

**Statement of Camille Calimlim Touton,  
Commissioner,  
Bureau of Reclamation  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Before the  
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources**

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Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso and members of the Committee, I am Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner for the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). My statement today provides a status update on drought in the western United States, the short and long-term operational actions being taken to address it, and the allocation of additional resources, such as those provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL, PL 117-58).

In most Western watersheds there have been successive and compounding years of drought. Many Reclamation facilities have realized below average inflows in water year 2022, while storage across the West is also below average at many facilities. Now is a critical juncture for irrigation districts as water deliveries are underway for the growing season and several crucial operational decisions must be made. Water supplies for agriculture, fisheries, ecosystems, industry, cities, and energy are no longer stable given anthropogenic climate change, which threatens food and energy security, human health, the regional economy, and biodiversity.

**Overview of Current Regional Reservoir Conditions**

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, as of June 7, 2022, more than 40 percent of the United States is currently experiencing at least moderate drought. Almost 93 percent of the western United States is experiencing drought or abnormally dry conditions, and more than 70 percent of the western United States is experiencing severe or extreme drought conditions. Across much of the Southwest, California, and parts of the Pacific Northwest and Missouri River Basin, the footprint of drought will likely intensify throughout the summer, with severe to exceptional drought throughout those regions.

*Colorado River Basin*

The Colorado River Basin is in the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of a historic drought. Both Lake Powell and Lake Mead – the two largest reservoirs in the United States – are at historically low levels with a combined storage capacity of 28 percent of capacity.

While Reclamation and its partners have been successful in conserving water in Lake Mead and Colorado River System reservoirs, more needs to be done as the system reaches critically low water levels. The system is at a tipping point. An example of how Tribal Nations and water managers have addressed these conditions is shown in how, over the past 15 years, approximately 4.6 million acre-feet (maf) have been conserved in Lake Mead through voluntary measures by the three Lower Basin States, Tribal Nations, and Mexico. This has been accomplished through the creation of Intentionally Created Surplus, system conservation water, water for Mexico's water reserve under Minutes 318, 319, and 323, as well as other water

conservation efforts. At current water levels, these measures add 70 feet to Lake Mead's elevation and delayed the first shortage declaration by six years.

Over the past few years, Reclamation has worked with the Upper and Lower Basin States, Tribes, and stakeholders on Colorado River Drought Contingency Plans (DCPs), which were implemented in 2019. The DCPs provide a framework for additional actions to help the basin adapt to drought. An example of this is a 2021 Lower Basin Memorandum of Understanding, called the 500 Plus Plan. The plan, developed under both the DCP and 2021 MOU, aims to conserve additional water above what is required under a Lower Basin shortage condition and contributions under the Lower Basin DCP. The 500 Plus Plan parties have identified and are funding projects in each of the three Lower Basin States, and the projects include tribal, agricultural, and municipal water users.

On May 3, 2022, Reclamation announced [two separate drought response actions](#) that will help increase Lake Powell storage by nearly 1.0 maf over the next 12 months (May 2022 through April 2023). The two actions include:

1. Approximately 500,000 acre-feet of water will be released from Flaming Gorge Reservoir, located approximately 455 river miles upstream of Lake Powell, pursuant to an agreement as part of the Upper Basin Drought Contingency Plan (adopted in 2019); and
2. Another 480,000 acre-feet will be left in Lake Powell by reducing Glen Canyon Dam's annual release volume from 7.48 maf to 7.00 maf, as outlined in the 2007 Interim Guidelines that control operations of Glen Canyon Dam and Hoover Dam.

Regarding current conditions, in March 2022 Lake Powell dropped below elevation 3,525 feet, meaning the reservoir was less than 35 feet above the minimum power pool of 3,490 feet (i.e., minimum elevation at which hydropower can be generated).

According to the [May 2022 Most Probable 24-Month Study](#), the April-July runoff forecast into Lake Powell is 3.80 maf, or 59 percent of average. Lake Powell's water surface elevation is projected to end the calendar year at 3,522.94 feet (22 percent full). Lake Mead is projected to reach an elevation of 1,039.92 feet (27 percent full) on December 31, 2022. While not official until the *August 2022 24-Month Study*, a shortage condition for the Lower Basin is projected in calendar year 2023.

