

United States Senate

March 3, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum,

In light of the recent Office of Personnel Management memo calling for significant reductions in the federal workforce, we, as United States Senators representing the Lower Colorado River Basin States, strongly urge the Department of the Interior (Interior) to ensure that any cuts do not further impact the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). Reclamation is already a primarily operational rather than regulatory agency, and staff are indispensable to managing water in the West, where water systems are highly technical, complex, and closely coordinated with state, tribal, and local authorities.


In that same vein, we strongly urge Interior to immediately rescind the funding freeze for projects under the Lower Colorado River System Conservation and Efficiency Program (Program). This Program, funded with an initial allocation through the Inflation Reduction Act and managed through the Bureau of Reclamation, has been instrumental in increasing water conservation, improving efficiency, and preventing the Colorado River system's reservoirs from reaching dangerously low levels that threaten water deliveries and power production.

The entire Colorado River Basin – supporting 40 million people and 5.5 million acres of agricultural land across seven states – depends on a stable and reliable water supply from Lake Mead. That's why the Program is so critical – it directly adds water to Lake Mead. In Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024, funded projects contributed 1.2 million acre-feet of water, raising the lake's elevation by an astounding 15 feet. This year, planned projects were set to conserve an additional 734,000 acre-feet, adding another 9 feet to the lake's elevation. The water savings produced by these projects were pivotal in securing the historic seven-state consensus agreement in 2024 for interim operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead through 2026. Under this agreement, the Lower Basin States committed to conserving 3 million acre-feet of water to stabilize the Colorado River System. With funding now on hold, these conservation targets are at risk, threatening the progress made and undermining future multistate agreements.

The need for this water is more urgent than ever. This year's water outlook is dry, with forecasts predicting below-average supply. Project recipients need certainty that the federal funding they were promised – whether formally under contract or not – will be available so they can plan accordingly. Without continued support from Interior, efforts to conserve water and sustain the communities, economies, and ecosystems that rely on the Colorado River are in serious jeopardy. The urgency of this situation cannot be overstated, as the system remains in Tier 1 shortage.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to working with you to ensure adequate staffing and funding for the Colorado River, and to achieve a lasting seven-state consensus on a long-term operations plan that ensures the sustainability of the Colorado River System.

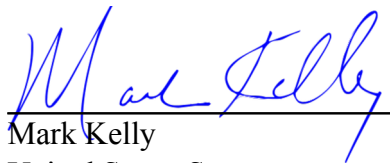
Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator