

Evolution of Collaboration between the US and Mexico on the Colorado River

"...From this day forward, for richer, for poorer...in surplus and in shortage..."



Image: Ben Yang, WRRRC Photo Contest

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**CENTRO
LUKEN**

DE ESTRATEGIAS EN AGUA
Y MEDIO AMBIENTE



The U.S.-Mexico Relation: A history of turbulence



The U.S.-Mexican War, 1846 - 1848

- How long before scars of war can heal?
 - Mexico excluded from the Colorado River Compact (1922)
 - Colorado River Land Company and Mexicali's' *El Asalto a las Tierras* / *The Assault on the Land* - (Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas, 1937)

The 1944 Treaty, Constitutional: S. Mumme

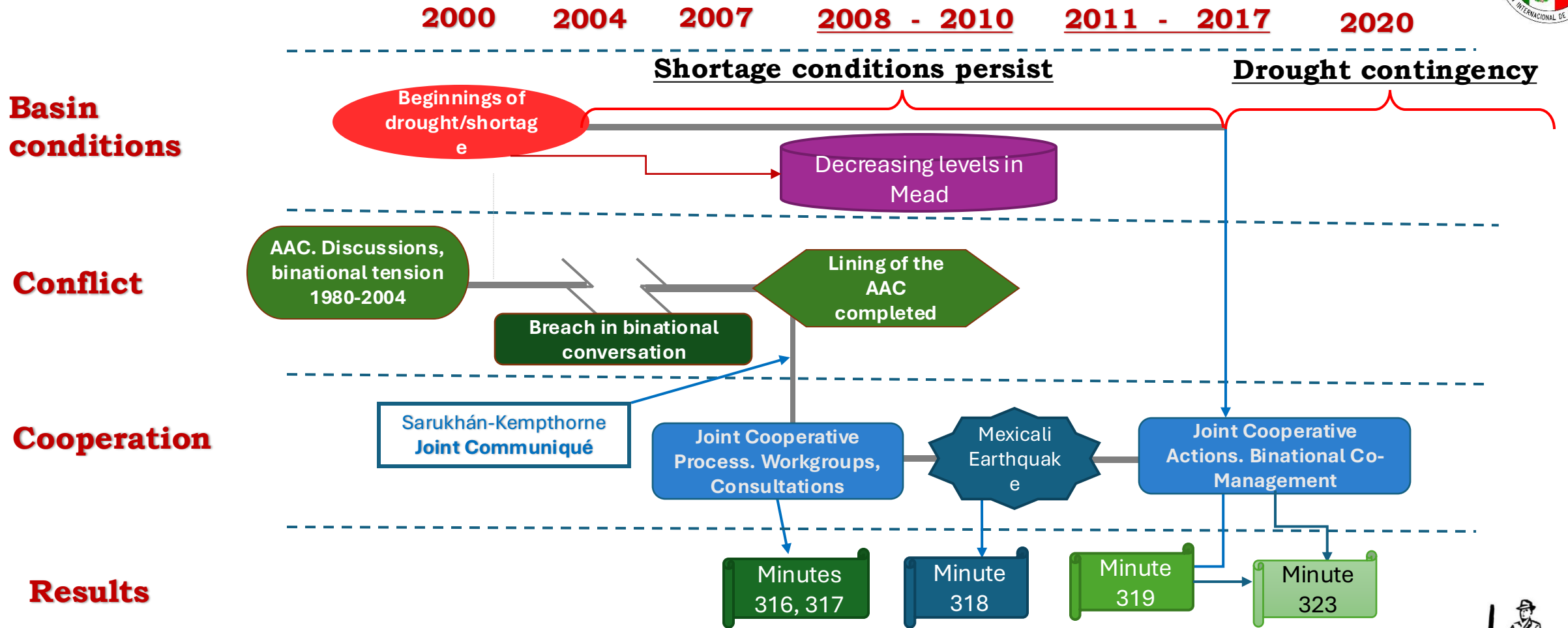
- Its complexity
- Its water-allocation function,
- Its establishment of an implementing agency
- Its allowance for interpretation and amendment,
- Its provisions for fact finding and dispute resolution,
- Its longevity,
- Its general acceptance by stakeholders in both countries



