

March 16, 2016

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

On behalf of our organizations, which represent the views of agricultural water users as well as conservationists, we are writing to encourage you to include in your Fiscal Year 2018 budget request to Congress robust support for programs that fund innovative water management solutions in the Colorado River Basin and across the West. We ask that your FY18 budget request reflect the federal government's important role in building more resilient water systems to sustain communities and irrigated agriculture while supporting fish and wildlife.

As you are aware, the Colorado River provides critical water supplies for cities, irrigated farmland, and tribes throughout the seven basin states. Reservoirs in the Colorado River Basin, filled to the brim at the end of the 20th Century, are at historic lows due to a fifteen-year drought and growing demands. Diminished stream flows now pose serious challenges for cities, farms, wildlife and recreation. According to the Bureau of Reclamation, by 2060 demand for water from the Colorado River may exceed supply by 3.2 million acre-feet. Coming up short could put at risk the drinking water supplies of more than 36 million people in the Southwest, agriculture production including a significant portion of our Nation's fresh vegetables, future economic growth as well as the Colorado River's \$26-billion outdoor recreation economy with its quarter million jobs. While these challenges are significant, there has always been a tradition of working in a bipartisan, multi-stakeholder fashion to address these complex issues. We are confident that this tradition will continue under your leadership.

It is therefore critical that your budget continue to support programs capable of improving water conditions throughout the Colorado River Basin. These programs should support projects that offer multi-sector benefits wherever possible to protect productive irrigated farms, sustain healthy river flows, ensure greater economic vitality, and secure water resources for millions of Americans dependent on this critical natural resource. And, all sectors – agriculture, urban areas, and the environment – must continue to explore ways to better prioritize and maximize their use of existing water supplies.

Drought Statement

Your FY18 budget request as a whole should recognize drought response and resilience as a priority. While we cannot predict when the current Western drought will end, we know that

droughts and their impacts will become more common and severe as the climate changes and populations grow, especially in an over-allocated system like the Colorado River. Therefore, investments that make our water systems more resilient while sustaining a healthy environment will be critical to withstanding prolonged droughts.

In addition to a general commitment to the importance of federal actions related to drought response and resilience, we ask that your budget request include the following specific line items at the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture.

Department of the Interior

The Department of the Interior should continue the strong support shown for the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART Program, because it has been a critical component of the efforts to restore water supply and demand balance in the Colorado River Basin. Grants issued through the WaterSMART Program have been a powerful tool for conserving water through collaborative local projects. According to the Bureau of Reclamation, the 243 grants issued from 2010 to 2015 save an estimated 557,000 acre-feet of water per year—enough to provide water for more than 2.2 million people. Yet only about one out of five grant applications receives funding, which reflects a huge amount of unmet water savings potential.

The FY18 request should include \$30 million for WaterSMART Grants, which will allow the Bureau of Reclamation to meet a goal of supporting approximately one out of every three grant applications. We believe the WaterSMART Grants program can benefit both water users and river flows in critical basins in the West. In addition, while we were encouraged by the passage of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act and its extension of Section 9504 of the SECURE Water Act (42 U.S.C. 10364), we ask you to include a request in your budget for a multi-year extension of this authorization so that the benefits of the WaterSMART Grants program can continue uninterrupted.

We request that you maintain funding levels for other WaterSMART Programs at their FY16 appropriated amounts: Basin Study Program at \$5.2 million, Drought Response and Comprehensive Drought Plans at \$6.6 million, and Resilient Infrastructure Investments at \$2.5 million. Additionally, WaterSMART's Cooperative Watershed Management Program supports the formation and development of locally-led watershed groups and facilitates the development of multi-stakeholder watershed management projects. In your FY 18 budget request, we ask that you increase funding for the Cooperative Watershed Management Act to \$3 million. Increasing funding for the Act will expedite the formation of successful watershed processes throughout the Colorado River Basin.

The Bureau of Reclamation's authority to fund temporary water transfers, water banking, and other structural and non-structural measures to stabilize river flows and improve the efficiency and reliability of water supplies under Title I of the Emergency Drought Relief Act (EDRA) expires in 2017. (43 U.S.C. 2214(c)) In addition, the authorization of appropriations in EDRA is capped at \$90 million, and it also expires in 2017. (43 U.S.C. 2241) Reclamation's EDRA Title I authority should be utilized more extensively in FY18 to strengthen and expand the Drought Response Program and other targeted, emergency drought relief. Therefore, we request that your

budget include a request to extend the relevant authorizations and increase spending under EDRA as needed.

