



PRESS RELEASE

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Statement from ADWR Tom Buschatzke regarding today's testimony by Camille Touton, Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation, to the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources

Commissioner Camille Touton's description earlier today regarding conditions on the Colorado River system should remove any remaining doubt that the Colorado River States and our federal partners have a duty to take immediate action - no matter how painful - to protect the system from crashing.

This morning, she identified the need to conserve between two million and four million acre-feet of Colorado River water on top of the amounts already being conserved. I have seen the data Commissioner Touton has seen and I agree with her conclusions.

She further observed that the Bureau will take action to protect the system if the Colorado River Basin states do not. I fully support her encouragement to the states to act on our own behalf.

Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona noted Arizona's "junior" water-rights status and observed that "if our state absorbed this two-to-four million acre-foot loss, it would wipe out water deliveries to cities, tribes and farms in Phoenix and in Tucson."

Kelly then asked: "If the Basin States cannot reach an agreement, is the Department prepared to take actions to impose restrictions on other states without regard to river priority?"

In response Commissioner Touton said, "Yes, we will protect the system. But we're not at that decision point yet. So, let's get to the table and figure this out by August."

It is gratifying to hear the Commissioner's commitment to protecting the system. It is vital, however, that the states propose a plan before the United States is forced to take that drastic action unilaterally.

We have done much in recent years to protect this vital system. By her comments today, the Commissioner has rendered it clear that the powerful impact of a decades-long drought and a changing climate requires us now to do much, much more, and to do it quickly.

Arizona and others in the Colorado River Basin have conserved substantial volumes of water since 2014. Taken together, those efforts have resulted in an additional 70 feet of elevation at Lake Mead.

When earlier steps proved insufficient, we did more. That needs to be our united approach going forward: We will do whatever it takes. Circumstances now beckon us further toward immediate and substantial actions.

This includes the passing of \$1 billion at the Arizona Legislature for water conservation and new sources.

In 2007, we established concrete guidelines stipulating how the river system should be operated under shortage conditions. In 2014, Arizona began voluntarily leaving a portion of its Colorado River allocation – in most years, almost 200,000 acre-feet – in Lake Mead.

In 2019, the Secretary of the Interior and the seven Basin States signed the celebrated Drought Contingency Plan agreements, which included voluntary reductions in water deliveries under specified conditions and increased conservation efforts on top of the 2007 Guideline reductions.

And, just last fall, we took additional actions with the 500+ Plan, which is designed by the Lower Basin States to conserve a minimum of an additional 500,000 acre-feet per year in 2022 and 2023 in Lake Mead.

In implementing the reductions specified in the 2007 Interim Guidelines, the 2019 Drought Contingency Plan and the 500+ Plan, Arizona is on a path to reduce its use of Colorado River water by more than 800,000 acre-feet in 2022.

Despite all these efforts, reservoir levels at Lake Powell and Lake Mead have continued to decline, as the Commissioner just described.

The trend of less-than-average runoff, even with near-normal precipitation, is projected to continue. As a result, we in Arizona and water users across the Basin need to do more to protect the system. Again, we will do whatever it takes.

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