

Water Use History

The USGS National Water-Use Science project has documented 60 years of water-use from 1950 to 2010 in an interactive map. Choose a year and pick a category to see how much water your state uses. USGS has been collecting data from States since 1950. Spanning 60 years of water-use nationally, this collective data set not only shows variations across the country and throughout time, it lays the framework for an emerging story about our evolving relationship with water.

<https://www.usgs.gov/news/how-much-water-do-we-use>

People and industries are changing how they use water as populations grow, technology advances, and regulations evolve. To assess these changes, the USGS developed an [interactive data visualization](#) that shows freshwater use by state every five years from 1950 to 2010. This tool allows users to discover the most comprehensive national-scale data on water use for the United States. The USGS compiles and estimates this water-use information in cooperation with State, Federal, and local agencies. The estimates are reported by categories including public supply, irrigation, and thermoelectric power.

The visualization highlights how differently one half of the country uses water from the other. Water withdrawals for thermoelectric power generation are most prominent in the eastern half of the country while water-use for irrigation is predominant in the west.

Trends within each category are also notable. Water-use associated with public supply increased steadily from 1950 to 2005, then dipped a bit in 2010 despite an increase in population. Industrial water-use for manufacturing dropped from peaks of approximately 39,000 million gallons per day in 1970 and 1980 to approximately 17,000 million gallons per day in 2010, the lowest value seen in the USGS data for this category. The decrease in industrial water-use reflects higher efficiencies in industrial processes and regulations that emphasize water reuse and recycling, as well as economic conditions.