

Indigenous Peoples Declaration For Water Justice in the Colorado River Watershed

Our earthly origin is founded on teachings, traditions and spiritual practices that are grounded in the principle that water is sacred: water is more than a source of life, it is life itself. When we are created, we are formed from the union of creator's natural waters. We are carried in fluids of life creating waters until we are ready to enter this world. We are Water. We come from Water. Therefore we exist. As life is created and given is the lifeway. Water is a life giving entity, a medium through which we are connected and communicate with The Creator. Water responds to all living things without prejudice and its hydrological cycle passes from all water bodies to sky and back again to earth as freshened rain or snow—a never ending life cycle that nurtures and sustains all life. All living beings are part of and not separate from this cycle of water. Water is not merely a resource to be exploited to solely satisfy human demands and needs; it is a gift to be respected and used as it is offered. Water is connected to the whole of the landscape, above and below ground. We cannot protect this element without paying equal attention to the soils, plants and animals that too comprise the web of all life interconnected through this cycle.

As descendants of the first peoples connected to the waters of the Colorado River basin, we are distressed by the water management practices advanced by Federal, state and tribal governments that persist in deteriorating the availability, quality and life-giving force of this vital element we collectively hold in trust for future generations. This has brought great injustice to our people, lands and heritage, as well as compromising the social/ecological balance across the entirety of this watershed, of which more than 40 million people in Mexico and the USA depend upon.

Since 1922 when the Colorado River Compact was drafted, our sovereign rights to employ these principles of water stewardship in the Colorado River basin have not been

fully respected, nor accepted. In fact, the sovereign tribes were excluded from participating in this constitutional process. The growing imbalance between water demand and water supply may soon become too overwhelming to cope with for all living things. The laws and policies that created this imbalance are based on systems of governance that maximizes profits quickly, and have led to unsustainable growth that has sacrificed the prosperity of future generations. These laws and policies must be revisited and the sovereign nations must be allowed to participate.

Development from extractive industries and energy generation based on burning fossil fuels create harm to Mother Earth and all her children. This includes hydraulic fracking, damming, deforestation, toxic waste dump, poisonous air emissions that result in widespread contamination and depletion of precious water resources. The affects of climate change must addressed without delay to preserve our way of life and our connection to water.

We therefore declare further actions involving water within the Colorado River watershed be taken consistent with the following:

I. Justice for Mother Earth

1. We recognize our umbilical connection to Mother Earth and understand that the waters within and about the Colorado watershed are a source of life, not a resource to be exploited. We only have to look at our own bodies to recognize the sacred purpose of water on Mother Earth. We respect and honor our spiritual relationship with the lifeblood of Mother Earth. One does not sell nor contaminate their mother's blood. We must acknowledge our sacred relationship with Mother Earth and demonstrate our commitment to respect her natural laws:

- the damaged water cycle must be restored to sustain all natural systems
- the natural diversity of her creation must not be intentionally altered
- the natural rhythms of the rivers must be restored so that life can continue
- it imperative that solutions are not delayed any longer

2. We have all damaged the Earth; we must now all be part of the solution. Rather than beholden to economic or development-based governance, we must collectively strive toward Mother Earth-based governance that recognizes the rights of ecosystems and species – including humans – to exist and thrive. In an interdependent living community, it is not possible to recognize the rights of only human beings without causing an imbalance within the pathways of Mother Earth.

Improving human relationships in the Colorado River basin would include embracing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), and the treaty negotiated between the Māori Tribe and the government of New Zealand (2017), which state the rights of a river are equal to the rights of humans.

3. The healing must start now. Humans have gone too far, placing humanity and Mother Earth in the state of crisis that even affects the cosmic ocean. Many of our teachings warn that one day we would be unable to control what has been created. That day is here. Ignoring warnings from both nature and the people of the Earth keeps us on the path of self destruction. The increasing risk of surface and ground water scarcity, flooding, water quality and biodiversity loss in the Colorado River watershed is a mere component of the larger crisis occurring globally. Moreover, the ongoing reliance on technological approaches, including the large-scale capture and distribution of water, the extraction of resources and production of energy, and the growing and production of food has heightened this level of risk and scale of potential damages.

II. Health and Well Being

1. The lack of clean, potable water remains a persistent problem for all people in the Colorado River watershed and causing much harm to our health and well being, stealing our sustenance like a parasite. And the increasing demands for decreasing supplies is threatening to infuse this problem basin-wide. More information is needed to

understand the scale of these problems, along with sufficient resources to develop and implement remedies.

2. The primacy of reliable, safe drinking water should be at the cornerstone of a larger water management objective committed to human health and well-being. This extends to the use of water for agriculture, energy generation and industry such that these uses promote healthy bodies, lifestyles and livelihoods.

