August [day], 2023

Ms. Maria Camille Touton

Commissioner

Bureau of Reclamation

RE: [Your business/organization’s] comment letter on the Bureau of Reclamation’s “Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Notice to Solicit Comments and Hold Public Scoping Meetings on the Development of Post-2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Lake Powell and Lake Mead”

Dear Commissioner Touton,

[Your business/organization] submits this comment letter in response to the Bureau of Reclamation’s “Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Notice to Solicit Comments and Hold Public Scoping Meetings on the Development of Post-2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Lake Powell and Lake Mead” as published in Federal Register Notice – 88 FR 39455 on June 16, 2023. Thank you for the opportunity to share our input.

[Tailor your message here by introducing your business/ organization and sharing why the Colorado River is important to you]

We support a holistic and proactive approach to managing the Colorado River that will protect the West’s water supplies, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and preserve the river’s unparalleled whitewater rafting, fishing, and wildlife viewing opportunities. **We urge the Bureau of Reclamation to embrace five principles in updating the river’s post-2026 management guidelines:**

**Principle 1.** Reduce water use across the Basin by 25%.

The annual demand for water from the Colorado River exceeds the available supply by roughly 1.5 million acre-feet. Businesses, industry, cities, farms, and ranches throughout the Basin must come together to reduce water demand by 25%. Strategies to achieve this reduction include supporting communities in integrating water and land use planning, supporting farmers in temporarily fallowing fields and upgrading to more efficient irrigation systems, and transitioning to more water-efficient renewable energy. At the same time, we need to ensure that Basin Tribes, who have long been denied their fair share of water, have the ability to access water and are key players in identifying strategies for sustainable management.

**Principle 2.** Plan for there being less water in the river today and less water in the future due to a warming, drying climate.

Guidelines for managing the river must reflect the fact that there is less water in the river today, and there will be less water in the future due to a warming, drying climate. Realistic climate projections, river flow data, and water demand forecasts must be incorporated into the river’s management guidelines. We also need more flexible policies and more frequent evaluation of operating guidelines to proactively respond to changing conditions on the river before there is a water crisis. These policies must be equitable and sustainable for all states, Tribes, and stakeholders.

**Principle 3.** Keep water flowing in the river to protect irreplaceable ecosystems, cultural values, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Millions of people visit the Colorado River each year to enjoy hiking, fishing, rafting, and wildlife viewing opportunities. Anglers, boaters, communities, and fish and wildlife all depend on a healthy river. We need to be strategic in how we move water between the Colorado River’s reservoirs to protect and restore river health. For example, during high flow experiments, water releases are timed to mimic periodic natural flooding in the Grand Canyon to rebuild beaches and maintain important riparian habitats. Going forward, policies for managing the river and its reservoirs must similarly aim to keep the river healthy and flowing.

**Principle 4.** Include Colorado River Basin Tribes, who have long been denied access to their fair share of water, in decision-making and ensure that they have equitable access to water.

There are 30 federally recognized Tribes in the Colorado River Basin yet Tribal water rights, infrastructure needs, and values have long been put on the back burner. Tribal communities throughout the Basin have been left without access to clean running water as a result. Water demand forecasts need to account for Tribes developing their fair share of water. Tribes must also have a seat at the decision-making table in Colorado River negotiations and be able to access and use their water in the ways that they believe will benefit their communities.

**Principle 5.** Provide impacted people, conservation groups, and other stakeholders the opportunity to meaningfully contribute ideas for sustaining the river.

Decision-making forums must be transparent, accessible, and meaningfully inclusive, and enable input from a broad range of impacted people, conservation groups, and other stakeholders. A transparent process might include holding stakeholder meetings each quarter, allowing for virtual participation, allowing stakeholders to submit questions and materials in advance, and creating a website to house meeting information. We will need all-hands-on-deck to address the Colorado River crisis.

We ask the Bureau of Reclamation to use this opportunity to put in place a forward-thinking plan to protect the Colorado River and all who rely on it. Thank you for considering our comments on this important issue.

[signature block for your organization]