

Interior and Reclamation seek formal input from governors to protect Colorado River Basin

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The Colorado River near Glenwood Springs, Colorado.

WASHINGTON – The Department of the Interior, through the Bureau of Reclamation, submitted a notice to the Federal Register today seeking recommendations from the governors of the seven Colorado River Basin states for protective actions Interior should take amid ongoing severe and prolonged drought. This notice recognizes the need for prompt action to enhance and ensure sustainability of Colorado River water supplies throughout the southwestern United States.

Recognizing growing risks in the basin, Reclamation and the basin states have worked for several years to develop meaningful drought contingency

plans for the Upper and Lower Colorado River basins. The governor’s representatives from each state endorsed a Reclamation goal to complete DCPs by the end of 2018. The four Upper Basin states approved their DCP in December 2018. However, efforts among the Lower Basin states of California and Arizona have delayed DCP completion past the January 31, 2019, deadline set by Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman at the Colorado River Water Users Association conference last December.

“Nobody questions the growing risk and urgent need for action along the Colorado River,” said Commissioner Burman. “Completion of drought contingency plans is long overdue. Action is needed now. In the absence of consensus plans from the Basin states, the federal government must take action to protect the river and all who depend on it — farmers and cities across seven states.”

The Colorado River is a vital water resource in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. It irrigates nearly 5.5 million acres of farmland and sustains life and livelihood for over 40 million people in major metropolitan areas including Albuquerque, Cheyenne, Denver, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, San Diego and Tucson. Since 2000 the Colorado River Basin has experienced its most severe drought in recorded history and the risk of reaching critically low elevations at Lakes Powell and Mead—the two largest reservoirs in the United States—has increased nearly four-fold over the past decade.

For more information: Drought Contingency Plan Summary:

<https://www.usbr.gov/dcp/>

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