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Where The Spirit Of The Lord Is, There Is Liberty
II Corinthians 3:17

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The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Isaiah 9:2

A River For Phoenix

There was a time when water flowed in the Salt River, usually after the spring run-offs. People used to go down to the Central Avenue Bridge to watch the flow. While the river seldom stayed up long enough to make boating worthwhile, a lot of youngsters used to get in some swimming.

Those days ended with the building of dams on the Salt and the Verde, beginning nearly 60 years ago. Now the only water in the Salt is floodwater, which generally goes beyond the normal river basin and damages abutting property.

Three or four years ago, a group of fifth-year students at the ASU College of Architecture conducted a class project on the possibility of putting water back into the Salt as it passes through Tempe, Scottsdale and Phoenix. They called it the Rio Salado Project, resurrecting the old Spanish name for the Salt River, and they came up with schemes for putting low-level dams in the Salt and backing up water into man-made lakes in the metropolitan area.

LAST WEEK, under the chairmanship of Dean James Elmore, the third conference in the Rio Salado series was held in Scottsdale. About 100 civic and municipal leaders heard new elaborations of the plan, and were given the benefit of the further studies made by succeeding classes of ASU architecture students.

Phase 1 of the program calls for twin lakes, four miles long, in the river as it runs between Scottsdale and Tempe. The shores of the lake would be used for public (parks, fairgrounds, cultural events, picnic grounds) and private (restaurants, motels, apartment buildings) purposes, adding an additional dimension to the recreational and commercial life of metropolitan Phoenix.

Phase 2 would include a similar development from the Central Avenue Bridge eastward to the boundaries of Phase 1, and eventually the entire river from Granite Reef to the Gila River could be made into a year-round water resource of tremendous possibilities.

THERE ARE a lot of obstacles in the way of putting water back into the Salt River. First, the water must be secured. Possibilities are an appropriation from the Central Arizona Project, when it is finally built, or a re-routing of the Salt River Project delivery system, so that the water would be put into the river and then taken out again. (Evaporation and seepage are admitted drawbacks in this plan.)

A great new source of water that might be tapped is the reuse of the effluent from the sewage treatment plant southwest of Phoenix. The water could be purified, and delivered to the upstream lakes.

A basic need would be for flood control channels, which the county and the Army Engineers Corps have been working on. But there might be difficulty in putting lakes over the channels.

Finally, at least half of the land in the river bottom is privately owned, and it now provides Central Arizona with much of the sand and gravel required for the cement that goes into roads and buildings. To put the river basin back into the public domain and to provide for the continued mining of the gravel pits will not be easy.

BUT WHO CAN think of a string of lakes along the Salt River without realizing what a fantastic asset they would be to Phoenix, Tempe, Scottsdale, Mesa and the entire metropolitan area?

"Probably no city in the world has such an undeveloped area in its heart as Greater Phoenix does in the Salt River," said Dean Elmore.

The task now, of course, is to refine the present studies, to make cost estimates, to work out all the ramifications of the Rio Salado and eventually to put water back into the river.

Last week's conference voted to transfer the development of the Rio Salado Project to Valley Forward, which has succeeded Valley Beautiful. A catalyst, intended to bring the Valley's resources to bear on such problems, Valley Forward is the right agency for this job. ASU's College of Architecture has developed a brilliant idea; Valley Forward now should move ahead with it.