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Comparing the Water Rights of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico

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Abstract:

"Water rights" refers to the rights of the users to take water from a water source and use it or sell it. At times when there is plenty of water and small demand, there is generally not much concern over water rights. At other times, especially in arid areas where the demand is large, there are more conflicts as to who has the right to the water. Currently, the rights to water are more important than ever as the population of the U.S. continues to increase and with potential climate change. Each state has its own way for determining water rights. There are two divergent systems, riparian doctrine and doctrine of prior appropriation and each state has adopted one or the other or a combination of the two. Generally speaking, the eastern states are riparian and the western states are prior appropriation. Eastern water systems, based on the riparian doctrine, are represented by Arkansas. Western systems, based on the doctrine of prior appropriation, are represented by New Mexico. In between are those states that have a hybrid system of appropriating water rights. They take some of the characteristics of both the riparian and doctrine of prior appropriation and are represented by Oklahoma and Texas.

Impact Statement:

This project is intended to educate extension, policy makers, and the public. When making policy decisions, we should look at what other states are doing. We can look at what has and has not worked for them. There is no reason for us to make the same mistakes that some other state has made. We also need to educate the extension staff so they can help answer the water rights questions of the general public. The more informed we are as a society today, the more capable we will be in making better decisions tomorrow.

Category: Other Water Resource Topics

Type of Presentation: Poster Presentation