

U.S.G.S. Estimated Use of Water in the United States in 2000

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ABSTRACT

Estimates of water use in the United States indicate that about 408 billion gallons per day (one thousand million gallons per day, abbreviated Bgal/d) were withdrawn for all uses during 2000. This total has varied less than 3 percent since 1985 as withdrawals have stabilized for the two largest uses—thermoelectric power and irrigation. Fresh ground-water withdrawals (83.3 Bgal/d) during 2000 were 14 percent more than during 1985. Fresh surface-water withdrawals for 2000 were 262 Bgal/d, varying less than 2 percent since 1985.

About 195 Bgal/d, or 48 percent of all freshwater and saline-water withdrawals for 2000, were used for thermoelectric power. Most of this water was derived from surface water and used for once-through cooling at power plants. About 52 percent of fresh surface-water withdrawals and about 96 percent of saline-water withdrawals were for thermoelectric-power use. Withdrawals for thermoelectric power have been relatively stable since 1985.

Irrigation remained the largest use of freshwater in the United States and totaled 137 Bgal/d for 2000. Since 1950, irrigation has accounted for about 65 percent of total water withdrawals, excluding those for thermoelectric power. Historically, more surface water than ground water has been used for irrigation. However, the percentage of total irrigation withdrawals from ground water has continued to increase, from 23 percent in 1950 to 42 percent in 2000. Total irrigation withdrawals were 2 percent more for 2000 than for 1995, because of a 16-percent increase in ground-water withdrawals and a small decrease in surface-water withdrawals. Irrigated acreage more than doubled between 1950 and 1980, then remained constant before increasing nearly 7 percent between 1995 and 2000. The number of acres irrigated with sprinkler and microirrigation systems has continued to increase and now comprises more than one-half the total irrigated acreage.

Public-supply withdrawals were more than 43 Bgal/d for 2000. Public-supply withdrawals during 1950 were 14 Bgal/d. During 2000, about 85 percent of the population in the United States obtained drinking water from public suppliers, compared to 62 percent during 1950. Surface water provided 63 percent of the total during 2000, whereas surface water provided 74 percent during 1950.

Self-supplied industrial withdrawals totaled nearly 20 Bgal/d in 2000, or 12 percent less than in 1995. Compared to 1985, industrial self-supplied withdrawals declined by 24 percent. Estimates of industrial water use in the United States were largest during the years from 1965 to 1980, but during 2000, estimates were at the lowest level since reporting began in 1950. Combined withdrawals for self-supplied domestic, livestock, aquaculture, and mining were less than 13 Bgal/d for 2000, and represented about 3 percent of total withdrawals.

California, Texas, and Florida accounted for one-fourth of all water withdrawals for 2000. States with the largest surface-water withdrawals were California, which had large withdrawals for irrigation and thermoelectric power, and Texas, which had large withdrawals for thermoelectric power. States with the largest ground-water withdrawals were California, Texas, and Nebraska, all of which had large withdrawals for irrigation.