

**MONDAY MORNING GROUP OF WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY
ANNUAL ADVOCACY TRIP – WASHINGTON, DC
APRIL 9 – 11, 2024**

COLORADO RIVER

ISSUE: Reducing demand on the Colorado River (River) is of critical importance to address the river's overallocation and to protect critical infrastructure at Lakes Mead and Powell by maintaining levels that allow for continued power generation. This demand reduction across the Southwest requires a solution that works for all seven Basin States and Mexico, including the 40 million people and nearly 6 million acres of farmland that rely on the Colorado River.

ACTION: The Monday Morning Group urges the administration to support a framework that protects the Law of the River, which has provided stability for the states for the last century and offers additional voluntary conservation that respects existing law and leverages available federal funding for water use efficiency. We also urge the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to effectively deploy funding made available through the Inflation Reduction Act to reduce demand on the Colorado River.

BACKGROUND: Water from the Colorado River has been an essential part of Southern California's economic vitality for nearly 100 years; it provides water for its more than 20 million people and supports a nearly \$2 trillion economy. It also provides water and hydroelectric power to seven California counties, and irrigates over 600,000 acres of farmland, supporting a \$6.2 billion farm economy in Riverside and Imperial Counties. The Colorado River has also provided a reliable water supply when the bleak hydrology in California creates shortages around the state.

Fortunately, California knows how to permanently reduce use of the river; we have worked to reduce demand over the past 20 years, through billions of dollars of investments and the development of hard-earned partnerships. Water agencies in Riverside County, like Eastern and Western Municipal Water Districts, have effectively reduced demand by over 40 percent over the last two decades and are serving twice the population with the same quantity of water. California's path to sustainability was laid in 2003 when it permanently lost access to 800,000 acre-feet of Colorado River water, which equates to a 15 percent reduction. Through agricultural, tribal, and urban partnerships that conserve and transfer supplies, California has reduced its use to its apportionment of 4.4 million acre-feet. Metropolitan Water District of Southern California has forged agreements and funded conservation programs with agricultural users in the Imperial and Palo Verde valleys. Other states have not similarly implemented water management programs and made investments with agricultural users to conserve water, and instead, they seek reductions from California's water supply outside of the parameters of the Law of the River.

In August 2022, the Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation called for the Colorado River Basin states to develop a plan to reduce demand on the river by 2 to 4 million acre-feet. In response, California advanced a proposal in October 2022 that commits California agencies to reduce demands by up to 17 percent, depending on the level of Lake Mead. The proposal was supported by Monday Morning Group as a viability that can be implemented quickly and avoids the delay and uncertainty of litigation. The voluntary component of the proposal preserves conservation agreements within California and across the Basin, including tribal partnerships. Because most of the contemplated reductions in the California plan are incentive-based, utilizing federal funding from the Inflation Reduction Act will result in greater support and participation. In addition, the proposal protects communities across the West by prioritizing water for human health and safety.

Subsequent developments shifted the discussion and in May of 2023, Reclamation announced a consensus proposal in which Lower Basin states agreed to conserve a total of 3 million acre-feet prior to 2026, with 2.3 million acre-feet of these cuts compensated by the federal government via \$4 billion in drought response funds provided by the Inflation Reduction Act. In October 2023, Reclamation released a new draft supplemental environmental impact statement analysis of the Lower Basin's consensus proposal. Reclamation noted that previous modeling was based on 2022 hydrology and that improved 2023 hydrology had significantly decreased the chances of both reservoirs reaching critical levels prior to 2026. Reclamation is studying long-term (post-2026) operational alternatives.

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Separately, in October 2023, Reclamation published a *Proposed Federal Action* and a *Scoping Summary Report* on Colorado River Basin operations after 2026. Reclamation identified 10 primary public comment themes for the post-2026 process. Reclamation will now begin writing a draft environmental impact statement to create strategies that can withstand different hydrological conditions. That draft is expected to be finished by the end of next year, and a finalized version will be available late 2025.