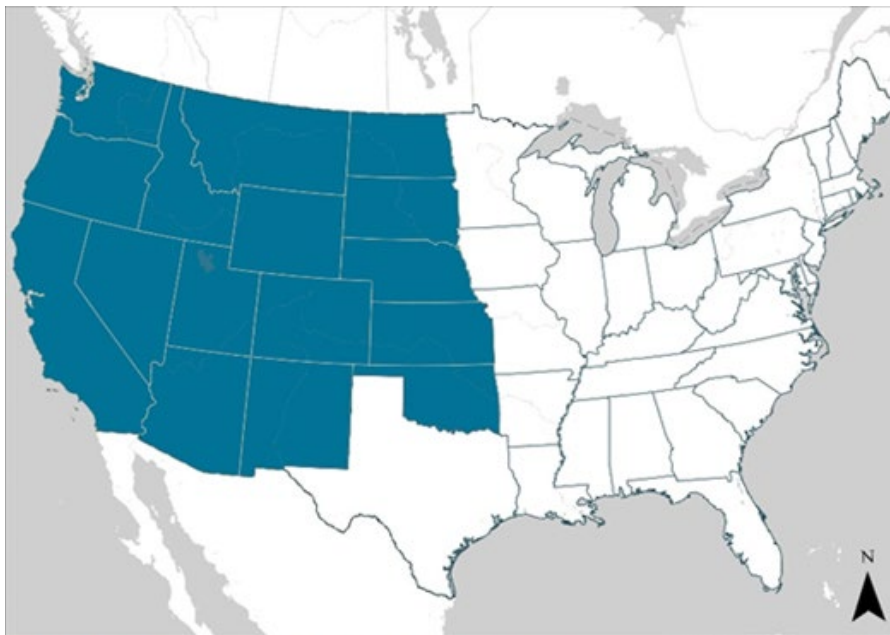




# The Reclamation Act

## The National Reclamation Act of 1902

The National Reclamation Act (43 U.S.C. Ch. 12) was signed into law by President Roosevelt on June 17, 1902. The full title of the Act is, *an Act appropriating the receipts from the sale and disposal of public lands in certain States and Territories to the construction of irrigation works for the reclamation of arid lands*. It was also known as the Newlands Act for its Nevada sponsor, U. S. Representative Francis Newlands. The act authorized the Secretary of the Interior to plan and construct irrigation works in 16 of the 17 arid western states including Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana,



Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Texas was added by separate legislation in 1906. These federal projects would be financed by the federal government, repaid by water users interest-free, then managed by user created irrigation districts.

