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Following Year of Historic Progress in Colorado River Basin Interior Secretary Bernhardt Encourages Continued Cooperation to Protect Water Users and Environment

Secretary Bernhardt initiates early review of current Colorado River operational rules

12/13/2019

Last edited 12/13/2019

Date: December 13, 2019

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Washington – U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt addressed the Colorado River Water Users Association’s annual conference today in Las Vegas, Nevada, where he praised basin leaders for reaching historic agreements this year to protect dependable water for the 40 million people who rely on the river every day. The Secretary also announced that the Department of the Interior (Department) will immediately begin work on a new report that will analyze the effectiveness of current Colorado River operational rules to ensure continued reliable water and power resources across the Southwest—a year ahead of when the current rules require the report.

“This conference brings together the best ideas for managing the Colorado River,” **said Secretary Bernhardt**. “This year’s historic agreements once again demonstrated that the best way to protect the Colorado River is collaboration and cooperation, not litigation. Looking ahead, we are eager to complete a review of our current operations by leveraging that collaborative approach to identify lessons learned from rules that have guided our operations since 2007. Thank you to CRWUA for providing the forum for launching this initiative.”

The Department of the Interior established current operational rules, known as the [Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead](#), in 2007. Those rules expire in 2026 and require a review and report as a first step in developing new or updated guidelines. The Colorado River report will be prepared by the Bureau of Reclamation, in coordination with other federal agencies, the seven Colorado River basin states, Native American Tribes

and non-governmental organizations. The public will also have the opportunity to provide input as the report is developed, which is expected to happen over the next year.

The Secretary also acknowledged challenges from two decades of extreme drought and reaffirmed the Department's commitment to collaborative and innovative efforts to ensure reliable water from the river now and for future generations. Under new drought plans adopted this year, the seven Colorado River Basin States and the Republic of Mexico took historic action to encourage water conservation and reduce water use. Water savings under the new plans will begin Jan. 1, 2020.

Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation Brenda Burman led the Department's negotiations to complete these historic agreements, which were signed at the Hoover Dam on May 20, 2019.

"The Colorado River Basin is a model for interstate and international cooperation. I applaud the extraordinary work of the states, Tribes, non-governmental organizations and our partners in Mexico that took action to protect the water supplies for the farms, families and ecosystems that rely on the Colorado River," **said Commissioner Burman.**

The Department's work advances President Trump's goals outlined in his [Presidential Memorandum on Promoting the Reliable Supply and Delivery of Water in the West](#), which focuses on collaborative efforts to create efficiency and coordination, coordinate on infrastructure investments, address emergencies and disasters, identify and implement new technology and streamline the water space to more effectively deliver water and services to customers.

"It was an honor to host Secretary Bernhardt at this year's conference. His presence underscores the importance of the work being done here as we prepare for the next stage in our efforts to preserve the Colorado River for future generations," **stated John Entsminger, General Manager, Southern Nevada Water Authority, incoming President CRWUA.**

"The Colorado River is one of the most critical water resources in the nation. The Drought Contingency Plan shows that even difficult challenges can be overcome through meaningful state and federal cooperation. The National Water Resources Association (NWRA) applauds the ongoing leadership of the basin states, Secretary Bernhardt and Commissioner Burman to develop and implement water policy that works," **said Ian Lyle, Executive Vice President, National Water Resources Association .**

"Collaborative efforts with the United States, the Basin States and their water users and Mexico have been key to the success of managing water supplies, creating resiliency against drought and a more sustainable Colorado River," **said Tom Buschatzke, Director, Arizona Department of Water Resources.** "Continuing and building upon those collaborative efforts are an absolute necessity and I applaud Secretary Bernhardt's announcement today that the required review of the interim Guidelines will be expedited."

"For 100 years, the Colorado River was managed without a full understanding of tribal water rights. I want to thank Secretary Bernhardt, Commissioner Burman, and the Department's leadership team for acknowledging that history, and laying the groundwork for meaningful changes moving forward," **said Dennis Patch, Chairman, Colorado River Indian Tribes in Parker, Arizona.** "Today, the Secretary's unparalleled commitment to incorporate tribal perspectives into this review and future guidelines marks a new era in River management, and one that ensures that tribal leaders have a voice in protecting the River for future generations."

Patrick O'Toole, President, Family Farm Alliance was also present at the CRWUA conference, where his organization rolled out two new reports featuring profiles of key agricultural water users in the Colorado River Basin.

"We are pleased to see the priority that Secretary Bernhardt has placed on this new report," **said Mr. O'Toole**. "As our reports demonstrate, all Colorado water users will be impacted by the outcome of the negotiations over replacement of the current 'Interim Guidelines'. We'll urge our members to engage with Interior and Bureau of Reclamation officials as they develop their important report."

"The CRWUA conference is an incredibly valuable opportunity to both celebrate the successes of the past years as well as discuss and brainstorm areas for continuous improvement into the future. The commitment of the stakeholders towards ensuring reliable water supplies is evidenced by the work achieved with the DCP. Those efforts and partnerships will serve all of us well into the future," **said Priscilla Howell, Director, Utility Services for the City of Henderson, Nevada**.

"The historic DCP has already produced water for the west allowing MWD to continue to store ICS water in Lake Mead. With a million acre feet in storage in the Lake, the future looks bright for all," **said Glen Peterson, Board Members, Colorado River Board of California and Metropolitan Water District of Southern California**.

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