

**ANNUAL REPORT  
ON THE  
COLORADO RIVER BASIN  
SALINITY CONTROL PROGRAM**

**2017**

**COLORADO RIVER BASIN SALINITY CONTROL  
ADVISORY COUNCIL**

**December 31, 2017**

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## **BACKGROUND**

Title II of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act (Act) (Public Law 93-320) created the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (Program), and Section 204 of the Act created the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council (Council). With the 2008 amendments to the Act that created the Basin States Program (BSP), the Council's consultation responsibilities have been redefined and clearly stated. The Secretary of the Department of the Interior, the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) originally approved a charter for the Council on February 6, 1976. In 2010 the Charter was revised to better reflect the Legislative changes that occurred to the Program in 2008. The Charter was renewed in 2016 and will need to be renewed again in 2018. A copy of the current Council Charter is included as Attachment A.

The Council consists of up to three members from each of the seven Colorado River Basin States. Governors of their respective states appoint the Council members. The Council membership list as of December 31, 2017, is included as Attachment B. The Council has created a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) that it uses to provide analyses and recommendations. The TAG includes one member from each state. Its chair is appointed by the Council's Chair.

All of the Council members at this time are also members of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum). The Forum is an organization created in 1973 by the seven Colorado River Basin States for the purpose of interstate cooperation and to provide the states with the information necessary to comply with the Water Quality Standards for Salinity on the Colorado River and Section 303 of the Clean Water Act. The Forum, like the Council, has an advisory and analytical group which is named the Forum's Work Group (Work Group).

This report provides annual recommendations to the federal agencies concerning the progress of the Program and the need for specific actions by involved federal agencies.

This report comments on the actions taken by the federal agencies through December 31, 2017.

The report does not attempt to fully describe or analyze the Program. Readers unfamiliar with the Program should refer to *Quality of Water, Colorado River Basin, Progress Report No. 25, 2017*, and the *2017 Review, Water Quality Standards for Salinity, Colorado River System, October 2017* (2017 Review) for a discussion of the Program. The first report is available at [www.usbr.gov/uc/progact/salinity/pdfs/PR25final.pdf](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/progact/salinity/pdfs/PR25final.pdf) or by contacting Kib Jacobson, Program Manager for the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) portion of the Program. The second report is available at [www.ColoradoRiverSalinity.org](http://www.ColoradoRiverSalinity.org) or by contacting Don A. Barnett, the Executive Director for the Forum. The addresses and phone numbers for Reclamation and the Forum are provided at the end of this report.

The Council met once in 2017. The meeting was held on October 24 - 25 in Sacramento, California. At that meeting the Council heard summaries of activities and a report of accomplishments in Fiscal Year 2017 (FY-2017). It further discussed the federal agencies' responses to the 2016 Advisory Council Report. The Council provided the federal agencies the opportunity to report orally and to explain these responses to the 2016 Advisory Council Report. Included in this report as Attachment C are the federal written responses to the 2016 Advisory Council Report. At this meeting the Council also heard reports from the federal agencies on implementation of the Program during FY-2017 and discussed the substance of this report. The Council appreciates the efforts of the federal agencies to summarize Program accomplishments into a timely, informative and concise Federal Accomplishments Report which was reviewed and discussed at the meetings.

## **COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **GENERAL SUBJECTS**

The Council continues to be pleased with the direction of the Program and the way the federal agencies are working together and coordinating with the Forum, the TAG and the Work Group. The importance of this joint effort is magnified as Reclamation evaluates replacement alternatives to the Paradox Valley Unit (PVU) during its current EIS effort. The Council finds that securing the continued future effectiveness of the PVU is a most critical issue. It is most important that all involved Department of the Interior agencies consider the Paradox replacement alternative effort as a Department-wide effort and that BLM, USFWS and USGS become partners with Reclamation in moving the project ahead. Each of these three agencies has an important role to play and Reclamation has worked hard at securing this coordination, assistance and support. It is apparent that the assistance and support will be most important as the EIS process proceeds.

The Council is also pleased with BLM's continuing effort to study and understand salt mobilization processes on rangelands. The Council encourages all federal agencies involved in these efforts to continue to work cooperatively to find answers to the salt loading which occurs from these federally administered lands. The Council is committed to work with Reclamation, BLM and ARS to pursue opportunities to fund these efforts. With significant seed moneys for these efforts having come from the limited Basin States Program funds, the Council is hopeful that BLM and ARS will now lead out in these efforts both monetarily and in executing the needed studies. It also requests that the USGS provide science support in this effort.

The Council also appreciates the efforts of the Science Team in providing the TAG and the Work Group valuable analysis of various issues facing the Program and reviewing potential study efforts. The Council recommends that this support continue.

The Council and the Forum continue to develop opportunities to ensure that adequate up-front cost sharing is available to match the federal expenditures for the Program. The Council appreciates Reclamation's extra efforts in working through the short-term management of the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund. The Council encourages all the federal agencies to work with the Forum on this effort as appropriate.

As a final general item, the timing of the renewal of the Charter has been problematic in past years as it has fallen coincident with the Council's fall meeting, which made it difficult to commit to meeting and travel arrangements when the Charter hadn't yet been signed by all three sponsoring agencies. The Council appreciates Reclamation's efforts this past year to move the period for renewal forward and herein requests that the Department of Agriculture and EPA also assist in 2018 such that the Charter is renewed in July. The Council recognizes that it is somewhat unique from other FACA committees and so it requests that the Charter stay consistent with the Congressional mandate to the Council and that no additional provisions be added which would limit the Council's effectiveness in meeting its role in moving the Program forward.

The below paragraphs provide specific comments and recommendations to the federal agencies involved in the implementation of the Salinity Control Program.

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA)

### *Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)*

The Council recognizes the key and essential role that NRCS has played in reducing the salt load of the Colorado River for the benefit of downstream agricultural and municipal users. NRCS has been a consistent and very productive partner in the effort. Providing these benefits is the result of a coordinated effort between the Colorado, Utah and Wyoming state NRCS offices in the Upper Basin and also the cooperation they have provided when working with other federal agencies, the TAG, the Forum and the Work Group.

The Council recognizes and appreciates the consistent and adequate EQIP FA funding for FY-2017 and now for 2018. It recognizes the myriad of demands placed on program managers in allocating limited EQIP funds and, therefore, expresses appreciation for the priority NRCS has placed on salinity control activities. The Council will continue to work closely with the three State Conservationists and their staff in preparing a three-year funding plan for salinity control implementation. The Council has found that significant effort and good thought has gone into this plan. It is a realistic determination of what might be accomplished each of the next three years with adequate funding. The Council expresses concern that in FY-2017 approximately \$1.6 million dollars in EQIP FA salinity funds which were allocated to the Program were not obligated into projects. The Council urges the Secretary to address this issue and report back to the Council the steps taken to avoid similar lapses in future years and fully obligate available funds for salinity control.

The Council also recognizes that much of NRCS's past success in implementing salinity control comes from efforts beyond simply servicing EQIP contracts. It comes from talented staff working with producers in properly operating and managing on-farm improvements. A recent USGS study of NRCS data over a number of years in the Grand Valley shows a wide range in effectiveness derived from implementation and maintenance of the same practices, confirming the importance of the continual need for training and assisting producers. The Council requests that NRCS continue to recognize this need and provide sufficient staff and funding, including sufficient CTA dollars and other non-EQIP dollars, to

meet this critical need. The Council understands that a question has arisen as to the consistency in reporting TA dollar expenditures between the state offices and recommends that NRCS work with the Forum's Work Group to review and resolve this matter.

The Council believes that it is the dedication, coupled with effective and hard work of NRCS personnel, which has made the NRCS salinity control program such a success. The Council appreciates the attentiveness of NRCS Washington staff in the Program's success. The Council also recognizes and appreciates the dedicated attention that the three State Conservationists have given the Program and it invites them to continue to frequently participate in Program meetings, discussions and activities and provide input, expertise and guidance as we move the overall Program forward.

The Council very strongly believes that the efforts of NRCS's Salinity Control Program Coordinator have been critical to the Program's successes. Not only has the Coordinator been effective in coordinating and unifying NRCS implementation of the Program, but he has also been extremely helpful in providing input and expertise in the overall Program implementation. As one of the major implementing agencies, the NRCS Salinity Coordinator has provided a vital role in the overall Program successes. The Council sees an absolute need to continue this position and requests that it always be filled with a motivated and well qualified individual and that the position continue to be housed in Reclamation's offices so that full Program coordination can continue. With the retirement of NRCS's Salinity Coordinator, the Council strongly urges NRCS to quickly act to fill this position with a very qualified individual. The Council believes that this is a most critical and urgent need. Once hired, the Council recommends that the coordinator be given the freedom and resources to focus on control efforts throughout the states and not be burdened with other duties and responsibilities.

