

How Are Shifting Socio-Demographics Altering Water Demand?

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Rapid population growth across the Southwest is increasing municipal water demand. But this increase in population is only half the story.

The demographics of our urban and rural areas, along with levels of wealth and income distribution, are shifting in ways that are impacting water uses. Housing is changing as well, with home ownership rates reaching historic highs and ever-shrinking households moving into ever-larger homes. Newer homes also have significantly different landscapes, appliances and fixtures than the existing housing stock. All these changes impact indoor and outdoor water demand.

Values and preferences are shifting as well, with impacts on other water demand sectors. The explosive growth of ranchettes has brought new residents into close proximity with traditional water uses such as ranching, farming, and mining, creating friction. And as water resources become more scarce, demand for environmental amenities and water-based recreation is increasing.

The net effect and timing of all these factors cannot be predicted with precision, but certain broad trends are evident, and their likely impacts are discussed.