

LIVING RIVERS

COLORADO RIVERKEEPER®

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Wednesday, May 7, 2014

Grand County Council
125 E Center Street
Moab, UT 84532

Fred Ferguson
Legislative Director
Rep. Rob Bishop
123 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Public Lands Bill for Eastern Utah

Dear County Council and Congressman Bishop,

Thank you for inviting the public to submit written comments about the proposed public lands bill for eastern Utah.

Living Rivers & Colorado Riverkeeper is a non-profit organization based in Moab, UT. Our mission is to protect the water resources of the Colorado River basin, with special emphasis on the Colorado Plateau.

In our letter of January 17, 2014, our organization asked the leadership of the “Bishop Process” for a water budget to demonstrate to the public whether water is even available for all the proposed extraction industries in eastern Utah. In that letter we submitted significant evidence to conclude that the necessary water for these projects does not exist.

To further illustrate this point, as of May 2, other basin states are implementing mitigation strategies to avoid the consequences of diminishing reservoir levels at Lakes Mead and Powell. For example, the Bureau of Reclamation, California (MWD), Nevada (SNWA) and Colorado (Denver Water) are offering \$9 million to fund water conservation programs in the Colorado River basin.¹

While the feds and other basin states are initiating strategies to avoid curtailments with good faith and hard cash, Utah is spending their time and resources to develop water intensive mining/energy projects in eastern Utah; essentially dipping into the shared water pool of the

¹ <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/water-environment/new-program-pay-water-users-take-less-drought-stricken-colorado-river>

Colorado River at the cost of others. Clearly, Utah's political leadership is intentionally generating bad public policy and ill-will with their residents and neighbors.

In addition to the jeopardy Utah is imposing on the water resources of the Colorado River basin, the proposed mining/energy projects will increase air pollution in legally sensitive areas, such as First Nations and National Parks. Moreover, these projects will increase greenhouse gases significantly and eliminate any hope of increasing the annual yield of water derived from high elevation snowpacks. Of course the quality of human life will diminish in step, and the region's biodiversity and water quality will likely crash as well.

The three alternatives set forth by the County Council are very poor choices. This preference for a paradigm of business-as-usual is why the Colorado River basin is now poised in a situation of water insecurity.² We strongly suggest that the leadership walk away from this process or, better yet, give the people an assured hope for a much more prosperous future by implementing a system of governance that would restore the health of this vital watershed. This would include an energy policy that provides infrastructure and jobs without exploiting the development of dirty fossil and nuclear fuels.

Sincerely yours,

John Weisheit
Conservation Director
Colorado Riverkeeper
Moab, UT

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/06/us/colorado-river-drought-forces-a-painful-reckoning-for-states.html>