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The Water Resources Institute (WRI) historic aerial photograph collection now has over 100,000 images digitized and posted on the WRI website. Each photograph contains metadata related to the individual photo, and images date as far back as the 1920s. This is the largest collection of California digitized aerial photographs coded with metadata that are available to the public on the internet. The primary focus is the largest river in Southern California, the Santa Ana River, but the collection also covers the High Desert and the Salton Sea areas and other parts of the West as well. Much of the collection is from either San Bernardino Flood Control and Conservation District or Riverside County Flood Control and Conservation District. The collection also includes other WRI holdings and donations of smaller collections.

The collection has gained a sizable audience of users, including US Fish and Wildlife, the Salton Sea Authority, many law firms, environmentalists, and consultants of all types, including anthropologists, historians, and seismologists. The aerial photos have been used to plan and build many aspects of water infrastructure, including dams and dikes, as well as the locations of pipelines, channels, reservoirs, and more. The flood control districts currently use the photos to plan flood control infrastructure and study flow patterns in areas where there isn't much urbanization. Local home owners have even accessed the photos to look at their houses from the sky, and historians use them to track growth and population movements.

Most of the funding comes through donations from various water agencies and particularly the Pinkie Brier estate. Without the student interns being supported by this estate, this project would not be possible. This year's interns include Cynthia Bernal (Mathematics major), Dolores Mancha (Health Science, Public Health major), and Elias Rex (Geography major). The students also learn valuable skills that are transferable to their careers.

You can watch the collection grow by periodically accessing the website at <http://wri.csusb.edu/archives/HistoricalAerialPhotos.html>. These digital photographs are maintained under the auspices of the WRI and the Pfau Library. Using estimates approved by CSUSB Advancement in the past, this project has a value of over 4 million dollars currently.