Implementation of the Salinity Control Program has been adaptive over the years as we have needed to adjust to changes in funding, legislation, policies, practices and producer needs. The Council is aware that changes are under review in the relationship between the technical assistance and division of labor being provided by NRCS and the state ag agency

personnel with Basin States Program (BSP) dollars. The Council asks that NRCS continue to stay engaged and provide counsel and guidance in this effort as the most effective and beneficial options for implementation of Program objectives are evaluated and then implemented.

Due to a number of factors, present Program implementation has de-emphasized the role and number of EQIP-ineligible contracts referred to Reclamation for funding consideration. That said, the Council believes that there will continue to be a limited number of such contracts which are cost effective and strategic to overall Program implementation objectives. The Council has been troubled regarding the recent hand-off process. To the extent that such worthy, yet EQIP-ineligible contracts are received, reviewed and batched by NRCS, the Council requests that they be forwarded (handed-off) to Reclamation by April 1 each year and that NRCS provide to Reclamation any evaluations or supporting information it has developed for these contracts so that it can quickly, in conjunction with the State ag agencies, determine which, if any, of the projects will be funded with BSP funds (see also discussion on this matter in the Reclamation section).

The NRCS has many dedicated employees who have worked hard to accomplish irrigation improvements and advance the purposes of the Program. The Council recognized last year the filling of its engineering position in the Uinta Basin and it yet encourages NRCS to fill this needed engineering position in Colorado. These two positions have provided key engineering and technical support in Colorado and Utah, as well as authored the annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports. The Monitoring and Evaluation Reports prepared each year are most helpful, and the Council applauds the involved NRCS staff for this effort. The Council urges that this work continue. The Council also encourages NRCS to work with the Work Group in formulating a more uniform format for these reports.

The Council recognizes the vital role of actual implementation of contracts by those in the field and the importance of organizing and coordinating the offices of area conservationists and district conservationists in such a way that the efficient implementation of the Program will continue and requests that NRCS make every effort to assure that each of these offices

are adequately staffed. Recognizing the regional importance of the Salinity Control Program, the Council urges the Secretary to provide sufficient staff hiring allowances such that the District offices are adequately staffed. The Council is concerned that while technical service providers may meet a short-term need, long-term adequate staffing is essential to success in meeting Program objectives. The Council requests that the Secretary specifically comment on efforts to provide sufficient staffing to move the Salinity Control Program forward.

The Council also recommends that NRCS pursue salinity control in established salinity control areas before going to other parts of the Basin to expend salinity EQIP funds. The Council requests that NRCS specifically include in its response a discussion and detailing on the adequacy of staffing in moving the program forward.

In the future, the Salinity Control Program may need to turn more and more to grazing lands (rangelands). BLM, ARS and USGS are now engaged in studies, in part funded by Basin States Program funds, to unravel the complex nature of salt loading from grazing lands. NRCS's Salinity Coordinator has been most helpful as this effort has moved ahead in the past. NRCS has leading knowledge in some aspects of this complex puzzle. The Council requests that NRCS continue to support this effort in any way it can.

The Council requests a written response from the USDA to recommendations contained in this report by **April 16, 2018**. This response should include comments on statements made in this section of this report and also on recommendations found in this report under the General Issues section and the Management and Budget Recommendations section.

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR (DOI)

### *Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)*

The Council greatly appreciates the efforts of the Upper Colorado Region (UC) office in the continued oversight and coordination of the Program and the priority given to the Program from the top down, including the assemblage and support of a capable and dedicated salinity team. The Council also appreciates the increased involvement of the Lower Colorado Region (LC) office, including participation of a salinity coordinator in the Work Group meetings and a high-level representative at the Forum and Advisory Council meetings.

The Council notes that the Upper Colorado Region had brought together a capable staff to effectively administer the Program. Things were really working well from an administrative standpoint within the Program. However, with the recent departure of Marcie Bains from the team the Council recognizes a huge hole. Further, the Council notes that important to the overall efforts in the past has been an engineering position. This position has now been vacant for several years. The Council strongly encourages that these two positions be filled quickly.

The Council appreciates the effort in the UC Region to address and improve the contracting issues that have previously faced the Program. However, the Council recognizes that contracting procedures and issues are again plaguing the efficient implementation of the Program. These issues now appear to be coming at the Department level. Specifically the waiver process appears to be handicapping Reclamation from timely and efficient implementation of the Program. Therefore, the Council requests that the Secretary review these issues and report back to the Council on efforts to streamline the contracting processes to allow for efficient implementation of the Program. The Council also requests that Reclamation continue to monitor the time and effort required to move contracts forward through its offices and make adjustments as needed.

Recognizing the funding issues that are facing the Program and the fact that the LC manages the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund (LCRBDF), the Council finds that the LC's role is critical to the success of the Program. The Forum and Council are dealing with temporarily difficult decisions relative to funding and generation of cost share dollars to the LCRBDF. The Council appreciates Reclamation's efforts to work with the Council to manage this fund over the next several years in a way that prevents the LCRBDF from going into deficit. At the same time, the Council concurs with Reclamation's recommendation to expend available funds, thereby accomplishing additional salinity control while drawing down the accrual. During this past year Reclamation also undertook a major review and reallocation of past Program repayments. The Council commends and supports Reclamation in these efforts. The Council encourages Reclamation to work with the Forum and Work Group to continue to monitor the status of the funding imbalance and report to the Advisory Council at its regular meetings.

The Council has observed over the years Reclamation's efforts to be even more effective in administering the Basinwide Program each time with its, generally triennial, Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA). Much commendation should be given to the Reclamation staff and the NRCS coordinator for work well done. Such commendation continues with the efforts made by Reclamation in conducting the 2017 FOA and it recommends that Reclamation continue such efforts in future FOAs.

As noted above, deficiency in income to the LCRBDF has reduced available cost share dollars. Among other things, this has led to a reevaluation of the efforts and dollars being expended under the Basin States Program, including moneys provided to the state ag agencies for implementation of the Program. The Council appreciates Reclamation's efforts in participating with the states in reviewing past practices and looking for potential changes as we adapt and move the Program forward in an efficient manner. The heart of past Basin States Program efforts has revolved around the pass-off of EQIP ineligible projects to the state ag agencies. For a number of reasons, over the past few years this piece of the Basin States Program has been less employed. While it is presently a lesser piece of the overall efforts, the Council believes that there are, and may continue to be,

worthy and cost-effective EQIP ineligible projects which should be funded under the state agencies' programs. Working closely with Reclamation and NRCS, and upon recommendations from the Work Group, the Forum adopted policy direction in 2017. While in general consensus on these matters, there is yet work to be done in 2018 to fully implement the agreed-to policy direction, and the Council encourages Reclamation to continue to work with the states in moving these efforts forward.

The continued and efficient operation of the PVU is very important to the Council. In the General Issues section, the Council has expressed its support for the PVU EIS and Alternative Studies efforts and continues to emphasize the need to complete these studies in a timely manner. Last year the EIS schedule was put off one year when a joint decision was made to conduct at least two pilot scale demonstrations of potential zero liquid discharge technologies. The Council applauds Reclamation's efforts to seek out new technologies which might have less negative impacts. The Departmental contracting issues discussed above delayed these efforts by half a year. The Council urges Reclamation to quickly move ahead on these efforts so that the overall, revised EIS schedule can be kept. The Council urges that Reclamation make every effort to meet this schedule. The EIS effort continues to require meaningful funding, and the Council appreciates Reclamation's efforts to secure the required funding.

The Council appreciates Reclamation's commitment to the ongoing EIS efforts for the PVU and also encourages it to plan for and secure the needed funding for the planning, design and implementation of the selected alternative(s) after issuance of the Record of Decision in 2020. The Council also requests that Reclamation work with the states on funding options, including potential phasing for implementation of the selected alternative. The Council also recognizes Reclamation's efforts to develop a contingency plan and road map for placing PVU back into operation as quickly as possible if a shut-down were to occur prior to the implementation of a preferred replacement alternative. The Council requests that Reclamation keep the plan up to date as the EIS and Alternatives Study progresses.

