

Remarks Delivered By:
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It's great to be here this morning. It's great to be back at CRWUA again.

Last year, when I was up here, I think I'd been sworn in for about three or four days. Coming back to CRWUA for my first act as commissioner, it felt like coming home again. That was great.

This morning, I am going to keep my remarks brief and to the point. You have lots of experts to hear from in the next several minutes, and hours, and couple days at CRWUA.

I have to say, as I look back on 2018, we have had one hell of a year.

I would say that it's not over yet. The panels ahead this morning, they'll talk about the year, the need for drought contingency plans to reduce the risk facing the basin as we did at CRWUA in 2015, 2016, and in 2017.

I will leave it for others to discuss the elements and details of the DCP again. When I visited with you all last year, I identified two goals that we needed to be working on in 2018. One of those goals was completion of the Tribal Water Study, a joint undertaking by Reclamation and the Colorado River Basin Ten Tribes Partnership.

I also identified completion of the Upper and Lower Basin DCP to better protect our basin against the unacceptable risk of crisis and conflict.

The Tribal Water Study, I am proud to announce today, after much hard work, the Ten Tribes Partnership and Reclamation are releasing the Colorado River Basin Ten Tribes Partnership's Tribal Waters Study.

This study was collaboratively conducted by Reclamation's Upper and Lower Colorado River regions and the member tribes of the Ten Tribes Partnership. These Tribes, located from the headwaters of the Colorado and Green rivers to the border of Mexico, have diversion rights are claimed to nearly 2.8 million-acre feet from the river or its tributaries.

The Tribal Waters Study was built on the scientific foundations of the Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study that Reclamation published back in 2012. The study documents how partnership Tribes currently use their water and project how future water development could occur. It describes the potential effects of future tribal water development on the Colorado River system.

The study also identifies challenges related to the use of tribal water and explores opportunities to provide a wide range of benefits to both partnership Tribes and other water users in the basin.

Last year, I think it was my third or fourth meeting as Commissioner, I sat down with the members of the Ten Tribes Partnership. I heard firsthand how important completing this study was to each Tribe. I'm very proud to be standing here today, proud of this study, how Reclamation and the partnership worked together. This is a first of a kind reference.

I'm particularly pleased to hear how working together, brainstorming and problem solving -- what we do best in this basin -- we found a way to present the tribal views in their own, clear, strong voices. The study report includes perspectives and positions from each of the partnership tribes related to Colorado River water use.

This is really unique for a Reclamation study. We believe that by doing it this way, in partnership, we were able to get the most important information out there, published in a way that respects the views of each partnership Tribe.

I encourage you to read the study report. You can find it on our Reclamation website. There are electronic copies at several booths next door. I think you will find the study to be an invaluable reference and an educational tool going forward.

That may be its greatest value, as a way to encourage greater dialogue, conversations, understanding here within the basin, among neighbors, as we face certain challenges ahead. It won't surprise you to hear that I believe we will succeed through working together.

It is my sincere hope that today's release of the Tribal Water Study will help facilitate those collaborative successes.

I now turn to the status of the Drought Contingency Plans. Completion of the DCPs is a more complicated story. Last year, I stood here and asked the basin states to complete the DCPs by CRWUA, by today. I also remarked that to be successful the federal government couldn't want the DCPs more than the states and the water users themselves.

In all honesty, there have been many moments this year that it did feel like Reclamation wanted it more than the participants because over this year we have seen, we have watched the harmony and disharmony in the basin play out across newspapers, on our screens, as national attention focused on our dry conditions in the Colorado River system and the efforts to complete the DCP in both basins.

I have to say no one abandoned the effort. Even when we were wavering no one abandoned that effort. Over the last six months, the effort has been impressive and it is yielding results.

In contrast, the latest hydrology information is sobering. Anyone who was hoping that a wet year would somehow bring us around needs to step back and think that that's not something that's going to happen here.

After experiencing the fourth driest year on record last year, Lake Powell and Mead's combined storage sits today at 46 percent. That is the lowest level since 1966 when Lake Powell was initially filling and cutting off water supplies down south.

To put it in more personal terms, these are the lowest reservoir levels in my lifetime. We are teetering on the brink of a shortage today. We see real risk of rapid declines in reservoir elevations, particularly at Lake Mead, in the very near future.

With the current Powell inflow forecast at just 66 percent of average, Lake Mead is projected to decline to below elevation 1050 in 2020. It is time for us to pay attention. We are quickly running out of time.

While we can't stand here together to celebrate the completion of the DCPs this year, I can report that we are closer than we've ever been to completing the job. If I have one message for you all to take away from my remarks today, it is this.

Close -- isn't -- done.

Only done will protect this basin.

Folks that have followed Reclamation's pronouncements this year have seen our descriptions use strong language to describe the risks we face. Today's level of risk is unacceptable. The chance for a crisis is far too high.

On the positive side, I'd just say there's much to be encouraged about. The basin states and water districts worked throughout the summer to produce draft DCP agreements. You saw those published in October.

I want to thank the talented folks who produced those agreements. We have worked weekends and nights to put them together. I want to thank the basin leaders for the innovations and compromises that those agreements reflect. The basin came together on this one.

In the Upper Basin, just yesterday the four Upper Basin states, acting through the Upper Colorado River Commission, approved the DCPs and are ready to proceed. You'll hear a lot about that in just a moment.

They're ready to move forward as soon as the Lower Basin is ready to move forward. In the Lower Basin, Nevada is done. California and Arizona are not. I have seen remarkable progress in Arizona this year. Arizona is crafting a consensus solution to approving the DCP among the tribal, agricultural, municipal, and developer sectors.

I want to be very sensitive to those ongoing negotiations. Reclamation has carefully worked to support all of the parties to help facilitate a consensus solution in Arizona. I won't stand here and praise or press any particular entity or group. If Arizona is able to

come to consensus, there will be ample time to recognize those who were willing to step up, compromise, and contribute.

California also appears to be very close in finishing their negotiations or closing their deal. I would caution folks, however, not to add unrealistic demands as they try to complete the pieces of the DCP puzzle.

As I said before, close isn't done and we are not done. Only done will protect this basin.

In every effort that I've been a part of in this basin, and I've been involved in many, our success has often had one common thread. That thread is that deadlines matter.

To date, Interior is very supportive and extremely patient with the pace of progress of the DCP. The delay increases the risk for us all. We need to ensure that the risks of lake level declines to critically low elevations are addressed with or without the DCP.

Consistent with the practices of many prior Secretaries and Commissioners, I am here today to tell you all that we will act as needed to protect this basin. Here is our approach.

If by January 31st the parties to the DCP agreements in the Lower Basin have not finished their work to complete the DCP, the Department will publish a notice in the Federal Register. In that notice, we will ask all seven states for their specific recommendations for prompt Departmental action.

We will ask for actions to reduce the risk the basin is facing and will ask for actions that can be adopted prior to next August's 24-month study that will determine operations for 2020.

If we go down this path, and I want to emphasize that it is absolutely not our preferred course of action, but if we do, we will give the states 30 days for those submissions. The Department will take those submissions and decide on a course of action before the August determination on 2020 operations.

I know, we all know, that it is high time to wrap up these efforts. I sincerely hope that in early 2019 we are in a position to better protect all of the people that rely on this river, our shared resource. That's our job. Thank you all.