Looking to the future, Reclamation is preparing to develop new operating guidelines given that the 2007 Interim Guidelines expire in 2026. Reclamation is targeting initiating a formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process in early 2023. Technical information and lessons learned from management under the current guidelines will be very helpful as the basin strives to develop new guidelines that are durable and drought resilient. Additionally, collaboration and involvement by partners and stakeholders (Tribal Nations, States, water districts, etc.) will be paramount for the effort to be successful. Prior to the start of the formal NEPA process, Reclamation is preparing to issue a "pre-scoping" *Federal Register* notice (targeting the week of June 20) to ask for input on both the stakeholder engagement process and the substantive elements and strategies for post-2026 operations.

Despite the actions taken by the Department and Reclamation, significant and additional conservation actions are required to protect the Colorado River system infrastructure and the long-term stability of the system.

### *California Great Basin*

California's Central Valley is experiencing its third consecutive critically dry year. Reclamation issued a zero percent allocation to federal Central Valley Project irrigation water service contractors, reduced allocations to the senior Sacramento River Settlement and San Joaquin River Exchange contractors, and set allocations for municipal and industrial contractors to minimum health and safety levels. The State of California's allocations for water from the State Water Project are similarly low.

Reclamation has worked with other Tribes, federal agencies, Tribes, and local partners on efforts to mitigate the impacts of drought in the Klamath Basin. In 2022, this included the development of the [2022 Annual Operations Plan](#), the [2022 Drought Plan](#) (released April 29, 2022), and the allocation of tens of millions of dollars for drought relief, including \$20 million for the Klamath Drought Relief Act efforts. The Operations Plan describes the 2022 temporary operating procedures for Water Year 2022 as well as a series of drought mitigation measures to potentially minimize involuntary shortages among Project contractors. These measures include the Klamath Project Drought Response Agency's (DRA) drought relief programs, voluntary water transfers among Project contractors, and voluntary water conservation efforts. The latest water supply estimate for the Klamath Project is 18 percent of the maximum project supply of 350,000 acre-feet, or 62,000 acre-feet.

The on-going drought this year across the West is having significant impacts to agriculture, municipalities, Tribal communities, hydropower, and fish and wildlife. Reclamation continues to communicate and aid our stakeholders and inform them of the various grants and programs available to help in this exceptionally dry year. Reclamation is also providing limited additional water to communities to help meet their public health and safety needs on a case-by-case basis. Reclamation is taking extraordinary measures at the conservation hatchery facilities we support to protect the vital refugial and supplemental populations of fish species and continues to further habitat maintenance and restoration.

### *Columbia Pacific Northwest*

In the Columbia-Pacific Northwest, many reservoirs have well below average water supply for this time of year. Low snowpack and continued dry conditions have resulted in low reservoir refill rates across the region. For example, as of June 2, 2022, reservoirs in the Deschutes River Basin in Oregon are 37 percent full, which is 46 percent of average for this time of year. The basin started the irrigation season at a record-low 39 percent of capacity. Storage contractors received a storage allocation shortage for the first time this year and irrigation deliveries are expected to cease in late July.

Over the past decade, irrigation districts in the Deschutes Basin have been successful in implementing water conservation programs through state and federal funding programs, including Reclamation's WaterSMART and the Natural Resources Conservation Service's PL 83-566 Watersheds funding program. Additionally, Reclamation is working with districts to grow supplies, with partners like the North Unit Irrigation District (NUID) on an appraisal-level

study for a potential project to move NUID's point of diversion downstream to Lake Billy Chinook, where NUID would pump water uphill to its current distribution system. NUID's water rights in the Crooked River would remain instream to the new diversion point and support fish habitat in those critical reaches. Reclamation allocated \$200,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 supplemental drought funding for this project. The goal of the appraisal-level study is to determine if a feasibility study is warranted.