With the drilling and testing of small-diameter wells soon, Reclamation's efforts and the USGS studies, with the participation from the Washington County Water Conservancy District, will have furthered the understanding of the salt loading mechanisms at Pah Tempe (La Verkin) Springs, and this final effort should allow for the design of brine-capture facilities. As these studies conclude, the Council requests that Reclamation begin to look at how a project might be built at Pah Tempe Springs. The Council notes that these springs were authorized for study under the original Salinity Control Act. The Council believes that these future efforts are moving ahead under this original authority and that if a project becomes feasible at these springs, implementation and funding of the project would be under the original authority. In the response to last year's Advisory Council Report, Reclamation indicated that it would confirm the authority question and report back to the Council.

The Council recognizes the significant efforts of Reclamation the past few years, both in terms of time and staff, to better understand and update the Salinity Economic Impacts Model (SEIM). A number of meetings were held with state agencies and water users. Additionally, the model structure and format has now been significantly updated. The Council appreciates these efforts and notes that they led to improved forecasts in the Forum's 2017 Review. This process has also recognized and better defined model deficiencies. A contract will soon be awarded for updating the salinity functions in the model. The Council urges Reclamation to continue to work closely with the states to not only update existing salt functions, but to also identify previously unidentified salinity impacts and include such in the model. The Council requests a report on the status of this effort.

In the Management and Budget Recommendations portion of this report, the Council recognizes that it is very difficult, given Reclamation's budget cycle, to make funding recommendations that can influence Reclamation's budget request for the next two fiscal years. The Council recognizes and appreciates Reclamation's efforts which have led to an increase in Basinwide Program funding in FY-2018. The Council recommends that Reclamation seek increased appropriations in FY-2019, FY-2020, and FY-2021 in

accordance with Table 1. It is noted that the requested amounts have been decreased due to the very cost effective projects selected in the recent FOA. Reclamation is requested to give a detailed report on its efforts to secure additional funding at the next Advisory Council meeting.

The Council also recognizes Reclamation's efforts to secure additional Basinwide Program funding in past years, up to 15 percent. Reclamation's efforts have been very successful in this regard in prior years. However, in FY-2017 the full additional amount was not available. The Council requests an understanding from Reclamation on this matter. Additionally, the Council recognizes and expresses appreciation to Reclamation for its efforts to "find" additional dollars and stretch the limited dollars to make the Program work. Program staff have been very effective at looking for and bringing in dollars to make things work, and the Council appreciates these extra efforts.

Each fall Reclamation seeks input from the involved federal agencies and prepares a Federal Accomplishments Report (FAR), which report is sent to the Advisory Council before its fall meeting. This is very helpful and the Council urges that this report continue to be provided.

The Council continues to observe the value of the role played by the Science Team. The Council urges Reclamation to continue to convene and staff the Science Team. The Council has recommended for several years the funding of efforts at Desert Lakes to confirm salinity savings from the Huntington-Cleveland Project. Working with the Science Team and the Work Group, the Council requests that Reclamation summarize the data and findings and make recommendations for future study efforts, if any.

The Council recognizes that among the many things Reclamation does to move the Program forward is the biennial preparation of Progress Reports and their submittal to Congress. The Council appreciates the value of these reports. The Council notes that Progress Report No. 25 was finalized this past year and it urges Reclamation to work with the Forum's Work Group on the next report to assure consistency in reporting.

The Council asks Reclamation to respond in writing to recommendations contained in this report by **April 16, 2018**. This response should include comment on statements made in this section of this report and also on recommendations found in this report under the General Issues section and the Management and Budget Recommendations section.

### ***Bureau of Land Management (BLM)***

The Council recognizes that when Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior “to develop a comprehensive program for minimizing salt contributions to the Colorado River from lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management,” BLM was given a daunting task. Creation of a “program” hasn’t always fit within other BLM programs. The Council recognizes and expresses appreciation for the top-to-bottom leadership which BLM is now showing relative to the Congressional charge to BLM. Such leadership is seen by participation in meetings, responses to inquiries, dedication of staff time and funding, commitment to studies, understanding and reporting, and the willingness to think outside the box in regards to integrating salinity control into other BLM programs and objectives. The Council recognizes these efforts, expresses appreciation for the shift in emphasis and encourages BLM to continue on the courses it has laid out.

The Council understands that BLM has completed its *A Framework for Improving the Effectiveness of BLM’s Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (2017-2022)* document. The Council looks forward to and would appreciate a presentation and report on the document at its spring meeting. The presentation could include the report’s findings and recommendations, an understanding of how the recommendations will be implemented and anticipated impacts therefrom to salt loading in the Colorado River.

In 2016 and 2017 BLM expended \$1.5 million of Soil, Water and Air funds on specific Colorado River salinity control activities. From the Council’s perspective this is a huge milestone and something that has been sought for a number of years. BLM is to be congratulated for this commitment and these efforts. The Council is yet desirous of a

uniform, peer-reviewed report on how the dollars were expended with estimates of salt savings therefrom. The Council asks that BLM work with the Science Team and the Work Group, respectively, on this request and an appropriate reporting format.

The Council appreciates BLM's efforts to create a better understanding of salt mobilization on public lands, including a significant literature review of rangeland salinity control. This has led to a number of presently on-going studies in conjunction with ARS and USGS. The Council is anxious to hear the results of these studies and asks that BLM work with the Science Team and the Forum's Work Group in reporting out the results of these studies as they become available. The Council has recommended in the past to Reclamation that an important portion of the limited Basin States funds designated for scientific study be spent on this rangeland salinity issue. Reclamation has moved ahead with the funding of some recommended studies that involve BLM, ARS and USGS (approximately \$1 million in the past few years). The Council is not recommending that additional studies be funded with Basin States Program funds until the results of these already funded efforts are reported. Therefore, the Council requests and understands that BLM will coordinate with ARS in letting the Work Group know where studies have been reported (i.e., journals, etc.) and report the status of the overall BLM and ARS efforts, as well as plans moving forward.

In the 2016 Report the Council notes significantly increased efforts to quantify and report the salinity savings associated with various BLM activities. The Council applauds these efforts and requests that BLM continue to refine the process and then report such to the Science Team and Work Group for peer review and input. It noted Figure 16 (page 52) shows a correlation between salinity and sediment loading that is "generally accepted." The Council requested that in their studies BLM independently verify and quantify this generally accepted relationship. In its response BLM indicated that it would do so. The Council reiterates such request. Such understanding is important in confirming the sediment and salt retention values being reported in the FAR.

Previously, the Council has urged that BLM select a salinity coordinator whose assignment would be to work exclusively on Colorado River salinity issues. The Council's vision was

that the three implementing agencies, with their coordinators domiciled together, would move ahead as a team through daily interfacing of their coordinators. Controlling salt mobilization on BLM administered lands is a monumental task and the Council requests that BLM continually evaluate staffing needs, ensuring that program goals and objectives are addressed and adequately coordinated with the activities of the other federal agencies. The Council recognizes that BLM organization questions exist nationally. However, as things change and opportunities present themselves, the Council reiterates its recommendation to have a full-time BLM salinity coordinator tied to Washington and housed in Salt Lake.

The Council is concerned about the future of the Paradox Valley Unit. Currently Reclamation is involved in an EIS that addresses the future of the project. There are BLM issues to be addressed, particularly with respect to the potential future use of some BLM lands for PVU alternatives (e.g., evaporation ponds). The Council urges BLM to continue to be involved with these issues and facilitate, as part of Interior's team, resolution of a workable brine disposal alternative.

The Council requests a written report responding to each of the Council's recommendations by **April 16, 2018**. This response should include comment on statements made in this section of the report as well as recommendations found in the General Subjects section and the Management and Budget Recommendations section.

### ***U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)***

The Council wants to express its appreciation for how responsive USGS is in its science role for the Secretary of the Interior in assisting with moving the Salinity Control Program forward. The Council asks that USGS continue work with Reclamation, NRCS, BLM and the Work Group to ensure that the data collection, interpretation and analysis efforts are accurate, effective and contribute to the overall goal of Program implementation.

The Council appreciates the continued coordination and support of the Program provided by USGS with the several individuals involved in assisting with science support. Both the

continuity of participation, as well as the ability to bring in specialists when needed, has really provided important strength and understanding to the Program. Participation by USGS on the Science Team, the TAG and Work Group and at Advisory Council and Forum meetings has helped strengthen the overall Program and efforts.

