



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Washington, DC 20240

APR 08 2022

Mr. Peter Nelson
Governor's Representative
State of California
770 Fairmont Avenue, Suite 100
Glendale, California 91203

Dear Mr. Nelson:

As all who rely on the Colorado River are well aware, the Colorado River Basin is experiencing prolonged drought, low runoff conditions, and depleted storage in Lake Powell and Lake Mead. Recent studies indicate we are experiencing the driest conditions in the Basin in more than 1,200 years. These unprecedented challenges and changes in the Basin's runoff began more than two decades ago. The best available science indicates that the effects of climate change will continue to adversely impact the basin.

In light of the continuing drought and low runoff conditions, in recent weeks technical staff from the Bureau of Reclamation, along with Interior leadership, have communicated our concerns with projected runoff in the Colorado River Basin and the risk of Lake Powell and Lake Mead declining to critically-low elevations over the next 24 months. Our staff has worked diligently to explain the basis for these risks and concerns with representatives of the Basin's Tribal nations, other federal and state agencies, the Republic of Mexico, water users, and non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). As you know we have also communicated these concerns to each of you in your roles as the Governor's Representatives of the seven Colorado River Basin States.

Presently, staff from the Bureau of Reclamation and the Upper Division States are working closely with the Lower Division States, Tribes, other federal agencies, and NGOs to complete a 2022 Drought Response Operations Plan, as required by the 2019 Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan Authorization Act. Pub. L. No. 116-14 (Apr. 16, 2019). We are prioritizing these efforts and anticipate that the 2022 Drought Response Operations Plan will be finalized within the month.

Notwithstanding these robust, ongoing efforts to analyze potential releases from Colorado River Storage Project initial units to protect critical elevations at Lake Powell, we believe that additional actions are needed to reduce the risk of Lake Powell dropping to elevations at which Glen Canyon Dam releases could only be accomplished through the river outlet works (i.e., below elevation 3490' mean sea level (msl)), or hydropower operations infrastructure at Glen Canyon Dam would be adversely impacted (i.e., as reservoir elevations decline towards elevation 3490' msl). In such circumstances, Glen Canyon Dam facilities face unprecedented operational reliability challenges, water users in the Basin face increased uncertainty, downstream resources could be impacted, the western electrical grid would experience uncertain risk and instability,

and water and power supplies to the West and Southwestern United States would be subject to increased operational uncertainty.

Glen Canyon Dam was not envisioned to operate solely through the outlet works for an extended period of time and operating at this low lake level increases risks to water delivery and potential adverse impacts to downstream resources and infrastructure. In addition, should Lake Powell decline further below elevation 3490 feet, we have recently confirmed that essential drinking water infrastructure supplying the City of Page, Arizona and the LeChee Chapter of the Navajo Nation could not function.⁵ Given our lack of actual operating experience in such circumstances since Lake Powell filled, these issues raise profound concerns regarding prudent dam operations, facility reliability, public health and safety, and the ability to conduct emergency operations.

Consistent with applicable federal law, and applicable provisions of the 2007 Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead (73 FR 19873), we are fully committed to consult with the Basin States and work together to consider these concerns and develop and implement responsive operational strategies.

The Bureau of Reclamation is also fully committed to operate Glen Canyon Dam in a safe manner and maintain reliable downstream releases. However, given the ongoing low runoff conditions, as stated above, we are approaching operating conditions for which we have only very limited actual operating experience – and which occurred nearly 60 years ago. We hope to be able to delay or avoid operational conditions below the critical elevations referenced above but we fully realize that absent a change in the recent hydrological conditions, we may not be able to avoid such operations. This reality reinforces the need for the Basin States, and all entities in the Basin, to prioritize work to further conserve and reduce use of Colorado River water to stabilize the System's reservoirs. As we engage in that regard, we will continue to work cooperatively with each of you to develop prudent, temporary actions this calendar year to protect critical elevations at Lake Powell. In particular, in conjunction with any potential 2022 Drought Response Operations Plan releases the Department respectfully requests your consideration of potentially reducing Glen Canyon Dam releases to 7.0 maf this water year and providing additional certainty regarding annual release volumes and tier determinations for the 2023 water year. Sections 6 and 7.D. of the 2007 Interim Guidelines authorize the potential reduction under current circumstances.

Given the need to make prompt decisions and implement actions in a timely manner, we request your feedback and recommendations on or before April 22, 2022. Doing so would facilitate prompt decision making in the spring of this year, enhancing our ability to implement responsive actions in a timely manner.

We stand ready to work with each of you, along with our ongoing consultation and engagement with the Basin's Tribes, other federal agencies, the Republic of Mexico, water users, and NGOs. We appreciate your prompt attention to this important and urgent matter.

⁵ Reclamation estimates that at elevation 3465 feet these intakes would not function and staff are actively working with local officials about this concern.

Sincerely,



Tanya Trujillo
Assistant Secretary
for Water and Science

cc: Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation
David M. Palumbo, Acting Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation
Wayne G. Pullan, Regional Director, Bureau of Reclamation
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Identical Letters Sent To:

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