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Week 11

Water Infrastructure — Lead Pipes, Broken Dams, and the Colorado River Crisis

"Lead pipes, broken dams, and dry rivers are not acts of God. They are the result of decades of deferred maintenance."

1. The Problem

American water infrastructure is graded D+ by the American Society of Civil Engineers — 240,000 water main breaks per year, an estimated 9 million lead service lines in use (EPA 7th DWINSA estimate — note: in November 2025 EPA revised this to approximately 4 million based on utility inventory data, but NRDC challenged the revised estimate as unreliable due to incomplete reporting by states; the true figure is disputed and falls between 4-9 million), 200 million Americans drinking PFAS forever chemicals, and Lake Mead at approximately 30-35% capacity as of mid-2026 — confirmed from Bureau of Reclamation data — while seven states fight over a shrinking Colorado River with no plan to add water to the system.

2. The Governing Principle

Lead pipes, broken dams, and dry rivers are not acts of God. They are the result of decades of deferred maintenance and political avoidance of hard decisions. The federal government funds the replacement, the remediation, and the long-term water security solution. This week names the Colorado River crisis. Week 26 builds the answer.

3. The Specific Policy

Water Infrastructure Investment

- **Lead pipe replacement fully funded on a 10-year timeline:** EPA estimates between 4 and 9 million lead service lines remain in use depending on the counting methodology — disproportionately in low-income communities and older cities including Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Newark, and Baltimore. The 2021 Infrastructure Act allocated \$15 billion — not enough to address the full scope regardless of which estimate is correct. The platform fully funds complete replacement on a 10-year timeline. Mandatory utility inventory within 90 days of inauguration; replacement on a priority schedule weighted by the age of children served; real-time water quality monitoring with public dashboard reporting. There is no safe level of lead in drinking water.
- **Drinking water infrastructure modernization:** \$625 billion needed over 20 years per EPA drinking water needs surveys. Federal action using Army Corps of Engineers capacity redirected from reduced overseas deployments (Week 13). Priority: systems losing 30-50% of treated water

through leaks and facilities operating on 1950s equipment.

PFAS Contamination — 200 Million Americans Drinking Forever Chemicals

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances — PFAS, known as forever chemicals — contaminate drinking water for an estimated 200 million Americans per EPA and USGS monitoring data. The EPA designated PFAS as hazardous substances in 2024. PFAS are linked to cancer, thyroid disease, immune system disruption, and developmental harm in children.

- **DoD funds full PFAS remediation at military-adjacent communities:** not partial remediation. Not a study. Full cleanup to EPA maximum contaminant levels. The military caused the contamination at bases where AFFF firefighting foam was used for decades. The military pays for the cleanup.
- **National PFAS monitoring mandate:** all public water systems serving more than 10,000 people test quarterly and publish results in real time. Americans have a right to know what is in their water.
- **PFAS manufacturer liability pursued:** 3M, DuPont, and Chemours knew the risks and concealed them for decades. Full cost recovery pursued through Superfund and litigation. The taxpayer does not pay for damage that corporations deliberately caused and concealed.

Agricultural Water Efficiency

- **Agriculture accounts for 80% of western water consumption — the highest-impact lever available:** (1) Subsidized drip irrigation conversion at 50% federal cost-share — reduces water use 30-50% with no yield reduction. (2) Crop switching payments for voluntary transition to less water-intensive alternatives. (3) Fallowing payments during acute drought, freeing water allocation without permanent economic loss. (4) Mandatory metered groundwater monitoring for all agricultural irrigation wells in adjudicated basins.
- **Colorado River compact renegotiation:** the 1922 compact allocated more water than the river produces in an average year. Lake Mead at approximately 30-35% capacity is not a temporary drought condition — it is the structural consequence of a 100-year-old compact written during an anomalously wet period. The compact must be renegotiated to reflect actual sustainable yield. Week 26 builds the supply-side answer through desalination at the Yuma, Arizona campus.

4. Estimated Cost

Lead pipe replacement program: \$45-120 billion total capital investment over 10 years depending on final count of lead service lines (range reflects the disputed 4-9 million figure). Federal share at 75%: \$34-90 billion federal, \$11-30 billion utility. Drinking water infrastructure modernization: federal action over 20 years, prioritized by risk and population served. PFAS military remediation: DoD funded — not general appropriations. Agricultural water efficiency: \$2-5 billion per year in subsidized conversion and fallowing payments. All estimates independently scored by CBO within 90 days.

5. Year 1 Implementation and Measurable Result

Year 1 measurable result: mandatory utility lead service line inventory within 90 days; lead pipe replacement federal funding committed within 180 days; DoD PFAS remediation plan published within 90 days; agricultural water efficiency program funded within 180 days; Colorado River compact renegotiation initiated. Lake Mead baseline: approximately 30-35% capacity as of mid-2026 per Bureau of Reclamation data, projected to decline further without intervention.

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