

For Immediate Release

A New Confluence for Colorado River Management

Report finds leaders share a vision for collaboration, inclusivity and adaptation in an era of climate change

Dulce, NM (June 3, 2020) -- The Colorado River is more than a man-made plumbing system and should be managed collaboratively as a river, by and for all of its water users including its 29 Native American tribes. That's one of the takeaway messages from a new report prepared by the Water & Tribes Initiative and based on interviews with more than 100 tribal, state, federal, environmental and academic leaders in the basin.

The report, *Toward a Sense of the Basin*, found a surprising confluence of ideas from water leaders as they think about new guidelines for the river system. It documents the desire to include tribal nations in the drafting process and to use rigorous scientific information in an era of climate change.

"Though we heard a wide range of perspectives, nearly all of the people we interviewed told us that the upcoming process presents a unique opportunity to reconsider the core purposes of the river," said Daryl Vigil, one of the co-facilitators of the Water & Tribes Initiative and the Water Administrator for the Jicarilla Apache Nation. "The region's leaders are ready to look at not only the critical water allocations to cities and states, but also at the substantial needs of the 29 tribes in the basin, who hold legal rights to 20 percent or more of the river's annual flow but have historically played a minor role in river management decisions. We also heard, loud and clear, that the next set of guidelines should better accommodate the ecological values of the river. Tribal and other leaders view the river as source of sustenance for people, wildlife, and an entire ecosystem," he said.

The Colorado River sustains more than 40 million people across seven Western states, as well as a stunning diversity of ecosystems. Its allocations and management are governed by a collection of laws and policies, often referred to as the "Law of the River." Several components of this existing framework, including the 2007 Interim Guidelines, will expire at the end of 2026. The Bureau of Reclamation is currently reviewing the effectiveness of the 2007 Interim Guidelines. The process to develop the next set of guidelines will most likely begin some time after that review is complete.

According to the report, for tribes to fully participate in developing the next set of guidelines, they will need to increase their individual and collective capacities. One option calls for the Bureau of Reclamation to provide technical support to tribes to allow their meaningful involvement. Another option calls for the creation of a distinct tribal water forum to allow the 29 tribes in the basin to work together and prepare for negotiations with the seven basin states and the Bureau of Reclamation.

"There is already a culture of collaboration in the Colorado River basin," said Vigil, "and it is heartening to see broad and deep consensus that the best way forward is to build on this

culture and to provide multiple opportunities for all sovereigns and stakeholders to be meaningfully involved in developing the next set of guidelines.”

The [Water & Tribes Initiative](#) is a partnership of tribal and other leaders in the basin. Several organizations co-sponsored a series of workshops that led to *A Sense of the Basin*, including the Ten Tribes Partnership, Bureau of Reclamation, Denver Water, Central Arizona Project, Southern Nevada Water Authority, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, National Audubon Society, The Walton Family Foundation, Center for Colorado Rivers Studies, The Nature Conservancy, Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy, and the Center for Climate Adaptation Science and Solutions at the University of Arizona.

“It is important to emphasize that not everything in the report is agreed to by all of the co-sponsors nor all the participants,” Vigil said. “The report represents a sense of the basin’s leaders in terms of visions for the future of the river system and how best to work together to shape the future.”

To review a copy of *Toward a Sense of the Basin*, please go [here](#).

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