



FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA

MANY NATIONS, ONE JOURNEY TO HEAL OUR RIVERS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Concerns for the threatened Colorado River Basin drive Indigenous Leaders from Arizona on a remarkable journey to meet the Māori peoples of the Whanganui River. After winning a 175-year battle, the Whanganui River Tribes inspired the world when New Zealand law recognized their river as a living entity.

From the Mountains to the Sea is a short documentary two peoples who share one dream to protect their rivers for all of us.



This Discussion Guide is designed to encourage deeper engagement with the concepts highlighted in the film. In particular, those concerning the health and healing of our rivers. This guide was developed for educational purposes and is intended for use by diverse audiences, including 7-12 grade classrooms, universities & colleges, and communities.

ABOUT THE RIVERS

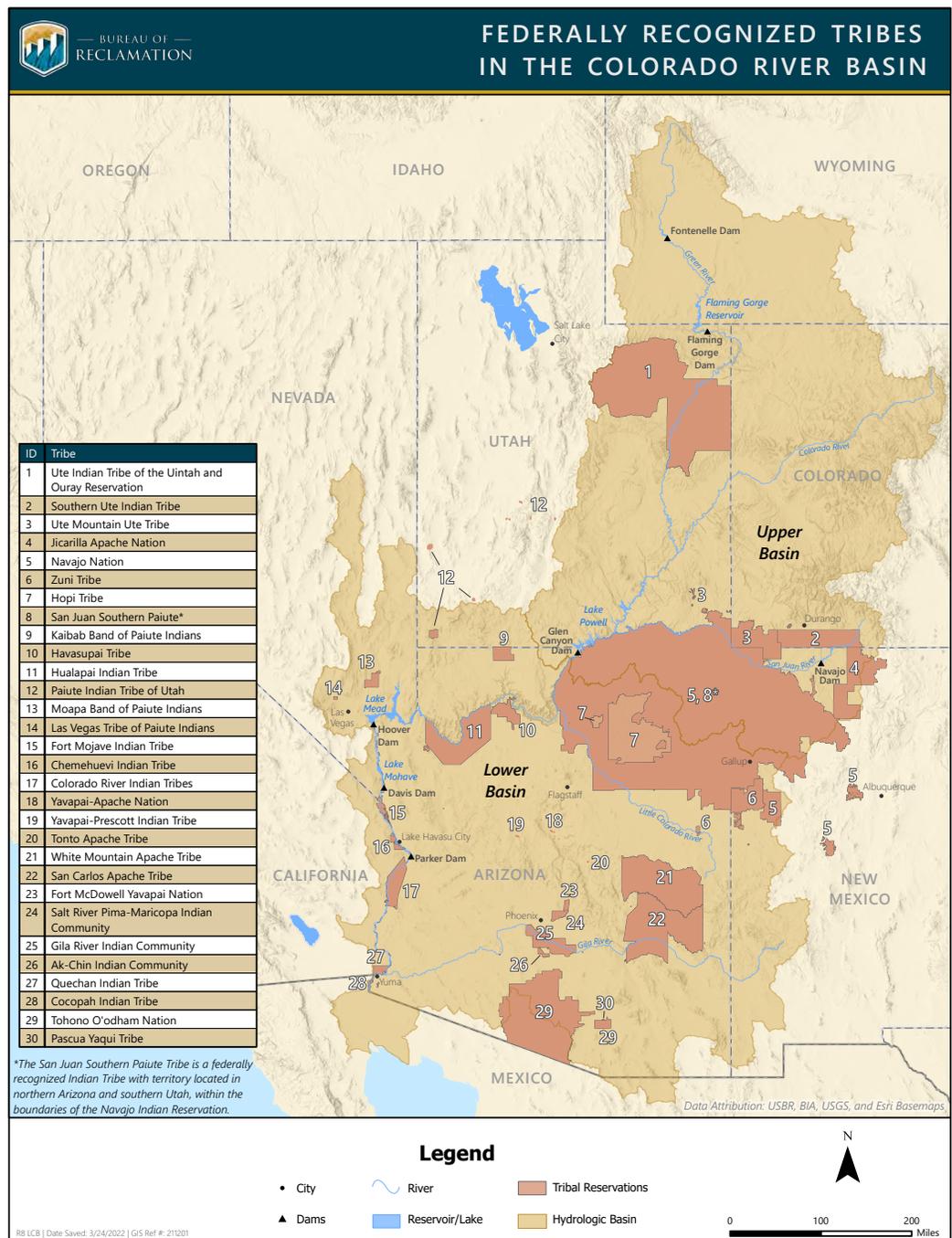
Take a moment to learn a bit more about the Whanganui and the Colorado Rivers.