Continued effective operation of the PVU is critical to the Council. USGS is presently working on four or five efforts, some using Basin States Program dollars and some using PVU O&M dollars, to better define the movement and discharge of brine within the groundwater system. The Council recognizes that these efforts were advanced in 2017 and expresses appreciation for such. It would urge USGS to complete these efforts so that the results can appropriately inform Reclamation and the states on the potential effectiveness of alternatives being considered during the EIS Alternatives Study.

The Council has given its support to detailed investigative efforts by USGS of the Pah Tempe Springs. The Council appreciates USGS's efforts and insight in proposing the final study to finish characterizing the fault zone which leads to brine discharge to the Virgin River. The Council will be watching and asking for periodic updates as this cooperative effort moves forward.

The Council recognizes USGS's proposal to work on a major study to understand long-term salinity trends in the Upper Basin. If funded, the Council urges USGS to work closely with and report often to the states on this important effort. Understanding the why behind the trends could have important impacts to future policy decisions within the Basin.

The Council recognizes USGS's critical role on the Science Team in identifying Program science needs and their role in scoping out potential studies and performing many such studies. These efforts are much appreciated. USGS has performed a number of other studies for the Program which have guided thinking and implementation activities. The USGS's role and efforts are recognized by the Council and are much appreciated.

The Council wishes to thank USGS for the priority it gives to funding the basic stream

gaging program on the Colorado River and encourages and supports USGS in their efforts to maintain the 20-gage network.

The Council requests that USGS respond to the Council on its continued ability to perform important data gathering, review and study functions by **April 16, 2018**.

### ***U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)***

The Council appreciates USFWS's role in finding, reviewing and supporting viable wildlife replacement projects and the service that USFWS provides in reviewing and tabulating replacement by areas and as requested. The Council recommends that USFWS continue these activities and proactively assist the other agencies in moving the Program forward.

As noted in prior years, the Council again notes its appreciation for the tables provided by USFWS in the FAR. The Council finds them most helpful and requests that the Council continue to be informed each year in the FAR as to the effectiveness of the wildlife replacement efforts and the current status of those efforts. The Council appreciates the USFWS's efforts to review and approve off-site replacement efforts and concurs with the USFWS that such efforts are better than receiving no replacement.

In the past few years the USFWS has participated with other agencies in seeking and reviewing potentially larger, more permanent mitigation opportunities, including ones on federally administered lands. The Council recognizes USFWS's role in the recently completed and successful (and notably under budget) efforts with a project in the Grand Valley and believes that this could be a good model moving forward. The Council appreciates and applauds these efforts as a potentially improved way to provide replacement for fish and wildlife values foregone. The Council would ask that USFWS continue to not only be a participant in these activities, but that it be proactive and a leader in looking for wildlife replacement opportunities which will provide lasting wildlife enhancement and which will fit within the Program opportunities and mandates, including construction of such projects on public lands.

The Council continues to recognize that USFWS, as an Interior agency, has a vital role in assisting other agencies in implementing the Salinity Control Program and encourages the agency to be collaborative in finding solutions for moving the Program forward and working through the issues, as needed, to continue to implement the Program. This collaborative effort is most needed as Reclamation looks for the best opportunities to control the brine through their PVU project. The Council believes that USFWS should consider itself a part of the Interior team that is charged with finding the best solution to the future of salinity control at the PVU. The Council applauds the USFWS's efforts to realistically look at the issues of incidental take under the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act and requests that the USFWS provide a status report of these efforts to the Council.

The Council requests a written response to the above recommendations by **April 16, 2018**.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)

The Council appreciates EPA's determination that Region 8 will be the coordinating region. The Council is pleased with the representative from this region and appreciates his participation at meetings, as well as the materials and responses provided, including EPA's annual write-up in the FAR.

The Council expresses appreciation to EPA for its involvement in and assistance with the Forum's triennial review process to review and update its *Water Quality Standards for Salinity, Colorado River System (2017 Review)* and asks that EPA help shepherd the state standards through to approval when they are submitted. The Council appreciates the updates given each year by EPA on the status of its efforts to approve such standards, as well as the involvement in water quality control by the Tribes in the Colorado River Basin.

The Council recognizes the importance of the PVU in the overall efforts to improve the water quality of the Colorado River and continues to encourage EPA's participation in the PVU EIS efforts. It also recognizes and appreciates EPA's previous commitments to fast tracking of a UIC permit, if the current injection well were to fail before an appropriate brine disposal alternative has been identified.

The Council has found that Region 8 of the EPA has been most responsive to issues it has been asked to address. The Council would appreciate a response to the above comments by **April 16, 2018**.

## **INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION (IBWC)**

While the Council's responsibilities are for activities occurring above Imperial Dam, the Council wishes to express its appreciation for the efforts and the activities of IBWC, particularly as it deals with sensitive salinity matters. The Council encourages IBWC to continue its coordination with the Council, the Forum and the states on issues affecting the salinity of the Colorado River as it crosses the international boundary.

The Council senses there may be a need to better inform Mexican officials and water users of the benefits to them associated with the Title II Salinity Control Program. The Council suggests that IBWC involve the Forum if there are ways that it can assist with any informational efforts directed to those using water below Imperial Dam. In the past the Forum and its staff has facilitated and conducted tours for designated officials from Mexico. It may be that IBWC would find this again to be helpful. If so, please contact the Forum in this regard.

## MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

The funding level recommendations contained in this report are consistent with and support the conclusions regarding the funding required to accomplish the Plan of Implementation (Plan) adopted by the Forum as part of its 2017 Review. The Program includes a significant amount of non-federal cost sharing. The states provide, in total, 30 percent cost share for the Program from the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund and the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund. The states are currently the second largest contributor to the Program behind USDA. In addition to the states' cost share, the local farmers cost share in the USDA on-farm program and many who participate in Reclamation's Basinwide Program bring significant dollars to their projects. The non-federal participants (states, landowners, irrigation districts, etc.) are ready in FY-2018 to contribute their share of the Program costs as up-front payments.

Tables 1 and 2 contain the Council's recommendations for federal funding for FY-2018 through FY-2021. These funds are for the construction activities necessary to meet the Program objectives as set forth in the Plan of Implementation found in the 2017 Review. The Forum also supports these recommendations and will seek adequate funding for the Program. The Council wishes to emphasize that funding delays and funding in lesser amounts will render the Program unable to meet the program objectives, as measured in tons of salt-load reduction. The funding recommendations shown in Table 1 are for the federal portion of project implementation costs only and are independent of the cost-share dollars from the Basin States Program. The Council also urges the agencies to provide adequate funding to support operation and maintenance, technical and education assistance, monitoring and evaluation of implemented projects and planning for future projects. The Council recommends funds for these activities be provided in addition to the funds recommended in Tables 1 and 2. The Council requests that in their responses, federal agencies specifically comment on funding for these non-construction activities.

Recognizing the need for the salinity control set forth in the Plan of Implementation, the Council makes the following funding recommendations:

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### *Basinwide Program (Reclamation)*

Reclamation has already received an FY-2018 appropriation of approximately \$8.107 million for the Basinwide Program. The Council recommends that Reclamation not reduce this appropriation any further through budgetary manipulations and that, in fact, it attempt to increase this appropriation by reprogramming any Reclamation-wide excess FY-2018 appropriations into the Basinwide Program prior to the end of the fiscal year. The Basinwide Program has proven its ability to effectively and efficiently utilize such end-of-the-year funding. Reclamation has provided the Forum and the Council with data that indicates that more than 9,000 tons per year of new salinity control is needed if Reclamation is to meet its goal set out in the 2017 Review.

There are several funding issues facing the Program. The Forum has created a committee to address these issues, and the Council recommends that Reclamation continue to work with this committee in attempting to identify options and strategies for resolving these issues. Prior to reaching that resolution, the Council has recommended temporary funding level expenditures from the LCRBDF in FY-2018. The Council recommends that as the FY-2019 budget process progresses, Reclamation make every attempt to budget \$10,100,000 to the Basinwide Program and that as it begins budgeting for FY-2020 it budgets the same amount. These funding requests are significantly reduced from previous recommendations by the Council. The Council believes that the funding levels it had previously recommended will ultimately be required if the Program is to maintain both the short and long-term goals set out in its most recent Plan of Implementation which will meet or exceed the requirements established by the salinity standard adopted by the States and approved by EPA for the Colorado River System. The Council appreciates Reclamation's efforts to work with the Council to appropriately manage the funds over the next several years and to assist the Forum as it studies and develops options for generation of future revenues. Because large appropriations will be required in the future, the recommended funding levels are the minimum levels that are acceptable for continued success of the Program.

