



SOUTHERN NEVADA WATER AUTHORITY

1001 South Valley View Boulevard • Las Vegas, NV 89153
(702) 258-3939 • snwa.com

August 15, 2022

The Honorable Debra Haaland, Secretary of Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tanya Trujillo, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland, Assistant Secretary Trujillo, and Commissioner Touton:

Sixty-two days ago, Commissioner Touton and I sat side by side in the United States Senate and conveyed to the world that the Colorado River is on the brink of a crisis. She testified that between two and four million acre-feet of additional conservation is needed to protect critical elevations in Lakes Mead and Powell in 2023 and every single year thereafter, and I testified that what has been a slow-moving train wreck for twenty years is accelerating and that our moment of reckoning is near. We were both right then and we're both right now.

Yet despite the obvious urgency of the situation, the last sixty-two days produced exactly nothing in terms of meaningful collective action to help forestall the looming crisis. The unreasonable expectations of water users, including the prices and drought profiteering proposals, only further divide common goals and interests. Through our collective inaction, the federal government, the basin states and every water user on the Colorado River is complicit in allowing the situation to reach this point.

In the absence of the political will to forge collective action, Nevada will continue our efforts to ensure the security and sustainability of our community. We have been clear-eyed and pragmatic about the realities of the situation confronting the river from the beginning. Nevada has spent the last two decades and billions of local dollars preparing for precisely the scenario that confronts us now. The Southern Nevada Water Authority invested \$1.4 billion engineering and constructing the third intake and low lake level pumping station to ensure our community's access to water in Lake Mead even if conditions deteriorate to the point that water cannot be released from Hoover Dam downstream to the country of Mexico and to water users in California and Arizona. Our community has blazed the trail for urban water conservation both nationally and internationally by reducing our consumptive use from the river by

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26 percent while adding more than 750,000 people to our valley. This year alone, we will leave sixty-five thousand acre-feet of water in Lake Mead – water that we’re legally entitled to divert and consume.

Nevadans are not the kind of people to rest on our laurels, and we are not stopping there. We have a workable plan to reduce water use from 110 gallons per capita per day to 86 gallons by 2035. These measures are not easy to implement. Every sector of our community has been – and will continue to be – required to make sacrifices, our elected officials will continue to make hard but necessary decisions, and we will continue to lead by example in the hopes that enough people of good will throughout the basin will join us on the path to water security.

To the broader river community, I say this: The Law of Mass Balance dictates that the Colorado River cannot provide enough water for the current level of use. The magnitude of the problem is so large that every single water user in every single sector must contribute solutions to this problem regardless of the priority system. The math is simple, even if the law and the politics are not: the bulk of the responsibility to reduce use falls upon water users downstream of Hoover Dam, because that is where the bulk of the water is used.

We are at the stage where basin-wide every drop counts, and every single drop we are short of achieving two to four million acre-feet in permanent reductions draws us a step closer to the catastrophic collapse of the system, as well as draconian water management practices to protect health and human safety that we have successfully staved off in the past through cooperation. Each temporary action must be a bridge to permanent reductions and must be implemented post-haste. We must not sit by and celebrate the small victories that fall short of the goal because to do so does a disservice to the communities we serve.

Our next chapter must be nimble, swift, decisive, and action-oriented. The Secretary of Interior has the tools to prevent the reservoirs’ decline if there is the support and fortitude to use them. To that end, we recommend the following actions be taken to minimize the consumptive uses of water from the Colorado River through existing federal authorities, programs, and appropriations:

- Create new beneficial use criteria for Lower Basin water users, eliminating wasteful and antiquated water use practices and uses of water no longer appropriate for this Basin’s limited resources
- Develop criteria for managing facilities, reservoirs, and projects for health and human safety operations in order to create certainty and predictability in the face of further reservoir declines
- Create a basin-wide municipal turf removal program to increase payments to customers where publicly available programs already exist
- Expand agricultural efficiency improvements that result in consumptive use reductions
- Eliminate wasteful municipal watering of non-functional turf and require seasonal irrigation schedules be implemented and enforced
- Invest in water reuse, water recycling, and desalination programs
- Purchase additional lands under the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program to prepare for habitat restoration under a significantly modified system
- Incentivize conversions to lower water-use crops
- Charge each contractor for evaporation and losses in the Lower Basin so that the Lower Basin can reduce its reliance upon excess water from the Upper Basin to balance reservoirs

- Reprioritize Salinity Control Act funding to only those projects that reduce consumptive uses of water, including following agreements and the purchase of marginal lands
- Accelerate and fund necessary improvements and modifications at Glen Canyon Dam that will increase predictability and reliability of releases under low reservoir conditions
- Prioritize federal funding for drought mitigation to those projects that provide meaningful long-term and permanent reductions in use

Without active and aggressive federal leadership, the states have always wallowed. We welcome an expedient and aggressive approach to implementing these actions. Writing the next chapter will require each and every water manager to convince their elected officials and governing bodies that sacrificing something is the only way to save everything. Should these efforts fail, we are ready to work with any of our willing partners on common-sense federal legislation that helps bring water usage in line with the river's modern-day hydrology. By missing this deadline, we are doing a disservice to every person, city, ecosystem, farmer, rancher, and tribal nation that relies upon the Colorado River; however, through bold and decisive action, we still have a chance to ensure the safety of all our communities.

Nevada stands ready.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John J. Entsminger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John J. Entsminger
General Manager