

U.S. water use at lowest levels since 1970

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According to a new U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) report, U.S. water usage has declined to its lowest level in the past 45 years. Despite major growth in the U.S. population and economy since 1970, water use has remained relatively stable and decreased significantly between 2005 and 2010. The report measures water withdrawal, which includes any removal of water from natural sources including groundwater, surface water, and salt water, even if it is returned to waterways after use.

Power plants use the most water, at 45 percent of total U.S. withdrawals, but efficiency improvements decreased usage by 20 percent from 2005 to 2010. Irrigation, the second-highest category at 33 percent of total withdrawals, has declined 9 percent over the same period. Only two categories, mining and aquaculture, increased their water use, but these account for just four percent of total withdrawals and do not offset gains from other sectors.

The report attributed the decreases in water use to many factors, including more efficient systems and technology, stronger environmental regulations, and limited water resources. The deputy secretary of the Interior praised these developments in a statement, drawing a contrast between the growing U.S. population over the last 45 years and steadily declining water use.

Sources: E&E News, U.S. Geological Survey