The Council requests that Reclamation continue to budget sufficient funds for required operation and maintenance of constructed units and for plan formulation, including the PVU alternatives studies and EIS effort. The Council requests that Reclamation also address anticipated funding needs for implementation of the preferred alternative in its future budget formulation. The Council also recognizes that Reclamation receives an appropriation to its Colorado River Water Quality Improvement Program. While this program is outside of the Title II funding, there is meaningful overlap and benefits between the two efforts, including supporting staff and maintaining stream gaging and monitoring activities. Therefore, the Council requests that Reclamation support the funding of this line item so that it does not draw dollars away from implementation efforts under the Title II program.

### ***Bureau of Land Management***

In the past, BLM has not been able to quantify its salinity control accomplishments, and the Council has struggled with BLM funding recommendations. BLM's salinity control funding comes through its Soil, Water and Air Program. The Council requests that BLM continue to fund projects in the Colorado River Basin under this program which, among other objectives, will improve the water quality within the Basin. In addition, this past year BLM, through a manager's discretion, has set aside \$1.5 million for specific salinity control activities within the Colorado River Basin. The expenditure of the funds in this manner has proven very beneficial to the Program by developing and testing methods of controlling salinity on public lands. The Council appreciates BLM's efforts to make more money available in FY-2017 and 2018 for salinity control activities. Moving forward, the Council recommends \$1.5 million for the next four fiscal years be set aside for specific salinity control on public lands within the Basin. If BLM is successful in creating a line-item Colorado River Basin salinity control program, the Council asks that this amount of funding be requested.

## **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

## ***EQIP (NRCS)***

The Council appreciates levels of funding made available to the salinity control effort through EQIP. Traditionally, on-farm salinity control has been some of the most cost-effective salinity efforts available. While much of the less expensive salinity control has now been accomplished and there has been a notable increase in on-farm salinity control costs in the last couple of years, cost-effective salinity control opportunities still exist. Continued funding is needed to meet the goal identified in the 2017 Review for the Department of Agriculture. The Council notes and expresses appreciation for the allocation of EQIP funding in FY-2018 consistent with the Three-Year Funding Plan.

The Council has determined that it will make its recommendations for the allocation of EQIP funding for the salinity control effort based on the Three-Year Funding Plan developed by the NRCS State Conservationists for Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. The funding allocations made by NRCS under EQIP generally do not come out until several months after the new fiscal year has begun and, therefore, input to NRCS is more immediate and projections out four years not nearly as germane. Further, the Three-Year Funding Plan put forth by the State Conservationists does not go out to FY-2021. However, to be consistent with other agencies, the Council has preliminarily used the FY-2020 amount for FY-2021.

Based on the information provided in the Three-Year Funding Plan and in support of that plan, the Council recommends the following fiscal year allocations for salinity control in the Basin: FY-2018 - \$13,948,900, FY-2019 - \$13,264,300, FY-2020 - \$12,648,300 with \$12,648,300 as a preliminary amount for FY-2021.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the Council's funding recommendations to the federal agencies. It should be noted that the funds identified in the tables do not include funds needed to continue to operate and maintain salinity control features, nor for the requisite planning and investigation studies necessary for a successful and cost-effective program. The

Council expects that where there is a responsibility to provide funding for these purposes, the agencies will also include the needed additional funding in their budgets.

**TABLE 1**  
**Colorado River Salinity Control – Department of the Interior**  
**Funding Recommendations (2018-2021)**  
**December 31, 2017**

	Fiscal Years			
	2018	2019	2020	2021
Bureau of Reclamation <sup>1,2</sup> Basinwide Program		\$10,100,000	\$10,100,000	\$10,100,000
Bureau of Land Management <sup>3</sup> Salinity Specific Funding from the Soil, Water and Air Program	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000

Notes:

1. The Council anticipates and requests that Reclamation budget sufficient funds for required operation and maintenance of constructed units and for plan formulation in addition to these amounts.
2. Funding recommendations in Table 1 do not include funds recommended for studies and future implementation at the PVU. The Council needs the assistance of Reclamation to determine the level of funding needed to support the PVU.
3. The Council anticipates and requests that BLM budget sufficient funds for inventory and ranking, planning, maintenance, monitoring, evaluation and support.

**TABLE 2**  
**Colorado River Salinity Control – Department of Agriculture (EQIP)**  
**Funding Recommendations (2018-2021)**  
**December 31, 2017**

STATE	FY-2018 <sup>1</sup>	FY-2019 <sup>1</sup>	FY-2020 <sup>1</sup>	FY-2021 <sup>2</sup>
<b>COLORADO</b>				
FA	\$7,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$7,000,000
<b>UTAH</b>				
FA	6,843,900	\$6,159,300	\$5,543,300	\$5,543,300
<b>WYOMING</b>				
FA	\$105,000	\$105,000	\$105,000	\$105,000
<b>TOTALS</b>	\$13,948,900	\$13,264,300	\$12,648,300	\$12,648,300

Notes:

1. Based on State Conservationists' Three-Year Funding Plan (2018-2020)
2. Same as FY-2020. Advisory Council recommendation for guidance when developing 2019-2021 Three-Year Funding Plan

## CONCLUSION

The Council recognizes and appreciates its responsibility to submit comments and recommendations on salinity control activities to the federal agencies. As indicated in the General Comments section, the Council is pleased with the agencies' efforts put forth in 2017 and looks forward to providing a framework for future coordination and consultation. The Council requests that written responses to this report be provided by **April 16, 2018**. Responses should be sent to the Council's Chairman, Mr. Eric Millis, at the following address:

Eric Millis, Chairman  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council  
1594 West North Temple, Suite 310  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84116

It would be appreciated if copies of the responses are sent to Mr. Kib Jacobson, Reclamation's Program Manager for the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (who also serves as the Designated Federal Officer to the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council), and to the Forum's Executive Director, Mr. Don Barnett, at the following addresses:

Kib Jacobson, Program Manager  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program  
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
125 S. State Street, Room 8100  
Salt Lake City, UT 84138

Don A. Barnett, Executive Director  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum  
106 West 500 South, Suite 101  
Bountiful, UT 84010

# **Attachment A**

## **Advisory Council Charter**

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
and  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
and  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

**Colorado River Basin Salinity Control  
Advisory Council**

**Charter**

1. **Committee's Official Designation.** The official designation of this Federal advisory committee is the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council (Council).
2. **Authority.** The Council was established by Section 204(a) of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act (43 USC § 1594), Public Law 93-320, Title II, as amended by Public Laws 98-569, 104-20, 104-27, 106-459, and 110-246 (Act), and is regulated by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), as amended, 5 U.S.C. Appendix 2.
3. **Objectives and Scope of Activities.** The Council provides advice and recommendations to the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior (Interior) and Agriculture (Agriculture) and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as stated in paragraph 4.
4. **Description of Duties.** The Council shall be advisory only and shall:
  - a. Act as liaison between both the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture and the Administrator of the EPA and the States in accomplishing the purposes of Title II;
  - b. Receive reports from the Secretary of the Interior on the progress of the salinity control program and review and comment on said reports;
  - c. Recommend to the Secretary of the Interior and the Administrator of the EPA appropriate studies of further projects, techniques, or methods for accomplishing the purposes of Title II; and
  - d. Provide to the Secretary of the Interior advice and consultation regarding implementation of the Basin States Program to carry out salinity control activities.
5. **Agency or Official to Whom the Committee Reports.** The Council will report to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, and the Administrator of the EPA through the Designated Federal Officer (DFO).
6. **Support.** Support for the Council will be provided by the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation.
7. **Estimated Annual Operating Cost and Staff Years.** The annual operating costs associated with supporting the Council's functions are estimated to be \$75,000, including all direct and indirect expenses and 0.20 Federal staff years support.