TE AWA TUPIUA (WHANGANUI RIVER)	COLORADO RIVER BASIN
	
<p>Whanganui Iwi (tribes) include those who descend from Ruatipua, Paerangi, Haunui-ā-Pāpārangi and collectively exercise customary rights and responsibilities in respect to the Whanganui River.</p>	<p>Thirty tribes maintain ancestral and historic ties to the Colorado River Basin. Twenty-two have recognized legal rights to the river.</p>
<p>The Whanganui River is the third largest river in New Zealand and is located in the lower part of the North Island.</p>	<p>Located in the Southwestern United States and northern Mexico, the Colorado River watershed encompasses seven U.S. states and two Mexican states.</p>
<p>With its headwaters in the Tongariro National Park, the River flows from Tongariro National Park, and through the Whanganui National Park to the Tasman Sea.</p>	<p>Starting in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, the river runs through the Grand Canyon in Arizona, and across the international border to the Gulf of California.</p>
<p>Whanganui River is New Zealand’s longest navigable river, stretching for 180 miles (290 kilometers).</p>	<p>The Colorado River is 1450 miles (2330 kilometers) long and is the sixth largest river in the U.S.</p>
<p>Its major tributaries are the Ōhura, Ongarue, Whakapapa, and Retaruke Rivers.</p>	<p>Its major tributaries are the Green, Gila, San Juan and Little Colorado Rivers.</p>

The Colorado River Basin is at Risk

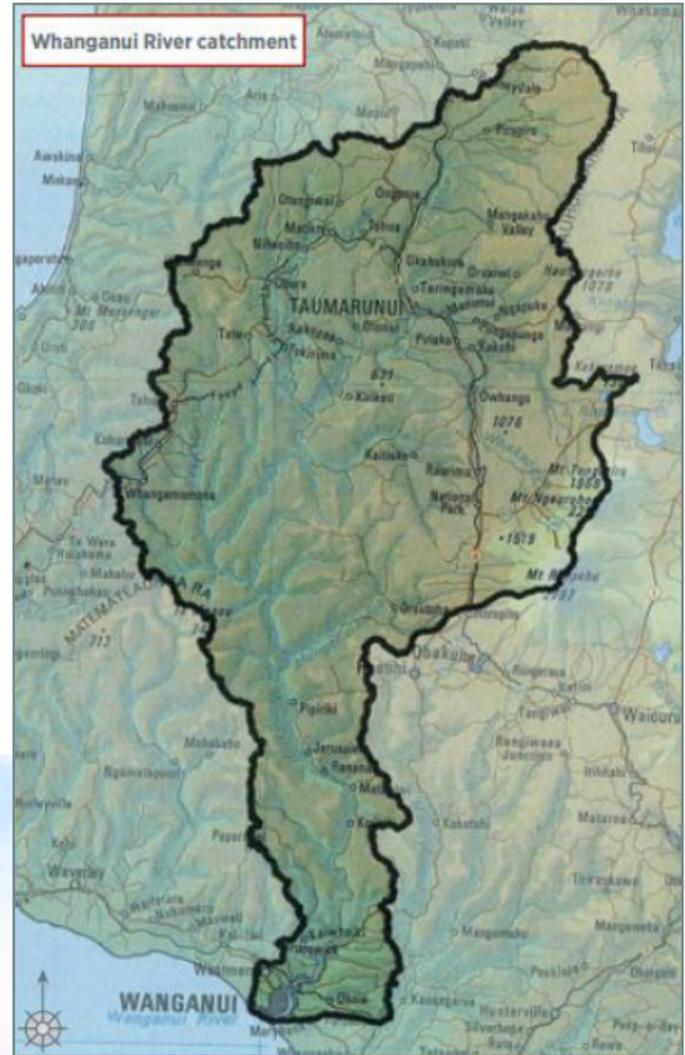
Thirty federally-recognized tribes maintain historic ties as stewards of the Colorado River Basin, yet the laws that guide the river’s management have long been developed without them. Now, more than any other time in history, climate change, rising temperatures and a mega-drought threaten the river’s health. The region has now focused its attention to renegotiating the management rules, including tribes for the first time.

Over 40 million people throughout the Western United States and Mexico depend on the Colorado River. As we enter a period of uncertainty about its future, it is critical to look to the knowledge keepers of the Colorado River Basin Tribes. The Colorado River Basin Tribes are actively engaged in planning for the future of the river. They are committed to an equitable planning process and restoring the health of the river.



