



February 23, 2026

**President Donald J. Trump**  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

**The Honorable Doug Burgum**  
Secretary of the Interior  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

**The Honorable Marco Rubio**  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

**RE: Colorado River Draft SEIS: Reward Nevada's Leadership, Restore Compact Accountability, and Treat Water Security as National Security**

This letter is being submitted as a formal public comment on the Bureau of Reclamation's Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement released January 9, 2026.

President Trump, Secretary Burgum, and Secretary Rubio:

On January 9, 2026, the Bureau of Reclamation released a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Draft SEIS) describing post-2026 operating alternatives for Lakes Powell and Mead. The document makes one thing clear: the federal government is now planning for cuts

measured in millions of acre-feet, including proposals that contemplate reductions as high as 4.0 million acre-feet in a single year.

The projected scale of these reductions is already influencing local water policy decisions in Nevada.

Last month, I was interviewed by Channel 3 in Las Vegas on Village Center Circle in Summerlin, where nearly 100 mature shade trees (more than 30 years old) have been marked for removal. These trees had long provided canopy cooling for adjacent streets and sidewalks. Following implementation of local turf-removal policies (now subject to litigation regarding their scope and statutory authority), many homeowner associations have removed the grass beneath these trees, eliminating the irrigation source that sustained them. As a result, established canopy is being lost.

The removal of mature tree cover reduces shade and natural cooling effects and increases localized surface temperatures. In many cases, natural turf is replaced with synthetic or other heat-retaining materials that do not provide comparable cooling benefits. In hot-weather climates, documented surface temperatures for synthetic turf have been recorded well above ambient air temperature, in some cases exceeding 180–200°F under peak summer conditions. Such materials do not contribute to evapotranspiration, can intensify urban heat exposure, and raise legitimate public-health and environmental considerations that warrant evaluation alongside any claimed water savings.

These outcomes underscore the need to evaluate conservation strategies against measurable, system-wide water benefit while also accounting for their effects on urban heat, public health, and long-term livability. Approaches that intensify environmental stress without demonstrable Basin-wide gain do not represent a durable solution to a structural water deficit.

### **Nevada has led in water conservation**

Nevada's Colorado River allocation is approximately 300,000 acre-feet per year, and Nevada has done more than any other Basin state to protect and extend that limited supply through conservation, reuse, and efficiency. Nevada is the model of doing more with less.

Yet under the Draft SEIS frameworks, Nevada appears positioned to absorb significant reductions even as states that have not implemented comparable reforms face limited structural change. Post-2026 operating rules should recognize demonstrated conservation performance and net system impact rather than treating unequal contributions as equivalent.

### **Compact accountability must be restored**

The Colorado River Compact requires that the flow at Lee Ferry not be depleted below an aggregate of 75 million acre-feet over any consecutive ten-year period. That obligation matters, and it must be honored.

Nevada has made significant, ratepayer-funded investments to secure reliable access to its apportioned supply at lower reservoir elevations, including below power generation thresholds. Post-2026 operating rules should not convert reservoir-elevation support into an extra-Compact obligation that effectively reallocates risk to Nevada as a condition of receiving water to which it is otherwise entitled.

Let the Colorado River Compact do its job. The Compact did not “over-allocate”; it allocated. The allocation did not occur at hypothetical peak flows; it reflected the flows at the time of negotiation. The system is governed by priority of appropriation enhanced by Compact allocation. Enforce those obligations so that short-term sacrifices produce measurable, system-wide benefits.

### **Water security is national security**

Water is the enabling infrastructure for the agenda you outlined in your State of the Union speech. Your address emphasized American energy strength and rising power demands. Yet water was not addressed as the constraint that will determine whether that agenda succeeds in the American West. Domestic energy development, critical minerals extraction, manufacturing reshoring, power generation, data-center expansion, and advanced industrial processing all require reliable water supplies for cooling, refining, and community growth.

A national energy strategy that ignores water security will export risk onto the very regions being asked to power the next wave of American growth.

The Colorado River supports major metropolitan economies, agricultural production that helps feed the nation, industrial activity, and energy reliability. When federal planning assumes multi-million acre-feet shortages as the “new normal,” it is planning for economic disruption and increased vulnerability.

No nation can claim strength if it cannot reliably sustain the water resources that support its development, industry, and food supply. Water security is national security.

### **The path forward: enforce accountability now, build security for the future**

America should not accept managed decline through ever-expanding cuts and coercive mandates. The answer is leadership: enforce accountability and build security.

We respectfully urge a two-track strategy:

Track 1: Enforce Compact obligations and Basin-wide compliance.

A post-2026 framework must be grounded in the Colorado River Compact and the legal authorities that govern allocation and delivery. The Compact establishes binding obligations, not aspirational targets.

Operating rules should not institutionalize structural imbalance or normalize shortages absent demonstrable compliance across the system. The federal government must exercise its authority to ensure Basin-wide adherence to Compact obligations before imposing additional structural reductions on states that have already optimized efficiency within their allocation.

Track 2: Launch audacious augmentation and infrastructure modernization.

Reclamation's original mission must be restored and modernized for a new era of water security. The challenge facing the Basin is not the absence of water on this continent, but the mismatch between where water exists and where reliability is required. Federal leadership must move beyond administering shortages and instead focus on infrastructure, augmentation, and system modernization to improve distribution, resilience, and long-term stability.

That effort must be sufficient to sustain AI-enabled scientific research, energy development, and advanced manufacturing initiatives now underway at DOE and across the national laboratory system.

This requires a coordinated national program centered on:

- large-scale reuse and advanced treatment;
- brackish groundwater desalination and regional treatment expansion;
- coastal desalination paired with exchange agreements where feasible;
- stormwater and floodwater capture, peak-flow management, and managed aquifer recharge;
- conveyance modernization and efficiency upgrades; and
- a federal permitting and financing fast-track for critical water security infrastructure.

Federal investment in water security should be coordinated, performance-based, and tied to demonstrable basin-wide water security outcomes. Fragmented conservation spending that yields marginal basin impact while imposing significant local environmental tradeoffs does not substitute for durable augmentation and infrastructure modernization.

## **Requests**

Water Fairness Coalition respectfully requests that the Administration and Department of the Interior:

1. Restore and enforce Compact obligations as the legal baseline for all post-2026 operating rules.
2. Structure reductions according to demonstrated conservation performance and measurable net system impact, without disproportionately burdening states that have already optimized efficiency within their Compact allocation.
3. Explicitly recognize Nevada's conservation and reuse record in shortage allocation decisions.

4. Establish a Colorado River Water Security & Augmentation Program with interagency authority to deliver projects rapidly.
5. Mobilize and coordinate federal financing tools (loan guarantees, grants, and procurement authorities) to accelerate augmentation and infrastructure modernization, with funding conditioned on measurable, verified system-wide benefit.

### **Closing**

The Draft SEIS confirms a structural deficit. The question is whether federal policy will institutionalize decline or build a modern American strategy of accountability and augmentation.

Nevada has done its part. The federal government should reward that leadership, enforce accountability across the Basin, and lead the nation toward water security and prosperity. We welcome the opportunity to brief your teams.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura McSwain". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Laura" being the most prominent.

Laura McSwain, President  
Water Fairness Coalition, Inc

cc: Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation  
cc: Assistant Secretary for Water and Science  
cc: White House Council on Environmental Quality  
cc: Office of Management and Budget