8. **Designated Federal Officer.** The DFO is the Colorado River Salinity Control Program Manager with the Bureau of Reclamation, and a full-time Federal employee appointed in accordance with Agency procedures. The DFO will approve or call all Council and subcommittee meetings, prepare and approve all meeting agendas, attend all Council and subcommittee meetings, adjourn any meeting when the DFO determines adjournment to be in the public interest, and chair meetings when directed to do so by the Secretary.
9. **Estimated Number and Frequency of Meetings.** The Council will meet approximately twice a year, and at such other times as designated by the DFO.
10. **Duration.** Continuing.
11. **Termination.** The Council is subject to biennial review and will be inactive 2 years from the date this Charter is filed, unless prior to that date, it is renewed in accordance with Section 14 of the FACA. The Council will not meet or take any action without a valid current charter.
12. **Membership and Designation.** Membership of the Council is specified in Title II as being comprised of no more than three representatives from each of the seven Basin States (Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California). The representatives will serve at the discretion of the Governors of the state that appointed them.

Members of the Council serve without compensation. However, while away from their homes or regular places of business, members engaged in Council or subcommittee business approved by the DFO may be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, in the same manner as persons employed intermittently in Government service under Section 5703 of Title 5 of the United States Code.

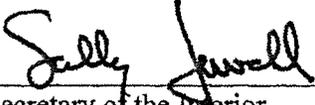
13. **Ethics Responsibilities of Members.** No Council or subcommittee member will participate in any specific party matter including a lease, license, permit, contract, claim, agreement, or related litigation with Interior, Agriculture, and EPA in which the member has a direct financial interest. Members of the Board shall be required to disclose to the DFO their direct or indirect interest in leases, licenses, permits, contracts, claims, grants, or any specific party matter that involve lands or resources administered by Interior, Agriculture, or EPA, or any litigation related to those matters.
14. **Subcommittees.** Subject to the DFO's approval, subcommittees can be formed for the purposes of compiling information or conducting research. However, subcommittees must act only under the direction of the DFO and must report their recommendations to the full Council for consideration. Subcommittees must not provide advice or work products directly to the Agency. Subcommittees will meet as necessary to accomplish their assignments, subject to the approval of the DFO.
15. **Recordkeeping.** The records of the Council, and formally and informally established subcommittees of the Council, shall be handled in accordance with General Records Schedule 6.2, and other approved Agency records disposition schedule. These records shall be available for public inspection and copying, subject to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552.

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
and  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
and  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

**Colorado River Basin Salinity Control  
Advisory Council**

**Charter**

Counterpart Signatory Page

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary of the Interior

JUL 06 2016  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

SEP 07 2016  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Filed

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
and  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
and  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control  
Advisory Council**

**Charter**

Counterpart Signatory Page

  
Secretary of Agriculture

**AUG 23 2016**  
Date Signed

**SEP 07 2016**  
Date Filed

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
and  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
and  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control  
Advisory Council**

**Charter**

Counterpart Signatory Page

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Administrator  
Environmental Protection Agency

AUG 1 2016  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

SEP 07 2016  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Filed

## Attachment B

### ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP December 31, 2017

#### ARIZONA

Clint Chandler  
Phoenix, Arizona

Krista Osterberg  
Phoenix, Arizona

Suzanne Ticknor  
Phoenix, Arizona

#### NEVADA

John J. Entsminger  
Las Vegas, Nevada

Jayne Harkins  
Las Vegas, Nevada

Jason King  
Carson City, Nevada

#### UTAH

Eric Millis  
Salt Lake City, Utah

Kim Shelley  
Salt Lake City, Utah

Gawain Snow  
Vernal, Utah

#### CALIFORNIA

Bill Hasencamp  
Los Angeles, California

Tanya Trujillo  
Glendale, California

#### NEW MEXICO

Tom Blaine  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Trais Kliphuis  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

#### WYOMING

Chad Espenscheid  
Big Piney, Wyoming

Patrick T. Tyrrell  
Cheyenne, Wyoming

David Waterstreet  
Cheyenne, Wyoming

#### COLORADO

Rebecca Mitchell  
Denver, Colorado

Pat Pfaltzgraff  
Denver, Colorado

David W. Robbins  
Denver, Colorado

## **Attachment C**

# **Federal Responses to the 2016 Advisory Council Report**



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
Upper Colorado Regional Office  
125 South State Street, Room 8100  
Salt Lake City, UT 84138-1102

IN REPLY REFER TO:

UC-240  
RES-9.00

**SEP 18 2017**

Mr. Eric Millis, Vice-Chairman  
Colorado River Basin Salinity  
Control Advisory Council  
1594 West North Temple, Suite 310  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-6201

Subject: The Bureau of Reclamation's Response to the Specific Recommendations on the  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program's 2016 Annual Report

Dear Vice-Chairman Millis:

On behalf of Acting Commissioner Alan Mikkelsen, I am responding to your letter of April 7, 2017, regarding the 2016 Annual Report on the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (Salinity Control Program), prepared by the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council (Council). I apologize for the delay in the response. Department of the Interior Officials suspended all Federal Advisory Committee Act activities in May and the suspension was lifted effective September 1, 2017.

The Council contributes greatly to the success of the Salinity Control Program. We truly value your partnership, participation, and recommendations in the Salinity Control Program. The Salinity Control Program continues to make measurable progress in controlling the salinity problem. Our responses to the specific recommendations in the report for Reclamation are enclosed.

We thank you for your support and for being such an active and aggressive partner in the Salinity Control Program. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Kib Jacobson by telephone at 801-524-3753 or by e-mail at [kjacobson@usbr.gov](mailto:kjacobson@usbr.gov).

Sincerely,

for Brent Rhees  
Regional Director

Enclosure

cc: See next page

cc: Bureau of Reclamation  
Designated Federal Officer  
Mr. Kib Jacobson  
125 South State Street, Room 8100  
Salt Lake City, UT 84138

Central Arizona Water Conservancy District  
Chairman, Technical Advisory Group  
Mr. Patrick Dent  
P.O. Box 43020  
Phoenix, AZ 85080

✓  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum  
Executive Director  
Mr. Don Barnett  
106 West 500 South, Suite 101  
Bountiful, UT 84010

## Reclamation's Response to the Specific Recommendations on the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program's 2016 Annual Report

### Paradox Valley Unit (PVU)

#### COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior -

Reclamation: The Council urges Reclamation to quickly move ahead on these efforts so that the overall, revised EIS schedule can be kept. The Council urges that Reclamation make every effort to meet this schedule.

Response: The projected schedule for completing the FEIS/ROD has slipped by about nine months to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter of Fiscal Year 2020. The main reason being that beginning in the spring all Financial Agreements over \$100,000 required approval from DOI officials. Reclamation finally received approval in August to execute the agreements with the entities selected to demonstrate the Zero Liquid Discharge processes.

#### COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior -

Reclamation: The Council also recognizes Reclamation's efforts to develop a contingency plan and road map for placing PVU back into operation as quickly as possible if a shut-down were to occur prior to the implementation of a preferred replacement alternative. The Council requests that Reclamation keep the plan up to date as the EIS and Alternatives Study progresses.

Response: The Contingency Plan is up-to-date.

#### COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior -

Reclamation: The Council appreciates Reclamation's commitment to the ongoing EIS efforts for the PVU and also encourages it to plan for and secure the needed funding for the planning, design and implementation of the selected alternative(s) after issuance of the Record of Decision in 2020.

Response: Reclamation continues to give consideration to completion of the FEIS/ROD process and implementation of an action alternative in the budget formulation process.

#### COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior -

Reclamation: The Council also requests that Reclamation work with the states on funding options, including potential phasing for implementation of the selected alternative.

Response: See Response above.

#### MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior -

Reclamation: The Council requests that Reclamation continue to budget sufficient funds for required operation and maintenance of constructed units and for plan formulation, including the PVU alternatives studies and EIS effort. The Council requests that Reclamation also address anticipated funding needs for implementation of the preferred

alternative in its future budget formulation.

Response: See Response above.

MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior – Table 1, Notes: 2. Funding recommendations in Table 1 do not include funds recommended for studies and future implementation at the PVU. The Council needs the assistance of Reclamation to determine the level of funding needed to support the PVU.

Response: See Response above.

### **Science Team**

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS - General Subjects: The Council also appreciates the efforts of the Science Team in providing the TAG and the Work Group valuable analysis of various issues facing the Program and reviewing potential study efforts. The Council recommends that this support continue.

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: The Council continues to observe the value of the role played by the Science Team. The Council urges Reclamation to continue to convene and staff the Science Team.

Response: Reclamation also has found the efforts of the Science Team to be very valuable and will continue to support, staff, and convene the Science Team.

### **Pah Tempe (La Verkin) Springs**

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: As these studies conclude, the Council requests that Reclamation begin to look at how a project might be built at Pah Tempe Springs.