Inspiration Behind the Film - Te Awa Tupua

The Māori peoples of the Whanganui River have achieved national recognition of the river as an indivisible, living entity. More than a century of laws, regulations and actions of the Crown had fragmented the Whanganui River, diverting its headwaters, stemming its flow with hydroelectric dams and threatening its health - much like what has happened with the Colorado River. In 2017, the New Zealand parliament passed unprecedented legislation, recognizing the legal 'personhood' of the Whanganui River: [Te Awa Tupua \(Whanganui River Claims Settlement\) Act 2017](#). This monumental act is a legal framework by which the innate relationship of the River to the People and the People to the River is upheld. A relationship built on mutual respect, accountability and care.



Te Pou Tupua

Te pou o te whakatupua	The celestial post
Te pou o te whakatawhito	The ancient post
Te pou o Ranginui e tū nei!	The pillar of universal order!

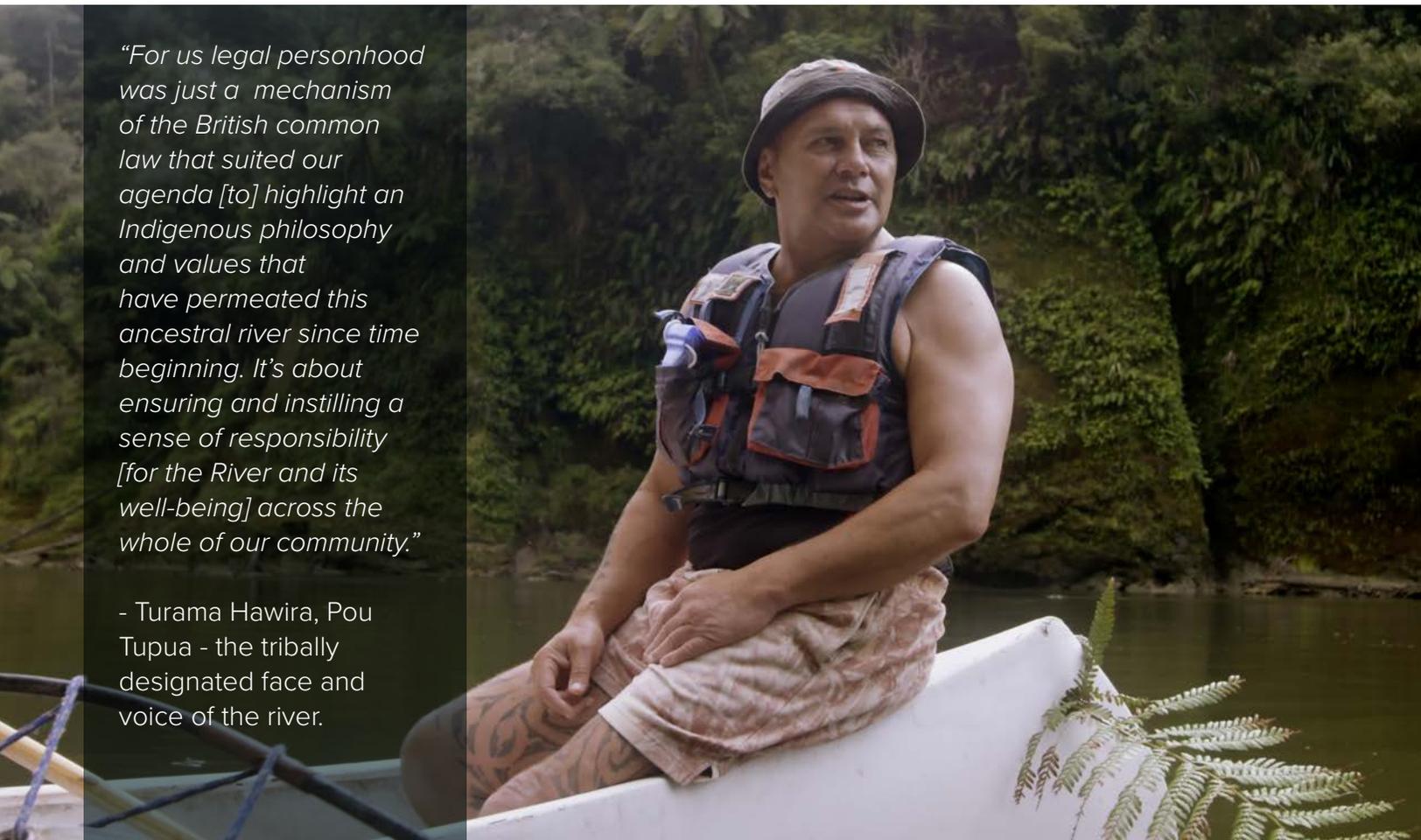
The Whanganui River as a legal person (Te Awa Tupua) requires a human agent that can take steps to act on its behalf and uphold its status, protecting its health and well-being in the name of Te Awa Tupua. Te Pou Tupua is a revered position established to perform this role and act as the human face of Te Awa Tupua. Te Pou Tupua are the voice of Te Awa Tupua in line with Tupua te Kawa. Tupua te Kawa – are the innate values of Te Awa Tupua that stem from a hapū and iwi value system.