In southern Idaho and western Wyoming, the middle and upper Snake River basins are also experiencing drought conditions. As of June 2, 2022, the Upper Snake system of reservoirs is 58 percent full (72 percent of average). Reclamation is working with stakeholders in the basin and hosted an [informational meeting](#) to discuss streamflow forecasts and projected reservoir operations on May 19, 2022. The current runoff forecast for the Snake River near Heise, Idaho is 76 percent of average.

### *Missouri River Basin*

The Missouri River Basin is experiencing drought conditions across much of the basin. Conversely, areas of North Dakota are experiencing above normal precipitation and resultant high water and flooding. Jamestown Reservoir (federally owned, managed by Reclamation) near Jamestown, North Dakota on the James River is an example of these conditions. As of June 2, 2022, 30.8 percent of the reservoir's flood control pool was occupied.

In Montana, drought conditions in the Milk River Basin will result in a shortened irrigation season, with water deliveries ceasing in mid to late June. Reclamation is working with irrigation districts and river pumpers to determine possible water supply availability for the latter portion of the irrigation season. The East Bench Irrigation District and the Clark Canyon Water Supply Company in Southwestern Montana are currently in tier 3 of their drought management plan, their highest level, requiring them to reduce water use by 35 percent and likely shortening their irrigation season by a few weeks.

Last month, Reclamation announced that many reservoirs in eastern Montana would be below desired recreation levels for upcoming weekends. This highlights conditions that will impact many of Reclamation's recreation sites this year - lower water levels at the recreation sites will reduce the access and, in some cases, enjoyment of recreation activities at the facilities.

The Missouri Headwaters Basin Study being conducted by Reclamation and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation describes strategies to address water resource challenges in the Missouri River and Musselshell River basins upstream of Fork Peck Reservoir in Montana. The purposes of this collaborative planning study are to inform stakeholders of current and future water supply challenges and to identify and evaluate strategies for improving resiliency to these challenges and for improving water supply reliability. Strategies include actions like changing current management practices, changing operations, and modifying or developing new infrastructure.

### *Arkansas, Gulf, and North Platte River Basins*

Drought conditions in the North Platte River Basin of Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska persist. On May 12, 2022, Reclamation [announced the latest projections for water supply availability](#). The May forecast indicated spring snowmelt would be below average. Total April-July runoff into the North Platte River system above Glendo Dam is expected to be 545,000 acre-feet, which

is 72 percent of the 30-year average. Based upon forecasted conditions, an allocation is expected for North Platte Project contractors. North Platte Project contractors are delaying taking water deliveries until mid-June and will likely discontinue water deliveries in early September to conserve water supply.

Water storage in Lugert-Altus Reservoir, W.C. Austin Project, Oklahoma is currently less than 24 percent of conservation storage capacity, which is insufficient to allow water deliveries for irrigation of the 48,000 acres served by the Lugert-Altus Irrigation District. The District has been notified that they will receive approximately \$25 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding through the State of Oklahoma for implementation of water conservation and improvement measures throughout the District which will help to maximize deliveries when water is available in future years. The District also plans to apply for a WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Grant, leveraging their American Rescue Plan Act funding to use as the required 50 percent match.

Water storage in Lake Meredith, Canadian River Project, Texas is currently at nine percent of conservation storage capacity. Reclamation is working with local officials to help evaluate salinity management strategies to mitigate saline conditions in the reservoir that are being exacerbated by the continued drought.

#### *New Mexico and Basins in the Southwest*

Other basins in the southwest are also experiencing drought conditions. For example, the Rio Grande Basin has experienced challenging hydrology the past several years. As of June 2, 2022, storage at Elephant Butte Reservoir was at 12 percent of capacity. If the monsoon rains do not materialize in the Rio Grande Basin, Elephant Butte could end the irrigation season at 2 percent of capacity. Regarding the Pecos River, the Carlsbad Irrigation District has allocated 1.4 acre-feet of water per acre.

#### **Coordination Across the Government**

Reclamation is working with Tribal Nations, States agriculture, power customers, municipalities, conservation organizations, and other stakeholders on addressing drought conditions and impacts. Reclamation is working alongside Department of the Interior (DOI) agencies and other federal agencies to ensure drought actions complement the work of these partners.