Response: The LC Region continues to support the study of saline loading originating from the Pah Tempe (La Verkin) Springs. The LC Region looks forward to understanding the results of the ongoing study prior to consideration of a project.

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: The Council believes that these future efforts are moving ahead under this original authority and that if a project becomes feasible at these springs, implementation and funding of the project would be under the original authority. In the response to last year's Advisory Council Report, Reclamation indicated that it would confirm the authority question and report back to the Council.

Response: Reclamation will discuss with the Department of the Interior Solicitors if there is authority in the Salinity Control Act to implement and fund a salinity control project at Pah Tempe Springs. Reclamation will consult with the Council on its discussions with the Solicitor.

## Progress Reports

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: The Council requests that these reports be coordinated with the Work Group and the Forum on the consistency of data and requests that Progress Report No. 25 be finalized soon. It also recommends that Reclamation consider posting past reports on its salinity website.

Response: Reclamation agrees with the Council that the Progress Reports be coordinated with the Work group and Forum so that there is a consistency of data, especially with the Forum's Triennial Review. At times there may be some discrepancy in the data between the Progress Reports and Triennial Reviews since these two reports are on different reporting cycles.

Progress Report No. 25 has been accepted by the Commissioner of Reclamation and approved by the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary).

Progress Reports Nos. 21-25 are available on the web site;  
<https://www.usbr.gov/uc/progact/salinity>

## Economic Damages Model

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: Several years ago the Council recommended the use of \$150,000 in BSP dollars to be matched with Reclamation funds to hire a contractor to improve data, methods and the [Economic Impacts] model. The Council requests a report on the status of this effort.

Response: Reclamation appreciates the recommendation from the Council to use \$150,000 from the Basin States Program to be matched with \$150,000 of appropriated funds to hire a consultant to update the economic damages model. This effort is being led by Reclamation's Lower Colorado Region. It is expected that a consultant will be under contract by the first of calendar year 2018.

## Funding - Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund (LCRBDF)

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: The Forum and Council are dealing with temporarily difficult decisions relative to funding and generation of cost share dollars to the LCRBDF. The Council appreciates Reclamation's efforts to work with the Council to manage this fund over the next several years in a way that prevents the LCRBDF from going into deficit. The Council encourages Reclamation to work with the Forum and Work Group to continue to monitor the status of the funding imbalance and report to the Advisory Council at its regular meetings.

Response: The Salinity Control Act, as amended, requires a cost-share from Upper Colorado River Basin Fund and LCRBDF for expenditures of appropriations in the

Salinity Control Program. For several years there has been insufficient funding available in the LCRBDF to meet the cost-share requirements, thus creating what those in the Salinity Control Program refer to as an accrual of unexpended cost share (Accrual). The imbalance between appropriations and required cost-share over the years has resulted in an Accrual balance of almost \$12M at the end of FY 2016.

Since FY 2014 the Forum and Council has requested of Reclamation that the approximately \$1M annual advance repayment for the original Units not be made so that these funds could be expended on projects in the Basin States Program and help reduce the Accrual. Reclamation agreed to the short-term financial management approach of the LCRBDF with the understanding that the Forum and Council would explore options that would allow the LCRBDF to meet its cost-share requirements and take steps to implement a solution. To date the Accrual issue remains unresolved.

Reclamation is concerned about the present level of the Accrual and the potential for it to increase. We request the Forum and Council focus efforts on developing and implementing a near-term solution that will balance the Salinity Control Program so that the Accrual is eventually eliminated and all cost-share obligations are met annually. Reclamation is also evaluating programmatic options to address this issue. We will continue to consult with the Forum and Council on a course of action.

MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: There are several funding issues facing the Program. The Forum has created a subcommittee to address these issues, and the Council recommends that Reclamation continue to work with this subcommittee in attempting to identify options and strategies for resolving these issues. Prior to reaching that resolution, the Council has recommended temporary funding level expenditures from the LCRBDF in FY-2018, FY-2019 and FY-2020.

Response: See Response above.

Also, Reclamation appreciates the Council's recommended temporary funding level expenditures from the LCRBDF in FY-2108, FY-2019, and FY-2020. Reclamation, in consultation with the Council, will try to obtain the funding levels recommended by the Council.

## **Funding**

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: The Council recommends that Reclamation seek increased appropriations in FY-2018, FY-2019, and FY-2020 in accordance with Table 1. It is noted that the requested amounts have been decreased due to the very cost effective projects selected in the recent FOA. Reclamation is requested to give a detailed report on its efforts to secure additional funding at the next Advisory Council meeting.

Response: Reclamation appreciates the support the Basin States provide to budget funding requests for the Salinity Control Program. Reclamation's UC Region takes

every opportunity to make known the successes and the needs of the Salinity Control Program at all levels of Reclamation, within the Department and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Reclamation is making every effort to fund the Basinwide Program at the highest levels possible while balancing the needs of other high priority projects and programs within a flat-to-declining-budget environment. Reclamation welcomes the opportunity to work with the Basin States to identify and prioritize the activities to be funded by appropriations received for the Salinity Control Program. Reclamation will report to the Council on its efforts to secure additional funding.

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: The Council also recognizes Reclamation's efforts to secure additional Basinwide Program funding each year, up to 15 percent. Reclamation's efforts have been very successful in this regard in prior years. However, in FY-2016 the full additional amount was not available. The Council requests an understanding from Reclamation on this matter.

Response: By the end of the fiscal year accounting, the Basinwide Program had received a full 15 percent of additional funding.

MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS: The Council also urges the agencies to provide adequate funding to support operation and maintenance, technical and education assistance, monitoring and evaluation of implemented projects and planning for future projects. The Council recommends funds for these activities be provided in addition to the funds recommended in Tables 1 and 2. The Council requests that in their responses, federal agencies specifically comment on funding for these non-construction activities.

Response: In FY16 for operation, maintenance, monitoring, and technical assistance of the salinity units of Grand Valley, PVU, and McElmo Creek, Reclamation expended appropriations of \$1,733,857, \$3,732,639, and \$321,000, respectively. In FY17, \$1,881,000, \$3,329,000, and \$716,000 have been appropriated for operation, maintenance, monitoring, and technical assistance of the same units, respectively. Reclamation feels that the units are being adequately funded to operate, maintain, monitor, and provide technical assistance.

In FY 2016, \$380,000 was appropriated into the Colorado River Water Quality Program (CRWQP) with the same amount appropriated in FY 2017. In FY 2016 an additional \$300,000 was transferred to the CRWQP and it is anticipated that \$300,000 of additional funds will be transferred at the end of this fiscal year. Funds in the CRWQP are used for staff salaries, monitoring and evaluation of implemented projects, technical and education assistance, and planning for future Salinity Control Program activities. There is no cost-sharing from the Basin Funds applied to these funds.

MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS, Department - Reclamation: The Council recommends that Reclamation not reduce this appropriation any further through budgetary manipulations and that, in fact, it attempt to increase this

appropriation by reprogramming any Reclamation-wide excess FY-2017 appropriations into the Basinwide Program prior to the end of the fiscal year.

Response: For many years Reclamation has been able to transfer up to 15 percent of its annual appropriations of additional funding into the Basinwide Program. Reclamation is prepared and anticipates to again transfer up to 15 percent of additional funding in FY-2017 into the Basinwide Program.

MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS, Department -

Reclamation: The Council recommends that as the FY-2019 budget process progresses, Reclamation make every attempt to budget \$10,283,000 to the Basinwide Program and that as it begins budgeting for FY-2020 it budgets the same amount.

Response: See previous responses

MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS, Department - Reclamation:

The Council also recognizes that Reclamation receives an appropriation to its Colorado River Water Quality Improvement Program. While this program is outside of the Title II funding, there is meaningful overlap and benefits between the two efforts, including supporting staff and maintaining stream gaging and monitoring activities. Therefore, the Council requests that Reclamation support the funding of this line item so that it does not draw dollars away from implementation efforts under the Title II program.

Response: See previous responses

## **Desert Lakes**

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior -

Reclamation: The Council has recommended for several years the funding of efforts at Desert Lakes to confirm salinity savings from the Huntington-Cleveland Project. Working with the Science Team and the Work Group, the Council requests that Reclamation summarize the data and findings and make recommendations for future study efforts, if any.

