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WATER USERS
ASSOCIATION**

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February 27, 2026

Bureau of Reclamation
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**RE: Comments to Post-2026 Colorado River Reservoir Operations
Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

To whom it may concern:

This letter presents the following comments of the Provo River Water Users Association (PRWUA) to the Post-2026 Colorado River Reservoir Operations Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

PRWUA is a Utah nonprofit corporation organized in 1935 for the purpose of providing a supplemental water supply to its shareholders comprising six metropolitan water districts, one conservation district, several mutual irrigation companies and two small farming companies. PRWUA contracted with the Bureau of Reclamation for the construction, repayment, operation, and maintenance of the Deer Creek Division of the Provo River Project. The Project includes, among other things, the Deer Creek Dam and Reservoir, the Provo River Aqueduct, the enlarged Weber-Provo Diversion Canal, the Duchesne Tunnel, and water rights from three primary river systems – the Weber River, the Provo River, and the Duchesne River. It serves roughly on average 100,000 acre-feet of water to the Wasatch Front for irrigation, municipal and industrial, and stock uses, as well as support of the June Sucker critical habitat and Great Salt Lake inflows.

The rights and obligations of PRWUA are defined in part by its water rights located in the Duchesne River basin, a tributary to the Green and Colorado River Basins.

Having reviewed the post-2026 Colorado River Operations DEIS, PRWUA urges Reclamation to continue coordination among state officials and local water agencies and entities regarding the proposed federal action. As noted throughout the DEIS, and as highlighted in Section 4.6, a “consensus-based approach to operations” is critical to the stability of the system. We agree. In Utah, ongoing coordination between Reclamation, the Utah State Engineer, and local entities, like PRWUA, will best advance and maintain the generations-long stewardship of Green River and Colorado River Basin water.

Such consensus is not only important practically, but also legally and administratively. The post-2026 operations must respect Upper Basin states' prerogatives to administer waters within their respective jurisdictions. PRWUA, whose Duchesne River water supply is part of Utah's apportionment, expects that any administration of its water rights and supplies will continue to be overseen by the appropriate regulatory authority (*i.e.*, the Utah Division of Water Rights). As Reclamation is aware, Section 8 of the Reclamation Act of 1902 provides, in relevant part, that "nothing in this Act shall be construed as affecting or intending to affect or in any way interfere with the laws of any States ... relating to the control, appropriation, use or distribution of water used in irrigation ... and the Secretary of Interior shall proceed in conformity with such laws. ..."¹ Indeed, throughout the history of federal-state coordination in reclaiming arid Western lands "runs the consistent thread of purposeful and continued deference to state water law by Congress."²

Given these considerations, and the importance of state and local administration of Utah's waters, PRWUA expresses its preference for state-driven voluntary modifications in use across all alternatives. To the extent new agreements emerge, all alternatives must provide for equitable management of the supplies on which PRWUA depends. To this end, we ask that all alternatives respect the reality and history of built and financed projects and the existing hardened demand which, in all cases, relies on them. Only at a state and local level can the unique and nuanced nature of use, supply, and demand be fully understood to best support the full-scale Colorado River and Upper Basin reservoir management and the local-scale needs of water users and the local project sponsors. One of the overarching themes must be the paramount position of storage projects in the availability and preservation of local and Basin-wide water supplies. We ask that all alternatives respect and promote the long-term viability of storage projects throughout.

Coordinating with Reclamation, PRWUA's investment in developing water tributary to the Green River and Colorado River has long been a hallmark of its operations. Through efforts over the course of the last century, PRWUA and other water users have built and maintained critical infrastructure to develop dependable water supplies. Foremost among this infrastructure are the numerous storage facilities upstream of Lake Powell that have allowed for a stable, predictable water supply.

For PRWUA's part, these storage facilities include the Deer Creek Reservoir to the extent it employs Duchesne River water. Although initially financed by Reclamation, PRWUA has repaid its obligations. Critically, the storage components of the Provo River Project provide a buffer, allowing water users to withstand the differences between supply and demand occurring during the water year and between wet and dry years. So, as a result of PRWUA's generation-spanning efforts, the developed supply is now integral to a host of uses, not least of which are municipal and industrial uses and irrigation. The hard demand created by these uses cannot be satisfied without the continued stability of the system.

¹ 43 U.S.C. § 383.

² *California v. United States*, 438 U.S. 645, 653 (1978).

Utah is well suited to manage its waters, through both its Division of Water Rights, as well as its Colorado River Authority. The latter, created by the Utah Legislature in 2021,³ spearheads conservation and management of Basin waters throughout the State, with regular input from interested stakeholders. The Authority's responsiveness to Utah water users is of paramount importance and should not be overlooked if reductions to Utah's apportionment must be passed on to users within the state. It should be noted that Utah has already taken numerous policy steps towards supporting Lake Powell inflows. One need look no further than Utah's Colorado River Demand Management Program allowing for water rights, including storage rights, to be committed voluntarily downstream with appropriate market-based financial remuneration to the water users. Or, one may look to Utah's substantial investments in conservation, split-season agricultural use, secondary metering, and technologically advanced diversion and depletion monitoring. Utah's state and local entities are answering this call.

Given the long-term investments by PRWUA and its water users, and their ongoing reliance on critical storage facilities, PRWUA asks that Reclamation take a judicious view toward any proposed curtailment of diversions of water tributary to the Colorado River within Utah. Such reductions, if they must occur, need to be equitably distributed among Utah's water users. Utah's Division of Water Rights and its Colorado River Authority, among other state agencies, are best suited to equitably allocate any reductions within Utah's apportionment of Colorado River water.

Finally, PRWUA adopts the fundamental concerns made in the comment letters submitted by the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, the Colorado River Authority of Utah, and Upper Colorado River Commission.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,

PROVO RIVER WATER USERS ASSOCIATION



Jeffrey D. Budge, P.E.
General Manager

³ See Utah Code § 63M-14-101, *et seq.*