) to represent the state’s interest, but it soon lapsed with the construction of Hoover Dam, presumably on the basis that it was no longer needed. However, increasing friction led to litigation and three lawsuits were filed by Arizona against California and other states during the years 1931-1936. These lawsuits were successfully defended. As the burden to protect the state’s rights to the river became more pressing and time-consuming, it became necessary to create a separate agency. Thus, the Colorado River Board was given an advisory role to a Colorado River Commissioner, who would have the general function of investigating issues and providing information about the water system, and reporting and recommending to the Governor as appropriate.

In 1940, the duties of the Commissioner were made subject to the direction of the Board. The Board initially consisted of six members appointed by the Governor, one representative from each of the agencies including the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, Department of Water and Power – City of Los Angeles, San Diego County Water Authority, Imperial Irrigation District, Coachella Valley County Water District, and the Palo Verde Irrigation District. The Board represents the state before congressional committees, federal agencies, and in negotiations with other Colorado River basin states. The staff of the Board, consisting mainly of engineers, collects, compiles, and analyzes engineering and legal data on the existing and proposed division and apportionment of the Colorado River waters. In more recent times, the Governor was given authority to add four members to the Board, two from the general public, and the Directors of the Departments of Water Resources and Fish and Game.

For the most part, the work of the Board has focused on sources of conflict over the use of the water system. The problem with Arizona has a lengthy and troublesome history, which relates to the interpretation of the Colorado River Compact, the Boulder Canyon Project Act, and the Mexican Treaty of 1945. In 1952, Arizona filed suit in the United States Supreme Court against California and the six agencies of the Board. In 1963, the Court ruled in Arizona’s favor, which significantly curtailed California’s quota of water. The Court determined that in years when the flow of the river was 7.5 million acre-feet or more, the water would be apportioned as follows: 4.4 million acre-feet to California; 2.8 million acre-feet to Arizona; and the remainder to Nevada. This has formed the foundation for distribution of the lower Colorado River waters. As other projects have arisen, various meetings and discussions have been held among the three states and the federal government. The Court, however, did not decide how to distribute the water in years when the overall flow is less than 7.5 million acre-feet, but left this issue to a determination by the U. S. Secretary of the Interior. In most years, the Secretary has transferred unused portions of other state allotments to make up for California’s shortage.

**Scope and Content**

The Colorado River Board of California records consist of one and a half cubic feet of textual records covering the period from 1949-1966, with a record gap existing between 1953-1966. The collection is organized into two series: Office Files and Newspaper Clippings. The records contain correspondence, memoranda, meeting schedules, agendas, minutes, rosters, reports, speeches, resolutions, hearing summaries, operational data, weekly bulletins, summaries of news events, legislative summaries, public relations files, and newspaper clippings.

In this collection researchers will find interesting materials on the history and functions of the Colorado River Board. The Office Files series contains a variety of documentation of the Board’s activities during the late-1940s and early-1950s. The materials provide insight into the disputes, policies, decisions, and activities of the Board during this period. The Newspaper Clippings series contains significant news stories and issues concerning the lower Colorado River during the early to late 1960s. Some of the article topics include: atomic energy, Arizona water projects, Bridge Canyon Dam, Bureau of Reclamation, California v. Arizona suit, Central Valley Project (CVP), Colorado River Storage Project, drought, Glen Canyon Dam, Hoover Dam, Lake Mead, rainfall, and water supply.

**Accruals**

Further accruals are expected.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library’s online public access catalog.

Colorado River, Water rights.

Water rights. California.

Water supply. California.

Water rights. Arizona.
Series 1 Office Files 1949-1953

Physical Description: 21 file folders

Arrangement
Arranged chronologically.

Scope and Content Note
This series contains the office files of the Board, including correspondence, memoranda, meeting schedules, agendas, minutes, rosters, reports, speeches, resolutions, hearing summaries, operational data, weekly bulletins, summaries of Colorado River news events, legislative summaries, and public relations files. Of particular note is data relating to operation of Hoover Dam and the California-Arizona lawsuit for water rights on the lower Colorado River.

Series 2 Newspaper Clippings 1960-1966

Physical Description: 8 file folders

Arrangement
Arranged chronologically by date of article.

Scope and Content Note
These are clippings received by the Board from a press clipping service. They have been selected, based on significance, from a much larger group of clippings (9 cubic feet) and copied to bond paper. The clippings reflect the broad nature of the Board's work relating to the state's interest in access to and use of the Colorado River. A large portion of the clippings relate to California's suit with Arizona over water rights to the lower Colorado River.