

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 16, 2022

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

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

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

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

We are writing to you regarding the worsening drought crisis in the Western U.S. and the recent actions taken by the Department of the Interior (DOI) to preserve the Colorado River System.

On June 14, 2022, Commissioner Touton testified before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee about the urgent need for states and tribes throughout the Colorado River Basin to develop a plan to reduce water consumption to address the historic drought before an August 16, 2022 deadline.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the deadline set by DOI has now passed without an agreement.<sup>2</sup> Following the recent announcement by the DOI asking Nevada, Arizona, and Mexico to make additional cuts to their water usage to conserve water along the Colorado River Basin,<sup>3</sup> we call on you to take additional federal actions and measures to ensure *all* Lower Basin states are contributing to the Basin-wide conservation required to meet the severity of this crisis.

To assist with these efforts, we believe Nevada's decades of leadership in water conservation can provide a vital blueprint for the Colorado River Basin's future. Accordingly, we urge the expedient implementation of the proposals put forward by the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA). These proposals, laid out in an Aug 15, 2022 letter to you by SNWA General Manager

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. "Short And Long Term Solutions To Extreme Drought In The Western U.S.", Statement of the Honorable Camille Touton, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., June 14, 2022. Hereinafter "2022 Drought Hearing."

<sup>2</sup> Lochhead, Colton. "Water authority chief blasts other states that rely on Colorado River." Las Vegas Review Journal. August 15, 2022. <https://www.reviewjournal.com/news/politics-and-government/water-authority-chief-blasts-other-states-that-rely-on-colorado-river-2623823/>.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Interior. "Interior Department Announces Actions to Protect Colorado River System, Sets 2023 Operating Conditions for Lake Powell and Lake Mead." August 16, 2022. <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-announces-actions-protect-colorado-river-system-sets-2023>.

John Entsminger, will protect the near-term storage volumes across Western reservoirs along the Colorado River – including Lake Mead.<sup>4</sup> While these will be vital first steps, implementing sustainable solutions will require continued, firm federal leadership, collective action, and coordination at all levels of government.

In an effort to protect the critical reservoir storage that remains, we urge the DOI to expedite the congressionally approved drought funding in the recently passed *Inflation Reduction Act* to assist with ongoing conservation efforts. While we recognize that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution to the prolonged drought in the Colorado River Basin, the \$4 billion provided via Section 50233 will create a critical pathway to permanent adaptation.

As you assess the proposals put forward by the partners in the region and establish guidelines for utilizing the drought mitigation resources provided in the *Inflation Reduction Act*, we also ask that you use DOI's authorities and influence to include all parties in the solution and provide Congress with routine updates on efforts, actions, and coordination underway at the Department. Moving forward, we look forward to continuing to work with you and our congressional colleagues on this critical matter, and echo SNWA General Manager Entsminger's message that Nevada stands ready to assist. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



---

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senate



---

Jacky Rosen  
United States Senate

---

<sup>4</sup> Entsminger, John. August 15, 2022. <https://www.8newsnow.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2022/08/SNWA-Letter-pdf-combined.pdf>