Additionally, the Department participates in several points of coordination established among federal agencies working to optimize federal drought response – including the National Climate Task Force, the Interagency Drought Relief Working Group, the National Drought Resilience Partnership, the Water Subcabinet, the White House Council on Native American Affairs, and works directly with federal entities including the Western Area Power Administration. Each of these groups provide important avenues for coordination, and collaboration, and encompass both immediate drought relief as well as long-term drought resilience efforts geared at responding to ongoing climate threats.

In April 2021, the Biden-Harris Administration launched the Drought Resilience Interagency Working Group (IWG) to address worsening drought conditions in the United States and to support Tribes, farmers, ranchers, and communities impacted by ongoing water shortages. On June 1, 2022, the Drought Resilience Interagency Working Group released its 1-year summary report. Chaired by the Secretaries of the Department of the Interior and the Department of

Agriculture, the Drought Resilience IWG builds upon existing resources and coordinates across the Federal family to provide targeted, near-term relief and support to drought-stricken communities. The IWG is also working to improve communities' long-term resilience to drought, given that drought cycles are increasing in severity due to climate change.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) provides historic investments of over \$13 billion to help communities meet water supply demands through a wide variety of infrastructure improvements; this funding follows-through on the President's promise to build climate resilience, and focus on water efficiency, storage, conveyance, water recycling, and watershed protection. In particular, the Drought Resilience IWG members are working to effectively deploy the \$8.3 billion in BIL funds for the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation's to increase water resilience and the \$918 million BIL investment in USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service for watershed infrastructure projects. The IWG also has coordinated drought relief activities in hard-hit watersheds including the Klamath, Rio Grande, California's Central Valley and the Colorado River Basin, and has launched a Federal-State task force with the Western Governors' Association to advance drought and soil monitoring systems.

In addition to the cooperative efforts, on June 1, 2022, the White House announced its Action Plan on Global Water. The Department and Reclamation look forward to contributing to the efforts outlined in the plan, particularly through advancing U.S. leadership in the global effort to (1) achieve universal and equitable access to sustainable, climate-resilient, safe water effectively, and (2) promoting sustainable management and protection of water resources and associated ecosystems to support economic growth, build resilience, mitigate the risk of instability or conflict, and increase cooperation.

## **Solutions**

The severe drought seen in the West highlights the need for immediate actions as well as for thoughtful planning and work to make both our infrastructure and operational decisions more resilient to withstand water resource scarcity and variability. Across the West, Reclamation has continued working on using the best available science to improve water supply forecasting and operations planning and modeling to help inform decision-making and meet competing demands.

Reclamation and its partners continue to make investments, both short term and long term, to address drought conditions in the West. But no amount of funding can completely offset the severe shortfalls in precipitation being experienced this year across the American West. We will experience unavoidable reductions in farm water supplies and hydropower generation, ecosystem degradation, and urban areas. We all need to do more together to conserve more water. The Department, and state, Tribal, and local partners have planned for this by being proactive and fully using the tools we have.

### *Investments in Drought Response Actions*

In FY 2021, Reclamation reprogrammed \$100 million for a suite of drought relief projects including: (1) salinity control, (2) water conservation, (3) temporary pumps and pipes to access water below intakes, (4) wildfire suppression and fuel reduction (5) Tribal assistance activities, (6) reservoir re-operations, (7) forecasting tools, (8) fishery projects, (9) groundwater recharge, (10) water storage, (11), and (12) water transfers. Congress provided additional resources in FY

2022 (PL 117-43), with a \$210 million supplemental appropriation for drought and wildfire. Last year, Reclamation selected 227 new WaterSMART projects, leveraging \$73.2 million in Federal funding with Tribes, States, and local entities. These funds are utilized with the aim of realizing on-the-ground projects that would foster water conservation, increase the efficiency of water deliveries, enhance the reliability of supply during drought, construct water reuse and recycling facilities, and restore watersheds. These projects also involved the development of applied science tools and collaborative planning effort to address drought and climate change.

