United States Department of the Interior  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA  
601 NEVADA WAY  
BOULDER CITY, NEVADA 89005-2426

IN REPLY REFER TO:  
D18 (LAME-S)  

April 7, 2005  

Mr. Robert W. Johnson  
Regional Director  
Lower Colorado Region  
Bureau of Reclamation  
P.O. Box 61470  
Boulder City, NV 89006-1470  

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Lake Mead National Recreation Area enhances the quality of life for local residents and provides a significant economic benefit to the surrounding region. Lake Mead National Recreation Area receives 8-10 million visitors per year and generates an estimated economic benefit ranging between $500 million and $1 billion annually.

Lake access and marina operations are impacted by lake levels and are a key element of the lake’s recreation use, visitor enjoyment and economic benefit. In order to maintain existing lake access, it is estimated that the National Park Service spends $5-6 million for every 20 foot drop in Lake Mead’s lake elevation. If a marina or lake access facilities can not be maintained in the same location by extending or moving the facilities further out, then the costs to maintain visitor facilities and public access increases substantially. In addition to the NPS costs, the private marina owners/operators are incurring millions of dollars in costs relocating and reconfiguring marina facilities in response to lower lake levels. To date, we have had to completely relocate two concessioner lake based operations and closed three launch ramps. In more extreme situations, entire marina operations would have to be closed due to lower lake levels and the lack of an alternative location and infrastructure to support the move to a new location. This is a situation we are trying to avoid.

Recreation and tourism benefits associated with the Colorado River system are an important consideration when making Annual Operating Plan (AOP) decisions. We believe that consideration of lake levels necessary to sustain important lake access and marina operations on Lake Mead and Lake Powell as a part of the AOP process can result in enhanced recreation and tourism benefits without negatively impacting other AOP objectives.
Of immediate concern is the Overton Beach Marina on Lake Mead. A minimum Lake Mead elevation of 1120’ is needed to maintain marina operations at its present location. This level is achievable with the most recent 24-month projection. Failure to maintain this elevation could result in termination of services, impacting 180 slip renters and the financial viability of the marina operation, as well as create a multi-million dollar financial liability for the federal government.

If we are able to maintain the 1120’ lake level through March 2006, the National Park Service is working to bundle certain concession contracts on the Overton Arm of Lake Mead. This would provide a single operation the flexibility of providing services from more than one location as floating facilities could be moved between the bundled concession locations. It is anticipated this bundling process will take approximately one year to complete.

A major unknown in this request is the pending review of the Glen Canyon Dam operations. We understand a meeting will be held later this month to review the operations of the Glen Canyon Dam to see if a reduction in releases is appropriate. If it is decided to reduce the 2005 releases from the Glen Canyon Dam below the scheduled 8.23 million acre-feet there will be a corresponding affect on Lake Mead lake level projections. If Lake Mead’s elevation were to drop below 1120’ during the next 12 months, it would most likely result in the closure of the Overton Beach Marina operation and substantial costs to the local economy, the concessioner and the federal government. Maintaining an 1120 elevation for the next 12 months could avoid such impacts.

With this letter, we are seeking the assistance of the Bureau of Reclamation in the AOP discussions to include consideration of recreation and tourism lake level needs and more specifically, a Lake Mead water level of 1120’ through March 2006.

Thank you for your support and the assistance of your staff.

Sincerely,

William K. Dickinson
Superintendent

cc:
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