

Intra-Basin Stakeholder Discussion on Comments Regarding the Section 7.D. Review of 2007 Colorado River Interim Guidelines

On December 13, 2019, Secretary David Bernhardt announced that he had directed Reclamation to initiate a retrospective technical review pursuant to Section 7.D. of the 2007 Interim Guidelines, and to do so by relying “on important input from the Basin States, Tribes, NGOs, and the public as the report is developed.” At the time of the announcement, Reclamation had planned to conduct public meetings to facilitate input from the Basin States, Tribes, NGOs and the public at key milestones of the 7.D. Review process during 2020.

As the 7.D. Review has largely played out during the ongoing COVID crisis, Reclamation’s ability to conduct in-person meetings that have been so important in past efforts for reaching agreements and sharing perspectives has been limited. Tribal communities have been particularly adversely impacted by the impacts of COVID. Despite these limitations, Reclamation has worked to accommodate tribal input through individual tribal outreach and extended timelines for submission of input. Moreover, Reclamation has strived to make the 7.D. Review an inclusive process through webinars and multiple separate stakeholder discussions. However, it remains uncertain when in-person meetings and outreach will resume again.

With this in mind, and given the ongoing inappropriateness of conducting large in-person gatherings, Reclamation has been evaluating new methods to improve stakeholder engagement and outreach related to the 7.D. Review.¹ To test technology designed to facilitate stakeholder engagement and collaboration, Reclamation is planning to host an on-line (rather than in-person) meeting to offer those interested in the 7.D. Review an opportunity to collectively discuss comments on the 7.D. Review and the Draft Report. The online meeting will follow the close of the comment period on the 7.D. Draft Report and provide an additional opportunity for participants to elaborate on their views and comments on the Draft Report.

The meeting will take place on November 19, 2020 from approximately 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM MST. Representatives that have been previously engaged in the 7.D. Review, including representatives from the Basin States and key water districts, tribes, NGOs, universities and other federal agencies, have been invited to participate. The selected groups represent those groups that have previously submitted comments on the 7.D. Review proposed scope and approach and Draft Report and who have been most significantly involved in the 7.D. Review. Due to the technical and logistical considerations for this on-line meeting, we have designed the agenda (and are asking groups to limit their participation) such that there are approximately 50 participants.

The event is planning to utilize the “breakout room” technology in virtual meeting platforms. The event will start with opening remarks, including an overview of the meeting agenda. Immediately following, each stakeholder group will have an opportunity to meet amongst themselves. This will be followed by a session where all stakeholder groups come together for a Reclamation overview of the written

¹ In evaluating such methods Reclamation has partnered with the University of Arizona’s Center for Climate Adaptation Science and Solutions through a research grant.

comments received on the 7.D. Review. Afterwards, to facilitate discussion on the content of the Draft Report and the comments received thus far, participants will be divided into mixed stakeholder small groups. Each small group will participate in a facilitated discussion on three key topic areas in the Draft Report: ICS, Lake Powell and Lake Mead Operations, and Effectiveness (as it relates to the purpose and common themes). Following these breakout sessions, all participants will come back together for a summary of the small group discussions.

Consistent with the scope of the 7.D. Draft Report, Reclamation does not intend for this stakeholder discussion to discuss or address post-2026 operations in any manner.

It is important to recognize that the on-line meeting is designed as a unique opportunity for Reclamation to garner further stakeholder input in a manner that allows all of the participants to hear each other's comments (and if desired, provide feedback). The alternative approach of holding individual on-line sessions separately with Basin States, Tribes, NGOs and others, would still provide Reclamation with an opportunity for individual input, but would not provide participants with the same exposure to the input. This opportunity for stakeholder input is not a decision-making meeting, nor is any participant required to present information. It is simply an opportunity for input and dialogue limited to the comments regarding the 7.D. Review.

Following this meeting, Reclamation will take the discussion and input regarding the comments received on the Draft Report into consideration when preparing the Final Report. The Final Report is scheduled to be released in mid-December.