Where Water Goes

Weigh the benefits and costs of water decisions across regions.

USG.P.2.3.C "Evaluate the extent to which political and economic decisions have had significant impact on human and physical environments of various places and regions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline political or economic decisions about water, circle their effects on people or the environment, and number each decision with the effects it caused. Use your marks to judge how far each decision changed a place.

Rivers Divided

1 In the 1960s, Soviet planners expanded irrigation across Central Asia to grow cotton. They diverted water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, the two rivers that fed the Aral Sea. Canals carried river water to dry fields in what is now Uzbekistan and nearby areas. Cotton production created jobs and supplied factories, but many canals leaked or lost water to evaporation. With less river water arriving, the Aral Sea began to shrink. This was a political choice about where water should go, not a natural drought alone. Farmers gained a new water supply while communities beside the sea faced a growing risk.

2 As the Aral Sea retreated, ports in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were left far from the shore. Fishing businesses closed, and exposed lakebed sediments, mixed with salt and pollutants, blew across nearby communities and farmland. The damage did not fall equally: cotton growers could still use diverted water, while fishing towns lost their main industry. In 2005, Kazakhstan completed the Kok-Aral Dam, which holds water in the northern part of the sea. Water levels there rose, and some fish populations returned. Yet the much larger southern Aral Sea remains severely reduced because river water still supports irrigated farming.

3 A similar trade-off shaped the Colorado River in North America. Dams and canals supply farms and cities in the United States and Mexico, but little river water usually reaches the Colorado River delta in Mexico. Wetlands there shrank, reducing habitat for birds and other wildlife. In 2014, a negotiated release of water sent a brief flow toward the delta and helped some vegetation recover. That agreement showed that policy can repair part of an environmental loss. It did not restore regular river flow or reverse decades of change. In both regions, the size and location of benefits and harms depend on who controls the water.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How extensively did irrigation change the Aral Sea region? Use one physical and one human effect to support your judgment.

2. To what extent were the benefits and harms of diverting Aral Sea water shared equally? Compare two groups from the passage.

3. How much of the Aral Sea's damage did the Kok-Aral Dam reverse? Give evidence of both progress and a limit.

4. Compare the extent of recovery after the Kok-Aral Dam and the 2014 Colorado River water release. What evidence shows a limit to each effort?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Propose a new water-sharing rule for either region. In one paragraph, predict its effects on a human community and a physical environment, identify who might receive less water, and judge whether the benefits would outweigh that cost using evidence from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Where Water Goes

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.P.2.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline political or economic decisions about water, circle their effects on people or the environment, and number each decision with the effects it caused. Use your marks to judge how far each decision changed a place. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How extensively did irrigation change the Aral Sea region? Use one physical and one human effect to support your judgment.	**It changed the region substantially. The sea shrank as less river water reached it, and fishing businesses closed when ports were left far from shore.**
2	To what extent were the benefits and harms of diverting Aral Sea water shared equally? Compare two groups from the passage.	**They were not shared equally. Cotton growers gained irrigation water, while fishing towns lost their main industry as the sea retreated.**
3	How much of the Aral Sea's damage did the Kok-Aral Dam reverse? Give evidence of both progress and a limit.	**The dam reversed some damage in the north, where water levels rose and some fish returned. It did not restore the much larger southern sea, which remains severely reduced.**
4	Compare the extent of recovery after the Kok-Aral Dam and the 2014 Colorado River water release. What evidence shows a limit to each effort?	**The dam raised northern Aral Sea water levels and helped some fish return, but the southern sea remains severely reduced. The brief Colorado River release helped some delta vegetation recover, but it did not restore regular river flow.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would require a small, reliable share of Colorado River water to reach the delta each spring before other deliveries are finalized. That regular flow could support wetlands and bird habitat more consistently than the brief 2014 release. Communities near the delta might gain healthier nearby habitat, but farms and cities upstream would have less water available. I think the environmental benefit could outweigh the cost if the reserved share is limited, since the passage shows that even a brief release helped vegetation recover.

Accept different judgments when students support them with accurate passage evidence and distinguish partial recovery from full restoration. For the open task, the rule must be new and its predicted benefits and costs must fit the region described.