Building mutual trust: An evolving narrative

- 1944: Treaty's historical context, subtext
- 1944 – 1961: The first years (Storage Project, 1956; Basin Project Act, 1968)
- 1961 – 1973: Growing apart (the salinity crisis)
- 1974 – 1999: Years of Surplus
- 2000 – 2006: A looming shortage
- 2007 – 2008: The All-American Canal Issue
- 2010 – 2020: Growing close
 - (a partnership defined in 5 Minutes: 316 – 319, 323)

BINATIONAL PROCESS DIAGRAM



Agricultural community not engaged in process



Mexico's Perspective

(from 1944 – 2012)

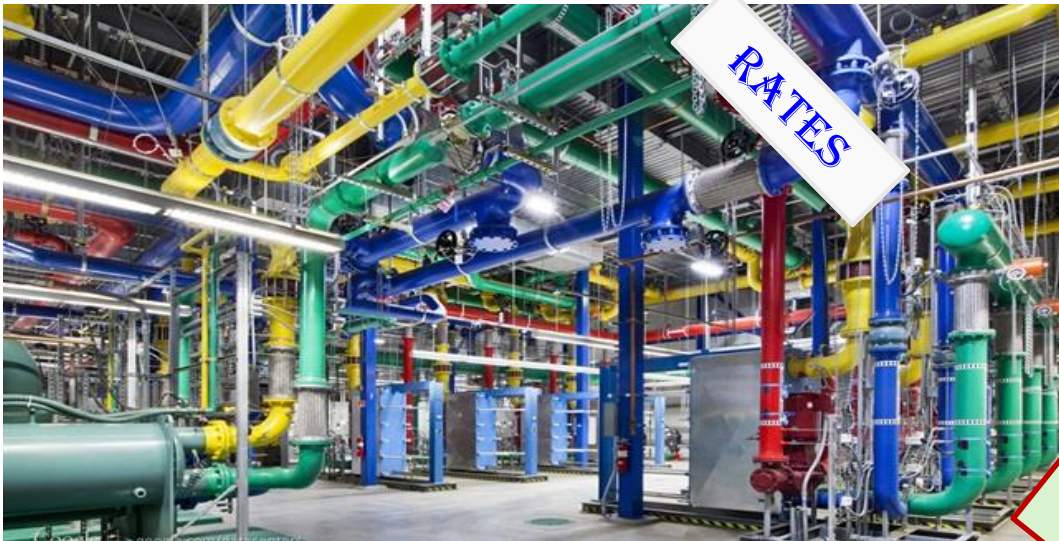
Colorado River



= 1.5 MAF

Infrastructure

LAW OF
THE RIVER



RATES

Water
Markets

Retail / Wholesale
Water Utilities



COMPLEX SYSTEM OF DAMS
FOR WATER AND POWER

Four factors in the evolution

- Overlapping crises: an *environmental* crisis (“hot drought”) added to a *diplomatic* crisis (AAC)
- An outdated, inadequate framework exposed
 - Water conservation cannot happen without storage
 - A revamping of infrastructure and outlook on water in Mexico
- Formalization of a new governance
 - Cross-border environmental advocacy meets citizens’ diplomacy = Advocacy Coalition
- Increased knowledge and capacity
 - NGOs as policy analysts (CBS initiative, transfer of knowledge, crossborder funding)
 - Policy and applied science

U.S.-Mexico Overlapping Interests

Store Mexican water in Lake Mead (ICMA)

- Contributes to higher lake elevations, averts shortage conditions
- Provides Mexico with water insurance for future
- Adds to volume available for environmental flows

Joint investment in infrastructure for water efficiency

- Capital availability in U.S. provides water for U.S. users NOW
- Infrastructure improvements benefit Mexico in long run

Cooperative approach to structural deficit

- U.S. water users exercise restraint, Mexico pitches in with voluntary savings
- Underlying goal to right the watershed

Restore legendary ecology in World Heritage site

- The benefits of restoring the Colorado River Delta are yet to be fully accounted

U.S.-Mexico Agreements: From bilateral to Regional



- **Sudden drop of water elevations in Lake Mead**
 - Numbering in the U.S.
 - Interpretation required for stakeholders in Mexico
- **U.S. Basin States dialogue: bleeding into U.S.-Mexico partnership**
 - Access to funding
 - Policy savvy
- **Mexico seated at the table has been productive**
 - Minutes 319, 323, 330
 - Commitments & Mechanisms for a productive partnership
 - What now for 2026



Thank you...!



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