During FY 2022, the Department has completed a steady stream of drought-related or water conservation-related funding awards across the West as part of existing programs to help make local communities more resilient or diversify local water supplies, selecting 56 projects to be funded with \$55.3 million in WaterSMART funding across the western states. Below are a few examples.

- January and March 2022: Drought Resiliency Projects selected, \$38 million for 23 projects in 7 western states.
- May 2022: Water and Energy Efficiency Grants selected, \$17.3 million for 33 projects in 11 western states.

We are currently reviewing applications for Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program, the Title XVI - Water Reclamation and Reuse Program, Desalination Construction Projects, Applied Science Grants, Small-Scale Water Efficiency Projects, and Drought Contingency Planning. Announcements will be made this summer.

Water recycling projects can provide growing communities with new sources of clean water, increasing flexibility and diversifying the water supply. Reclamation has several funding opportunities that support water reuse and desalinization, including through the WaterSMART Title XVI Water Reclamation and Reuse Program, the WaterSMART Desalination Construction Program, and the Desalination and Water Purification Program. The BIL has authorized an additional \$1B for water recycling projects, of which Reclamation plans to distribute nearly \$500M over the next two years.

### *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law*

The drought highlights the need for immediate actions as well as for thoughtful planning and work to make our infrastructure and operational decisions more resilient to withstand future water resource scarcity and variability. Fortunately, with resources made available by Congress through the BIL, Reclamation has been able to prioritize and accelerate projects that will create new water supplies to prepare for the future. Funds from the BIL will support water storage projects (\$1.15 billion), rural water projects (\$1 million), water recycling projects (\$1 million), desalination projects (\$250 million), WaterSMART Grants (\$400 million), and drought contingency plans (\$300 million).

Reclamation's BIL funding opportunities have been steadily announced throughout 2022, continuing through the summer, collectively making hundreds of millions of dollars available. An Aging infrastructure/Extraordinary Maintenance (XM) funding process for FY 2022 was kicked off in December, culminating with FY 2022 project selections announced 5/9/22. Additional funding opportunities for water recycling and desalination were announced in January 2022; Applied science in opportunities announced in February 2022; Small scale water

efficiency project opportunities announced in February 2022; drought resiliency project opportunities announced in March 2022; water and energy efficiency grant (WEEG) opportunity announced in May 2022; and information on small water storage program was posted in January and May 2022. In addition to these funding opportunities, BIL-funded projects selected via internal formulation processes were announced for dam safety in March 2022, and rural water, also in March 2022. More opportunities are on the way during 2022.

With nearly \$12.4 billion in overall BIL funding, DOI will make significant steps in helping communities tackle the climate crisis by investing in critical water resource projects including infrastructure, conservation, and environmental restoration. Specifically, Reclamation will allocate \$8.3 billion of BIL funding over the next five years to continue building drought resilience throughout the West. Work has begun through the allocation of \$1.6 billion in FY 2022 to various programs and projects. Recent announcements include \$420 million for Rural Water Projects across the country and over \$240 million for aging infrastructure. Additional projects that will move forward in FY 2022 include water storage and conveyance projects; extraordinary maintenance for aging infrastructure and transferred works; rural water projects; water recycling and reuse projects; desalination projects; Safety of Dams projects; WaterSMART grants; watershed management projects; aquatic ecosystem restoration and protection; multi-benefit watershed health improvements; endangered species and recovery Program, the Watershed and Flood Prevention Program, and the Emergency Watershed Program. NRCS has already announced nearly \$600 million worth of BIL-funded projects under these authorities.

### **Conclusion**

Addressing these challenges and climate change requires constant collaboration, persistence, and using the best available science across the landscapes and communities that rely on our western rivers. This Administration is working every day to collaborate with States, Tribal Nations, farmers, and communities impacted by drought and climate change to build and enhance regional resilience.

We appreciate Congress' attention to the severity of drought and welcome your input on new tools and approaches to help the communities we all serve. I look forward to our continued work together and to answering your questions.