3. Many of the threats to the health of all people come from corporate access to, and control over, water resources. Corporate interests often pursue objectives inconsistent with human well-being, as their profit seeking can compete with pollution monitoring, clean-up and remediation leading to long-term damage to precious water sources and the health of all communities and remove endangerment. Resources to ensure sufficient independent monitoring and legal compliance must be made available to communities whose water supplies are shared by these private interests.

4. The health of non-human species affects our own health and well-being in every conceivable way. No attention, however, is being given to the rate of species loss in the Colorado River watershed, nor opportunities to utilize biodiversity to enhance public health in the basin. A basin-wide inventory of biodiversity relative to native habitat conditions must be launched and maintained, which identifies the threats to these species and opportunities provided for the recovery of extirpated species.

5. Poor human health leads to psychosocial impairments and diseases such as depression, suicide, diabetes, cancer and the lack of joy. Furthermore, declining access to, and understanding of, the natural ecology that sustains us also diminish mental health and well being—rejuvenating and restoring ecosystems can have the reverse affect. A healthy environment is known to improve the quality of life. Opportunities to clean-up, rewild and recover the Colorado watershed's mainstem, tributaries, streams and their surrounding habitat must be pursued to their fullest potential. Furthermore, recreation on and with these water bodies should emphasis non-mechanized activities

to reinforce our physical and spiritual connection to the environment and the mental and physical health benefits this affords.

III. Equitable Stewardship Now and For Future Generations

1. Water is an element to be shared as needed to sustain all living creatures on the planet. Water is not a commodity for trade or profit. Management practices in the Colorado watershed must focus on needs not wants and advance equity as the core value.

2. The ecosystems of the Colorado watershed have inherent rights, and intrinsic value over and above their utilitarian value to people. A moral responsibility to our prophecies and concepts of natural law requires an adjustment to restore water balance. To make accommodations to restore ecological functions and to seek many avenues to improve efficiency and avoid wasteful practices.

3. Water policy cannot be developed in isolation. It is just one component of social administration that also includes: land use, energy, waste management, agriculture, and economic development. Each of these sectors must also embrace the principle of equitable, long-term water stewardship and pursue policies that significantly reduce waste and the potential for harmful impacts to the environment. To this end tools, such as Integrated Water Resources Management, should be employed to engage all stakeholders in an ongoing process to balance the multiple competing and conflicting needs of the Colorado watershed's finite water supplies.

4. All human activities impact water supplies and each person must maintain high standards of conduct and ethics in their behavior. The Colorado River water governance must revisit the current laws and regulations, which includes the natural laws of the indigenous peoples, as we are the original stakeholders. Historically, our conduct is consistent with the understanding that water is to be shared with all living things, and the quality and quantity of water must be respected.

5. Much of the Colorado's existing water infrastructure is aging, obsolete, and vulnerable to failure. It was constructed based on values and expectations inconsistent with assuring the long-term social and ecological health of the watershed. Management priorities must no longer strive to preserve the old, but to evolve from it. The same is true of antiquated laws and polices, such as the 1872 Mining Act and the The Colorado River Compact of 1922. They must be continuously re-examined, altered, and if appropriate, repealed, to ensure they are retaining and maintaining only those elements that support the realization of equitable, environmentally sustainable stewardship of the basin's water supplies now and for generations to come.

IV. Collective, Transparent Governance

1. Like water, the human race is all related. Each of us has the responsibility to maintain the health of our water supplies and the ecosystems they support. Colorado watershed water governance must embrace this shared duty and work to engage the public at all levels of decision-making from individual communities to the basin as a whole. This shared resource demands a shared governance that also strives for consensus-based discussion making that neither alienate nor discriminate.

2. Like a raindrop, there should be no less transparency in the decision-making, financing, monitoring and management of the Colorado watershed water supplies. All information relating to water use and water quality by both public and private entities, including the military and their contractors, must be freely accessible; this would include the Army Corps of Engineers as a water development agency. Transparency includes full disclosure of the use, fabrication and storage of harmful chemicals that end up in our water or air on Mother Earth.

3. The public should have access to resources for the independent testing, monitoring and auditing of public and private entities whose activities may be negatively affecting the quantity or quality of the waters of the Colorado River watershed. There must be

rigorous enforcement of the laws and regulations providing for the stewardship of the Colorado watershed's water supplies. This includes criminal prosecutions when warranted. Government officials in particular must be held accountable for ensuring enforcement.

V. Physical Science

1. Mother Earth and her natural processes speak to us in many ways. The physical sciences are particularly valuable to improve our understanding of the complex relationships within the water cycle, and those natural processes connected to it.

