

## FIRST DRAFT

# Water war in 1934 halted dam on the Colorado River

Political disputes, interstate suspicion and funding concerns have long been a fact of life when it comes to the Colorado River. Those same factors now are delaying a final agreement on how to handle drought in the river basin.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

But, at least none of the states involved has called out its navy.

Arizona did that 85 years ago to

prevent completion of Parker Dam, the concrete structure on the Colorado River that backs up Lake Havasu on the border between California and Arizona.

Actually, Arizona's governor called out the National Guard to halt construction of the dam, and the project was delayed for several months. Gov. Benjamin Moeur also ordered some guard members to inspect the construction from steamboats on the river, and they became known as the "Arizona Navy."

These days, Arizona receives large amounts of water for the Central Arizona Project from Lake Havasu. But in 1934, Southern California was to be the sole recipient of water from Lake Havasu once Parker Dam was completed, and Arizona wasn't happy.

Parker Dam was the brainchild of California's famed William Mulholland, the first director of the Los Angeles Water Department and the man who finagled to bring water from California's Owens Valley to Los Angeles.

By the mid-1920s, Mulholland realized the Owens Valley water wasn't sufficient for the anticipated growth of the City of Angels. He authorized a series of surveys to find a way to bring water from the Colorado River to Southern California.

In 1928, with the backing of Mulholland and others, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California was created by the California Legislature.

Three years later, as the Great Depression was well underway, voters in the district approved a \$220 million bond issue to pay for construction of the Colorado River Aqueduct, which would carry the water nearly 300 miles from Lake Havasu to the communities of Southern California.

Parker Dam was to be paid for by the federal government, which was already building the Hoover Dam 150 miles upstream on the Colorado River. The city of Los Angeles agreed to repay the feds for the cost by purchasing hydroelectric power from Parker Dam.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation began construction on Parker Dam in late 1934, and that's when Gov. Moeur called out the National Guard. He believed California was attempting to steal Colorado River water that belonged to Arizona under the 1922 Colorado River Compact. Moreover, because Congress had not yet given its final approval to the project, he argued that construction had



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

Arizona called out its National Guard in 1934 in an effort to halt construction of Parker Dam on the Colorado River.



SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

William Mulholland, head of the Los Angeles Water Department, was the man who first envisioned Parker Dam and the Colorado River Aqueduct.

to stop.

On Nov. 10, 1934, Moeur sent 100 National Guard troops to the dam site, where they set up camps near the construction site and temporarily halted work on the dam.

In a telegram to President Franklin Roosevelt, Moeur wrote, "I therefore found it necessary to issue a proclamation establishing martial law on the Arizona side of the river at that point and directing the National Guard to use such means as may be necessary to prevent an invasion of the sovereignty and territory of the State of Arizona."

Moeur also had some of the troops board steamboats on the river - thus creating the "Arizona Navy" - to inspect the work done on the dam at that time. The boats were owned by an Arizona woman named Nellie T. Bush, whom pundits temporarily bestowed with the rank of admiral of the state's navy.

Unfortunately, the vessels of the Arizona armada became entangled in cables related to the dam construction. The Guardsmen were rescued, to Arizona's great humiliation, by Californians working on the dam.

Still, Moeur's action stymied construction for a time. U.S. Secretary of Interior Harold

Ickes postponed work on the dam until Congress could give its formal approval. Construction resumed in early 1935.

By then, construction was well underway on Colorado River Aqueduct, which uses three different pump systems to lift the water from Lake Havasu 1,600 feet through mountains and the Mojave Desert, before sending it toward the coast.

The first aqueduct water was delivered to Southern California at Pasadena in June of 1941, six years after Mulholland died.

Construction of the aqueduct employed some 30,000 men over the life of the project, making it one of the largest employers in California during the Depression.

Today, the Colorado River Aqueduct provides water to 26 different water entities and an estimated 19 million people through the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

Lake Havasu City, the recreational and retirement community on the eastern shore of Lake Havasu, got its start in 1963 when Robert McCulloch purchased 16,000 acres of Arizona desert and began to layout a community. The city was incorporated in 1978.

McCulloch also purchased the old London Bridge from the

city of London. He had each block in the bridge marked, then the bridge was disassembled and shipped to Lake Havasu, where it was reassembled across a small expanse of water to an island on the lake. The bridge opened to the public in 1971, having cost McCulloch \$5.1 million.

After temporarily halting construction of Parker Dam in 1934, Arizona had to wait many decades before it could claim its share of Colorado River water.

The Central Arizona Project was authorized by Congress in 1968, and construction began in 1973 on the project that would take water from Lake Havasu and send it to the major cities and farming areas of Arizona. The project, involving more than 336 miles of canals and multiple pump stations, wasn't completed until 20 years later.

The Central Arizona Project now provides Colorado River water to more than 80 municipal water entities, irrigation systems and Indian tribes.

As of last week, drought contingency plans for California and Arizona had yet to be finalized and submitted to federal authorities. As a result, federal officials can't say how Lake Havasu would be affected if water levels in Lake Mead drop so low that the drought contingency plans are activated.

Meanwhile, the Arizona Navy remains mothballed.

Sources: "Arizona declares war against California at Parker Dam," by Julia Rosen, in *Earth Magazine*, <https://www.earthmagazine.org/article/november-10-1934-arizona-declares-war-against-california-parker-dam>; "The Colorado River Aqueduct," *Water and Power Associates*, <https://waterandpower.org/museum/Colorado%20River%20Aqueduct.html>; "William Mulholland and 'White Gold,'" *Los Angeles Almanac*, <http://www.laalmanac.com/history/h106de.php>; "The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California," <http://www.mwdh2o.com/WhoWeAre>; U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, <https://www.usbr.gov/>.

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## BLOTTER

COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

The man and woman suspects are seen on security tape.



### Credit card fraud alleged

Mesa County Crime Stoppers hopes someone from the public can help solve a case of stolen credit cards that were later used at area stores.

On Feb. 24, someone broke into two vehicles parked at Canyon View Park, one by the tennis courts and the other off 24 Road by the soccer fields. Credit cards taken from vehicles were used by a man and a woman at both Walmart locations and the Foot Locker in Mesa Mall. Estimated damage and property loss is more than \$8,000.

Anonymous tipsters can call Crime Stoppers at 241-7867. Information that leads to an arrest can mean a cash reward of up to \$1,000. More information is available at 241stop.com.

According to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office:

- Deputies are investigating a possible sex assault in the Highline Lake area that reportedly took place 10 months ago.

- Deputies took a report of a welfare check in the 400 block of 32 1/8 Road on Thursday.

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