Te Pou Tupua is a single role, held by two persons: Turama Hawira and Keria Ponga. The appointment is made jointly by both the iwi with interests in the Whanganui River and by the Crown, symbolising not only the Treaty partnership between Iwi and the Crown, but also the Crown's ongoing responsibility to uphold Te Awa Tupua.

The role is supported by the Office of Te Pou Tupua and by Ngā Tāngata Tiaki o Whanganui, the Post Settlement Governance Entity, which was set up to serve the people, the river, and to implement the Te Awa Tupua Framework.

“For us legal personhood was just a mechanism of the British common law that suited our agenda [to] highlight an Indigenous philosophy and values that have permeated this ancestral river since time beginning. It’s about ensuring and instilling a sense of responsibility [for the River and its well-being] across the whole of our community.”

- Turama Hawira, Pou Tupua - the tribally designated face and voice of the river.



NEW KUPU

(Words, Vocabulary, Statements)

From the Mountains to the Sea is a bilingual film in English and Te Reo Māori (the Māori language Indigenous to Aotearoa/New Zealand). This is a list of some of the Māori and English kupu you heard in the film along with their definitions. Definitions were sourced from [Te Aka Māori Dictionary](https://www.te-aka-maori.govt.nz/) and from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>, unless indicated otherwise.

Aotearoa	The Māori name for New Zealand. Originally used by Māori in reference to the North Island, it is often translated as ‘land of the long white cloud’.
Capitalism	An economic and political system in which a country’s trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.**
Colonial law	Colonial law encompassed the totality of the legal norms and research which related to the governance and administration of overseas regions conquered by Western powers.***
Customary law	Governing systems and laws that are deeply embedded into Indigenous cultures, social norms, and structures.
Iwi	Extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race.
Kawa	Customs, values, and rituals.
Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au	I am the river, the river is me.
Legal Personhood	A body of persons or an entity (as a corporation) considered as having many of the rights and responsibilities of a natural person.
Metaphysical elements	Examples of metaphysical concepts are being, existence, purpose, relation, universals, spiritual essence, causality, space, time, property, and events.
Te Awa Tupua	Refers to the Whanganui River; translates to ‘ancestral river’.
Crown	The symbolic representation of the New Zealand government.

** Oxford Languages / *** European History Online

HISTORICAL JOURNEYS

Below is a historical timeline highlighting just a few pivotal moments in the rivers' journeys. Read through the timelines and discuss any similarities and differences between the two over the last two centuries.

TE AWA TUPUA	COLORADO RIVER BASIN
<p>1840 Treaty of Waitangi is signed affecting the legal ownership and management of the land and waterways, including the Whanganui River.</p>	<p>Mid-1800s tribes are forcibly removed from their ancestral lands by the U.S. government and confined to reservations.</p>
<p>Late 1800s steamers and gold and coal prospectors extract river resources, degrading traditional fishing sites.</p>	<p>Large-scale water diversions start in the late 1800s. Gold and silver strikes draw prospectors to the upper Colorado River basin.</p>
<p>1920 Settlers propose hydroelectric dams. The NZ Statutes grant Whanganui River Trust Board entitlement to the river, infringing on Whanganui Iwi customary rights.</p>	<p>1922 Colorado River Compact legally allows seven states to use more water than is available. Tribes are excluded from the compact.</p>
<p>1962 Court of Appeals upholds legislation conveying the riverbed to the Crown. This decision closes all legal avenues for Iwi to pursue ownership of the riverbed.</p>	<p>1963 Glen Canyon Dam is built. This marks the last time the Colorado River reached the sea without humans intervening to release the dams and allow water flow.</p>
<p>Manawātū-Whanganui region is home to 220,000 people. There is extensive agriculture, forestry and coastal floodplains.</p>	<p>40 million people depend on the Colorado River's water for agriculture, industry and growing populations.</p>
<p>2017 New Zealand parliament passes legislation recognizing legal 'personhood' of the Whanganui River.</p>	<p>2021 U.S. Bureau of Reclamation declares a water shortage for the first time due to historic drought and low runoff conditions. Some tribes are included in negotiations for the first time.</p>

Discussion Question:

Given some of the similarities, what differences do you think might have contributed most to the difference in the rivers' current status?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following is a list of questions facilitators can use to guide discussion.