2. It is a hydrological truism that all water is connected. From the atmosphere to the oceans, glaciers, rivers, lakes and aquifers water deserves our utmost respect and understanding. Colorado River water policy, however, is balkanized into separate laws and jurisdictions for surface water, groundwater, river systems, and even climate change. We must incorporate into our policy-making sciences an evolving understanding of this cycle's wholeness and how a change in one element of the system provokes change in many others, for example cloud seeding and other geo-engineering activities.

3. Water is one of the most powerful forces on Earth. It has many forms of life: it can bestow life, sustain life, and can take life. Floods and droughts, for example, are part of the ebbs and flows of the water cycle that too must be respected, not merely managed to minimize human inconveniences. By embracing what science informs us about longer-term fluctuations in the water cycle, we honor future generations of all species, and preserve the role such phenomena play in shaping the watershed of the Colorado River into the larger ecological fabric on which we all depend.

4. Science helps to identify the extent of the imbalances that humans have created, such as climate change. Science also identifies the pathways toward reversing this behavior. By listening to the natural laws, we can respond more appropriately in

devising stewardship strategies to restore balance in our relationship with Mother Earth and her water cycle.

VI. Social Science

1. Human behaviors are largely responsible for the water management and ecological challenges present in the Colorado River watershed. Overcoming these challenges includes learning about the indigenous perspective of living in the arid lands for thousands of years.
2. Declines in surface and groundwater availability illustrate how we are transitioning from the era of abundance, which has influenced the development of prevailing religious, social, economic, and cultural institutions, to a new era of scarcity. Social science can assist us in adapting to this new reality, by developing strategies for transitioning society to use less. For example, developing workshops to teach responsibility of water knowledge.
3. Water scarcity, whether on the Colorado River or elsewhere, is fundamentally a socio-political problem. Scarcity breeds conflict, even war, hence the science of conflict resolution must now play an important role in water policy-making. This would include a discussion to address the problems of over-population and uncontrolled growth.
4. Historically, very little has been said of the extensive, negative cultural and spiritual impacts brought to native people of the Colorado due to water shortages and water pollution resulting from prevailing water management paradigms. Furthermore, advancing water scarcity is poised to impact the whole of the Colorado's society in similar ways. The social sciences are especially adapt at articulating these causes and effects and must be engaged to lead efforts to revise the basin's water policies so as to foster well being and security for all people and living beings in the basin.

5. The societal elements that created and now perpetuate the socio-ecological problems surrounding Colorado watershed management are not equipped to bring about solutions. Their focus has been, and largely remains, maximizing water delivery for human use. The challenges before this river-dependent society now, however, are far more complex. Harmony for future generations' relationship with the water cycle requires society embrace a broader view of how we interact with the water cycle, and access all knowledge and expertise that can help us fosters a socio-economic framework for recovery, resilience, and restoration.

VII. Education

1. The Colorado watershed society is water illiterate. Few people know where their water comes from, the complexities of the stresses upon it, nor their individual responsibility to participate in assuring its integrity for future generations. This ignorance must be eliminated if sustainability is to be achieved in management of the Colorado watershed's water cycle.

2. Many of our traditional teachings are grounded in wisdom derived from the water cycle, and reverence for all it bestows upon us. Several generations of dominance over water resources has diluted this understanding among our own people and crowded out opportunities to share it more broadly within the Colorado River watershed society. This dynamic must change and emphasis be placed on water education based on our principles of wholeness, justice and responsibility for the future generations of all living things. Develop workshops for school age children to include traditional science and economics.

3. Water education must therefore begin with youth. All primary and secondary schooling within the Colorado River watershed must incorporate water education as key components of their science and social science curriculum.

4. All agencies whose primary mission involves the management of water must have as part of its mission, and as a primary objective the ongoing education and engagement of those in its service area. This includes the Secretary of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Indian Health Services.

5. Much human capital will be required to physically transition and make more whole the damaged ecological assets of the Colorado River watershed. All water users, not agencies alone, should be engaged in these efforts for both educational purposes and honoring their shared responsibility to the resources that nourish them.

Sustenance

1. Develop co-ops to support local agriculture with seeds, tools, machinery.
2. Create textile and food markets in tribal communities.
3. Create workshops for traditional farming techniques.
4. Ban production of GMOs (genetically modified organisms).

Energy

1. We support the effort to leave fossil and nuclear fuels in the ground. Abandoned mining and drilling sites must be reclaimed to be safe forever, and surface and groundwater resources must be fully restored to be safe and drinkable for present and future generations.
2. Energy development on sacred sites, or where endangered wildlife need habitat to survive, should never be considered.
3. All permits for energy development must be fully vetted with the tribes. This includes consultation with the traditional leaders, and not just the elected or appointed tribal officials.
4. We support workshops to develop renewable energy, such as roof-top solar and wind generation where appropriate.
5. Existing mining and drilling operations must be audited for compliance of best management practices.