

Rio Grande River

Just west of Del Rio, Texas, passengers have a clear view of a river with a grand name and cultural impact, if not a grand quantity of water. The Rio Grande River, or Rio Bravo del Norte as it is called in Mexico, is the fourth largest river system in the United States, spanning 1,885 miles. This river serves as the stage for various recreational activities, as well as shaping the southern border between Texas and Mexico. The Rio Grande River originates in Colorado's Rio Grande National Forest, and joins with several streams as it flows through New Mexico and on to El Paso. From El Paso to Brownsville, where the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf of Mexico, the river forms the border between the United States and Mexico.

The name "Rio Grande" is very deceptive - in fact it is not very wide, nor is it deep enough to be navigated by any passenger or cargo vessels. The name Rio Grande, or "big river" as it is translated in English, does not reflect the size of the river, but it potentially points to the significance of this body of water and the way in which it shapes the lives of many. The river not only serves as a governmental dividing line, but it flows as a marker of cultural blending and diversity. Because it is very shallow at most points, it has long been fairly easy for people to cross between the countries. Many of the 'border towns' that have formed on the north and south banks have culturally meshed, and now contain elements of both American and Mexican culture.

The river is managed by both countries with a series of agreements through the US- Mexico Boundary and Water Commission. Though both nations make a considerable effort to manage the river, the water of the Rio Grande is seriously over-appropriated. Simply too many people and industries in the region draw from the river to support their homes, crops and industries. The effects of overuse can be seen in incidents such as in the summer of 2001 when a sandbar formed at the mouth of the Rio Grande, and water ceased to flow into the Gulf of Mexico. Since that time the waters of the river have fluctuated, but at times have been insufficient to reach the gulf.

Continued efforts of the US and Mexico to manage this river system will be needed to ensure that this river remains flowing for centuries to come.

Source(s):

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