1. Te Pou Tupua, Turama Hawira, talks about how the iwi view their ancestral river, Te Awa Tupua, as an indivisible whole, incorporating its tributaries and all of its physical and metaphysical elements from the mountains to the sea. What are some examples of the physical and metaphysical elements of a river?



2. Emerging leader, Amanda Cheromiah, shares her perception: "Every part of the generations that are there know who they are and know what their responsibilities are as caretakers of the Whanganui River." What does it mean to be a caretaker of a river or the land? What might be some of the similarities and differences in how people see, think, act, relate and care for the Colorado river in the U.S. versus the way the Whanganui Iwi care for the Whanganui river?



3. Raukura Naani Waitai talks about the significance of "*Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au*". If one river is unwell, we are all unwell. What responsibilities do we have to care for our rivers, and for our wellness and healing? What about the wellness and healing for all of humanity and the planet?



4. Vice Chairman Shan Lewis contemplates whether successful court cases with local and federal government should be seen as legal or spiritual victories. What do you think he means by "spiritual victory"?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following is a list of questions facilitators can use to guide discussion.

5. Aleena Kawe acknowledges that the New Zealand government has legislated the customary laws of the Māori people. What would need to change for the U.S. to legislate Indigenous laws that help protect the natural environment? Do you think legal personhood could help restore the health of the Colorado River, from the mountains to the sea? If so, how? If not, why?



6. Valerie Welsh Tahbo talks about how she sees things connecting. She knows the people at home know they are tied to the land and water. What actions can we take to reconnect with the rivers and water sources in our home areas? In what ways can we live that connection?



7. Many of the rivers found in the Colorado River Basin once flowed year round are dry. Councilwoman Herminia Frias shares that all she could think about when she was swimming was that the rivers back home are ill. She asks us, “How do we heal? How do we go back and heal the river? How do we heal from where we are now?” How would you respond to her questions?



From the Mountains to the Sea is a co-production between Red Star International, Inc. and Te Pou Tupua, Turama Hawira in Whanganui, and Anna Marbrook Productions.

Film Director/Producer:

Anna Marbrook

Film Producer:

Aleena M. Kawe (Hiaki)

Executive Producer:

Turama Hawira, Te Pou Tupua

(c) 2021 Red Star International, Inc.

For more information, contact:

Red Star International, Inc.

PO Box 57271 • Tucson, AZ 85732

<https://redstarintl.org/>

info@redstarintl.org

+1 (520) 777-9208 (US)

+64 9 889 1206 (NZ)

Indigenous leadership exchange hosted by Red Star International, Inc. in partnership with the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. and Te Pou Tupua. Support for the film was provided by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Support for this educational resource was provided by Agnese Nelms Haury Program in Environment and Social Justice.



ABOUT RED STAR

Red Star International, Inc. (Red Star) is an Indigenous-led, U.S. based nonprofit organization co-located in Tucson, Arizona and New Zealand. Red Star's mission is to advance self-determination for the well-being of humanity and the environment. Since 2007, we have sought to advance Indigenous Peoples' inherent right to freely assert their sovereignty and political status. We work in partnership with Native Nations, organizations and communities to positively impact health. We do this by providing programs and services that aim to:

- **Transform health systems** to create greater alignment between our work and our values. Through collaboration with our communities, we strengthen the interconnected relationships, interactions and values within tribal health systems to improve all aspects of Indigenous wellness.
- **Restore the well-being of humanity and the environment** by privileging Indigenous leadership, knowledge and practices. We know our relatives hold the knowledge vital to reclaiming the health of the Earth. Red Star looks to our customary ways inherited from our ancestors to heal the environment that Indigenous people have nurtured for generations.
- **Promote canoe traditions** to affirm cultural identity, community connection and our relationship with, and responsibility for, the natural environment. We support the revitalization and preservation of traditional canoe practices focusing on traditional voyaging and mātangirua – sailing outrigger canoes.