

THE NATION

Colorado River water deal is reached

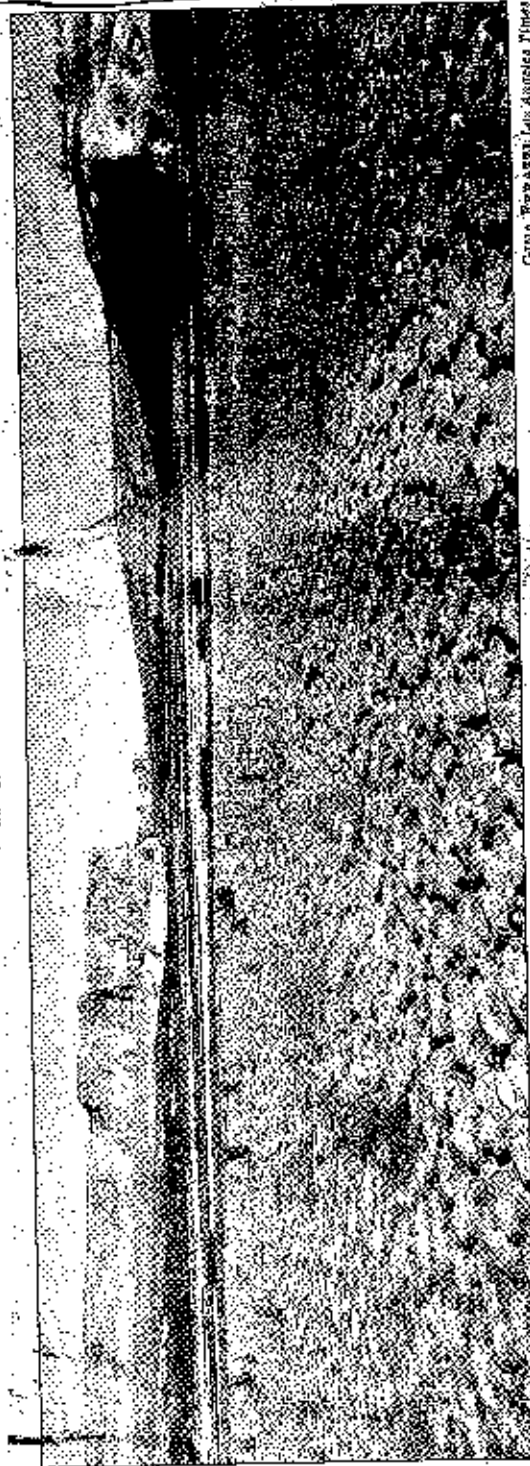
The Interior secretary calls it an 'agreement to share adversity.'

By BETTINA BOXALL
and ASHLEY POWERS
Times Staff Writers

LAS VEGAS — The federal government Thursday ushered in a new era of shortage on the Colorado River, adopting a blueprint for how it will tighten the spigot on the West's most important water source.

The guidelines, more than two years in the making, come in the eighth year of the worst drought in the century-long historic record of the Colorado River, which supplies water to 26 million people and 1 million acres of farmland.

Federal water managers say a shortage could be declared as early as 2010, allowing the Department of the Interior to re-



Chris Pappas/Los Angeles Times

'NO SIGN OF ENDING': The Western drought has left Lake Powell, above, and Lake Mead, the Colorado River's two mammoth reservoirs, half-empty. One study this year warned that global warming could thrust the Southwest into a permanent drought by 2050.

duce water deliveries to Arizona and Nevada, two of the seven states that have sparred over the waterway for decades. California, which has the biggest water allocation and senior rights in

the lower basin, would not be affected. The drought has left Lake Powell and Lake Mead, the river's two mammoth reservoirs, half-empty, their receding shore-

lines marked by a wide band of bleached rocks that a decade ago were under water. Without some wet years, Lake Mead may never refill, federal hydrologists say. "We have had good news and bad news," Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne said in a speech before signing the document at the Colorado River Water Users Assn. meeting at Caesars Palace. The bad news, he