1902 Reclamation Act States

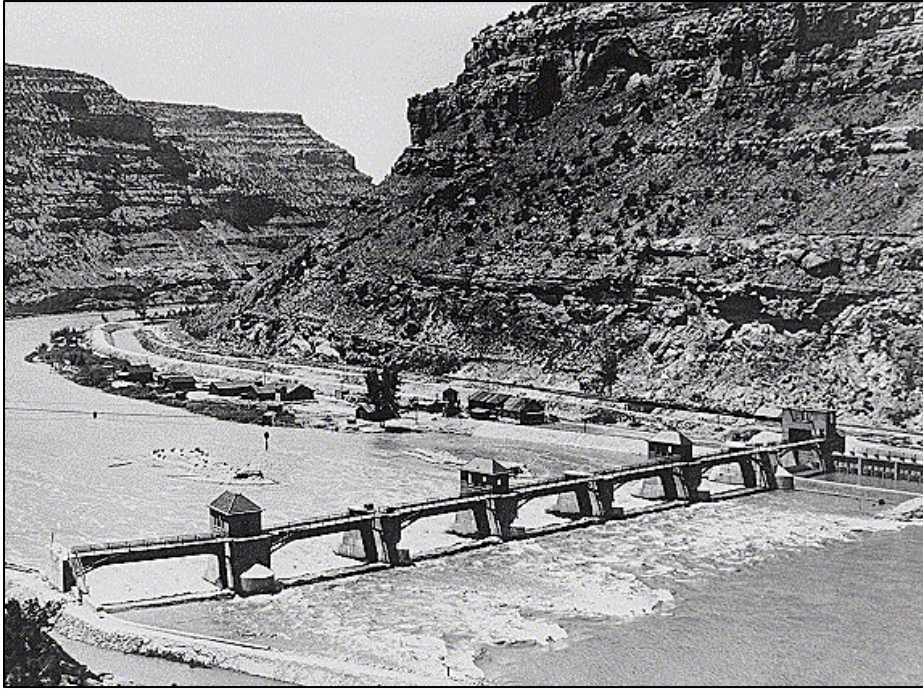
## Setting the Stage

Reclamation Act supporters believed that federal irrigation projects would lead to increased development throughout the western United States. Initially euromerican irrigation efforts diverted water from natural waterways. Water demand increased and water storage was desired to utilize spring snow and rain runoff later in the drier months of the year. Both private and state efforts were made to develop water storage



59.5-pound watermelon grown by Robert Cox. Grand Valley Project, Colorado, 1925 (Bureau of Reclamation)

systems. These frequently failed due to a lack of financing and/or engineering. The coffers and engineering expertise of the federal government was desired to make these large irrigation infrastructure projects a reality.



***“In the arid region it is water, not land, which measures production. The western half of the United States would sustain a population greater than that of our whole country today if the waters that now run to waste were saved and used for irrigation.”***

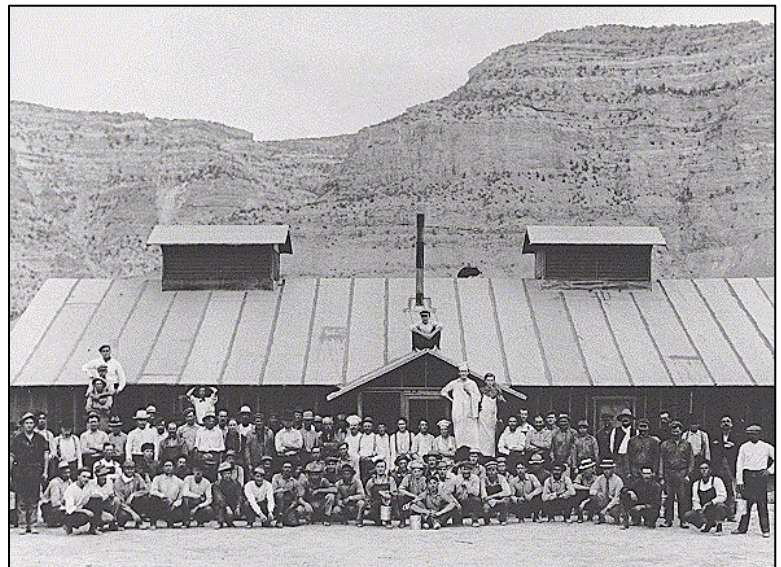
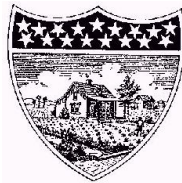
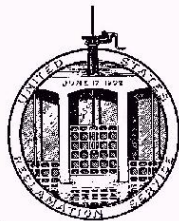
Secretary of the Interior  
Ethan Allen Hitchcock, 1902

*Grand Valley Diversion Dam, Colorado River, Grand Valley Project, Colorado, 1916 (Bureau of Reclamation).*

## Reclamation Service

Secretary of the Interior Ethan Allen Hitchcock created the Reclamation Service within the United States Geological Service’s Division of Hydrography under the 1902 Reclamation Act. The Reclamation Service was renamed the Bureau of Reclamation and placed directly under the Secretary of the Interior in 1923.

*Reclamation Service logos April 1908 (left); July 1908 (right)*



*Workmen at Construction Camp No. 1, Grand Valley Project, Colorado, 1913 (Bureau of Reclamation).*

**Learn more about the Reclamation Act and Bureau of Reclamation’s history at:  
<https://www.usbr.gov/history/>.**