

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

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November 15, 2005

Mr. John A. Johnson
Lower Colorado Region
Bureau of Reclamation
U. S. Department of the Interior
Post Office Box 61470
Boulder City, Nevada 89006-1470

Dear Mr. Johnson:

This is in response to the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) request for comments on recovering or replacing Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District bypass flows that are currently discharged to the Ciénega de Santa Clara in Mexico. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments.

The Arizona water agencies are to be commended for reaching out to environmental stakeholders to evaluate options for operating the Yuma Desalting Plant (YDP) in ways that would be compatible with preserving wildlife habitat in the Ciénega. Like others who rely on Colorado River water, California is concerned about continued use of Colorado River system storage to make up for the bypass flows, to meet U.S. salinity control obligations to Mexico. With the Lower Basin now using its full share of river water and the impacts of drought still evident in reservoir storage levels, we must do all that we can to use water more efficiently. We strongly support development of actions that can be implemented in a timely manner to improve drought preparedness and response capabilities.

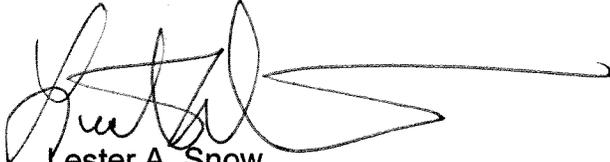
We believe that Reclamation should immediately begin the necessary planning and National Environmental Policy Act compliance, in coordination with the State of Arizona, to evaluate using excess Yuma area groundwater as a bypass flow replacement supply, including YDP operation as needed (at least at one-third capacity) to meet salinity requirements directly or through exchange. YDP operation should be evaluated in the context of an integrated resources management approach that includes consideration of drainage source area water conservation, forbearance agreements, and environmentally appropriate brine disposal.

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Meeting salinity obligations associated with the Mexican Treaty is a national obligation. We look to Reclamation to meet this obligation in a manner that conserves system water to the maximum extent possible without damaging the existing ecosystem at the Ciénega. The YDP is presently an unused, but available, federal resource. It is in the interests of both the U.S. and Mexico to determine how to use this tool wisely.

Please contact Jeanine Jones at (916) 653-8126 if you have any questions about these comments or need further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lester A. Snow", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lester A. Snow
Director

cc: Mr. Gerald Zimmerman,
Executive Director
Colorado River Board
770 Fairmont Avenue, Suite 100
Glendale, California 91203-1035

Mr. H. Gunther, Director
Arizona Department of Water Resources
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Mr. Richard Bunker, Chairman
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