

# The *GRAND PLAN* (part 2 of 6)

An essay by [Ray Wheeler](#)

## Hoover Dam and the Exportation of Wealth

The spectacular destruction by floodwaters of the first great Colorado River diversion system only added fuel to the smoldering fire of *The Dream*. The lesson of the flood was clear. Waterworks along the lower Colorado would never be safe until the river was tamed by a major dam somewhere upstream. This part of The Great Dream became reality with the completion of Hoover Dam in 1935.

Hoover (later, Boulder) dam was a project of epic scale and magnificent daring—a transcendent inspiration and an object of worship for would-be developers throughout the western United States. The great dam was a prototype not merely for the hundreds of Colorado River basin dams and diversion projects to follow, but also for the

hundreds of major mining, mineral processing, timber, grazing, power plant, waste storage, and industrial tourism projects that would be proposed, initiated, and occasionally completed on the Plateau throughout the next sixty-five years.

The principle reason for building Hoover Dam was to supply the electrical power necessary to transport 4.4 million acre-feet—over a quarter of the Colorado River’s average annual flow—to California. Incidentally the dam would also supply water to Las Vegas and revenue that could be used to finance more water projects.

The dam set a powerful precedent not merely for water projects but for all other forms of development on the Plateau and throughout the West. As with water, so too with all other natural resources. The region’s abundant supplies of coal, oil,



*Department of the Interior - Bureau of Reclamation Lower Colorado Region, Hoover Dam, [Hoover Dam web site](#), Retrieved 10/09/1999*

gas, uranium, and timber lay almost entirely on federal or state-owned lands. With sufficient funding and coordination from the federal government, the Colorado Plateau could be transformed into a lucrative natural resource colony for the urban centers surrounding it.

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