The System Conservation Pilot Program (SCPP) is emerging as a critical tool for protecting water storage levels in the largest and most important federal reservoirs in the Colorado River Basin: Lakes Powell and Mead. Their severe drawdown would ripple disastrously across the whole basin. SCPP supports approaches to conserve water in ways that benefit the entire Colorado River system – a novel goal that reflects increased collaboration among all water use sectors. We support funding for additional projects that shore up the Colorado River system by creating system water that benefits Lakes Mead and Powell and believe we should prioritize investment in infrastructure and water use efficiency improvement projects that have the potential for longer term benefits even if outside of the temporary nature of the SCPP. Any proposals that take farmland out of production, even on a temporary basis, must work for agriculture and help make agriculture more efficient and stronger for the future. Any demand management projects that are contemplated should be voluntary, and compensated.

SCPP was launched in FY14 with \$3 million in federal funds that was more than matched by \$9.5 million from large cities in both the Upper and Lower Basins. In FY15, another \$8.6 million in federal funds supported a similar and larger effort in the Lower Basin to protect at least 750,000 acre-feet of storage volumes at Lake Mead, with the bulk of the protection coming from water providers in the Lower Basin. Reclamation received another \$5 million for SCPP in FY16. Increased appropriations are needed in FY18 to scale up these kinds of programs in both the Upper and Lower Basins of the Colorado River without negatively impacting agricultural production and the rural economies and communities that are dependent on these farms and ranches.

We request that you maintain existing funding levels for endangered species recovery and water quality control programs at the Bureau of Reclamation and Fish and Wildlife Service:

- The Upper Colorado and San Juan Rivers Endangered Species Recovery Implementation Programs, funded through the Bureau of Reclamation and Fish and Wildlife Service, support two critical partnerships working to recover endangered fish in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, and provide Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance for more than 2,300 water projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin.
- The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program, requested in FY17 at \$16,851,000, provides long-term ESA compliance for both current and future water delivery and diversion and power production in the Lower Colorado River Basin, and quality habitat to conserve populations of 26 species, including federally endangered species.
- The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (Title I), requested at \$15,453,000 in FY17, is essential to managing water quality below Imperial Dam on the lower Colorado River and to meeting treaty obligations with Mexico. This funding needs to be maintained to protect storage volumes at Lake Mead.

- The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (Title II) enhances and protects the quality of water available to users above Imperial Dam. The basin-wide federal-state Salinity Control Forum has recommended increasing appropriations from FY17 levels. These federal appropriations are more than matched by hydropower revenues from federal dams in both the Upper and Lower Basins and by funding from USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program in the Upper Basin. Much of this salinity control is achieved by modernizing irrigation systems, which could be paired with reductions in water consumption for system conservation. Without the Salinity Control Program, it is estimated that municipal and agricultural water users along the Colorado River would incur almost \$400 million more in economic damages per year.

Another fundamental component of the broader federal response to the water supply imbalances in the Colorado River Basin and throughout the West is the rapid deployment of additional stream flow gages by the U.S. Geological Survey to gain a more direct and real time understanding of drought impacts on stream flows and water supplies. Priority should be given to streams with established instream flow requirements that do not have functional gages, and to streams in areas with high conservation value that suffer from low stream flows due to drought. Increased appropriations are needed in FY18 to implement such prioritized stream flow gaging within the National Streamflow Information Program.

We urge the administration to focus on environmental issues at the Salton Sea, including both air quality and habitat. These efforts are critical to communities, to wildlife, and to enabling California's participation in stabilizing the Lake Mead water supply.

Finally, we need to build upon the opportunities identified during the five-year duration of Minute 319. This agreement forged a new era of cooperation between the United States and Mexico, and provided multiple benefits to Colorado River water users while allowing for an experimental flow to temporarily re-connect the Colorado River to the Mexican delta. Increased appropriations to develop the extension of key provisions of this minute are needed to support ongoing U.S. drought contingency planning efforts.

Department of Agriculture

In the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory spending by \$6 billion. The cuts contained in the 2014 Farm Bill mean that new enrollments in conservation programs will decline by millions of acres. Cuts to conservation programs limit the capacity of producers to implement common sense practices that conserve water and maintain habitat while supplying food and fiber to all Americans. We urge you to avoid cuts in your FY18 budget request to critical conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and instead rely on the Congressional-mandated levels for USDA conservation programs.

Finally, we urge you to request funding for the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations program at \$200 million. This program benefits public safety, helps protect infrastructure investments, and funds locally-driven watershed protection projects across the country, including

irrigation efficiency in the Colorado River Basin. NRCS estimates annual needs of \$1.4 billion for authorized but unfunded projects.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.
Sincerely,

Tina Anderholt Shields
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Imperial Irrigation District

Dan Keppen
Executive Director
Family Farm Alliance

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Paul McFadden
Legislative Committee Chair
California Agricultural Irrigation Association

CC: The Honorable Mick Mulvaney, Director, Office of Management and Budget
The Honorable Ryan Zinke, Secretary, Department of the Interior
Mike Young, Acting Secretary, Department of Agriculture