Response: Reclamation has been collecting water quality data at Desert Lakes for nine years. Reclamation has requested Basin States Program funding through a 2017 SIR (Studies, Investigations, and Research) proposal to review and write-up an internal, informal report of the findings of the effort. This will help determine if, and what, future data collection might entail. The gage at Desert Seep Wash monitoring the flows leaving the Desert Lake Complex is to be maintained through 2017. Future monitoring will be based on the findings of the report.

## **Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)**

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior -

Reclamation: The Council has observed over the years Reclamation's efforts to be even more effective in administering the Basinwide Program each time with its, generally triennial, Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA). Much commendation should be given to the

Reclamation staff and the NRCS coordinator for work well done. With 2017 being another FOA year, the Council urges Reclamation to continue to stay the course as it builds on lessons learned in prior efforts.

Response: Early in Fiscal Year 2017 Reclamation started getting input on the FOA and process from its own staff and representatives from the Upper Basin States and designated Application Review Committee members from the Lower Basin States. The FOA was released on August 7 and will close on November 14, 2017. Reclamation expects this FOA to be even better than past FOAs. Reclamation encourages representatives from the Upper Basin States to promote the Salinity Control Program and FOA in their respective states and encourage participation by entities.

### **EQIP Ineligible Projects**

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: After discussion, the Council recommends herein that NRCS forward such EQIP ineligible projects, along with pertinent project information, to Reclamation for review and potential funding recommendations by April 1 of each year. The Council also urges that shortly after the receipt of such projects, Reclamation meet with the appropriate state ag agency to review the projects for potential funding under the state ag agency contracts. The Council is concerned that this last step has not been occurring to the degree that it was initially envisioned.

Response: Reclamation will coordinate with the NRCS for the receipt of EQIP ineligible applications in a timely and appropriate time-frame. The time-frame for the NRCS is influenced by the timing of their batching periods, number of applications, available staff, and workload. Once Reclamation receives the EQIP ineligible applications, it will review the applications with the appropriate state ag agency. With input from the state ag agency, Reclamation will decide which applications are deserving of funding under the agreements Reclamation has with the state ag agencies using Basin States Program funding. The main criteria for determining an application for funding is a reasonable cost effectiveness and being a strategic project for promoting more on-farm salinity control measures.

### **Staffing**

COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior - Reclamation: The Council notes that the Upper Colorado Region has brought together a capable staff to effectively administer the Program. Things are really working well from an administrative standpoint within the Program. The Council notes that important to the overall efforts in the past has been an engineering position. This position has now been vacant for several years. Last year Reclamation anticipated that the position would be filled by the end of the calendar year. The federal agencies are now operating under a temporary hiring freeze, but the Council recommends that efforts be made to put things in place so that the position can be filled as soon as the freeze is lifted.

Response: Reclamation agrees with the Council that the Upper Colorado Region has brought together an effective staff. Reclamation also agrees with the Council that additional staff is needed in the Water Quality Group. Reclamation is working on getting additional staff.

### **Contracting Process**

#### COUNCIL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Department of Interior -

Reclamation: The Council requests that Reclamation continue to monitor the time and effort required to move efforts forward through the contractual process and make adjustments as needed.

Response: Reclamation Salinity Control Program (SCP) staff have developed a good working relationship with the Acquisition Management Division staff and have learned to coordinate closely with the AMD staff. This coordination helps the SCP staff to know when to submit Purchase Requests, what documentation is required, and to respond quickly to inquiries and requests. There are still occasional delays and missed due dates, but not the number as in the past. Due to the diligence and persistence of the SCP staff, all Reclamation funding in the SCP, plus additional funding, has been obligated and expended each year.



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

JUN 07 2017

Mr. Eric Millis  
Vice Chairman  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control  
Advisory Council  
P.O. Box 146201  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Dear Mr. Millis:

Thank you for your letter of April 7, 2017, to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding recommendations accompanying the 2016 Annual Report on the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program. I apologize for the delayed response.

USDA appreciates the ongoing efforts and commitment of the Council to reduce salinity loading in the Colorado River Basin. Your long-standing commitment to improve the environment and economies for the users of Colorado River water is commended. The enclosure addresses each of your comments and recommendations, as requested.

Again, thank you for writing and for your continued leadership and support of the Colorado River Basin salinity control activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael L. Young".

Michael L. Young  
Acting Deputy Secretary

Enclosure

**NRCS RESPONSES**  
**to the**  
**COLORADO RIVER BASIN SALINITY CONTROL**  
**ADVISORY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS**  
**for the**  
**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SALINITY CONTROL PROGRAM**

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

The timing of the renewal of the Charter has been problematic in past years because it coincides with the Council's fall meeting, which made it difficult to commit to meeting and travel arrangements when the Charter had not yet been signed by all three sponsoring agencies. The Council appreciates the Bureau of Reclamation's efforts this past year to move the period for renewal forward and, herein, requests that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency also assist in 2018 such that the Charter is renewed in July.

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

Upon receipt of the Charter renewal package, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will work to promptly forward the package to USDA for review and approval by the Secretary in order to meet the requested July 2018 renewal timeframe.

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

The Council recognizes the key and essential role that NRCS has played in reducing the salt load of the Colorado River for the benefit of downstream agricultural and municipal users. These benefits are the results of a coordinated effort between the three State NRCS offices in the Upper Basin and their cooperation with other Federal agencies, the Technical Advisory Group, and the Work Group. The Council also recognizes that much of NRCS's past success in implementing salinity control comes from efforts beyond simply servicing Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts; it comes from talented staff working with producers to properly implement and manage on-farm improvements. A recent U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) study of NRCS data over a number of years in the Grand Valley shows a wide range in effectiveness derived from implementation and maintenance of the same practices, which confirms the importance of the ongoing need for training and assisting producers. The Council requests that NRCS continue to recognize this need and provide sufficient staff and funding, including sufficient Conservation Technical Assistance dollars and other non-EQIP dollars to meet this critical need.

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

NRCS will continue every effort to meet demands by matching staff to workload within available funding. NRCS will also continue to work with local and State partners to find innovative ways to stretch human resources, including the use of contribution agreements, Technical Service Providers, and other partnership arrangements.

NRCS will continue to focus its salinity activities within the 12 project areas, only going to other parts of the Basin if opportunities would be lost and funds might be redirected to other programs outside the Basin.

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

The Council also recognizes and appreciates the dedicated attention that the three State Conservationists have given the Program, and it invites them to continue to frequently participate in Program meetings, discussions, and activities to provide input, expertise, and guidance as we move the overall Program forward.

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

NRCS State Conservationists will continue to participate in meetings, discussions, and activities as their schedules permit. NRCS will continue with the goal of having one or more State Conservationists attend the Forum and Federal Advisory Council meetings. At least one of the State Conservationist's staff will plan to attend the Work Group and Technical Advisory Group meetings. The Acting Salinity Coordinator is tasked with keeping leadership informed about critical issues so that NRCS can provide information and decision making in an effective and timely manner.

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

Implementation of the Program has been adaptive over the years as we have needed to adjust to changes in funding, legislation, policies, practices, and producer needs. The Council is aware that changes are under review in the relationship between the technical assistance and division of labor being provided by NRCS and State agriculture agency personnel with Basin States Program dollars. The Council asks that NRCS continue to stay engaged and provide counsel and guidance in this effort as the most effective and beneficial options for implementation of Program objectives are evaluated and then implemented.

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

NRCS will work to stay engaged on this issue through the Acting Salinity Coordinator and appropriate NRCS State Office personnel.

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

Due to a number of factors, present Program implementation has de-emphasized the role and number of EQIP-ineligible contracts referred to the Bureau of Reclamation for funding consideration. That said, the Council believes that there will continue to be a limited number of such contracts, which are cost effective and strategic to overall Program implementation objectives. The Council is troubled by the recent hands-off process. To the extent that such worthy, yet EQIP-ineligible contracts are received, reviewed, and batched by NRCS, the Council requests that they be forwarded to the Bureau of Reclamation by April 1 of each year, and that NRCS provide the Bureau any evaluations or supporting information it has developed for these contracts so that it can quickly, in conjunction with State agriculture agencies, determine which (if any) of the projects will be funded with BSP funds (See also discussion on this matter in the Bureau of Reclamation section).

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

The NRCS State Conservationist and affected NRCS staff will work to forward applications, consistent with privacy provisions of the Privacy Act, Section 1245 of the 2002 Farm Bill, and Section 1619 of the 2008 Farm Bill to the Bureau of Reclamation as soon as practical after the applications have been reviewed and determined to be ineligible for EQIP contracts.

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

The Council very strongly believes that the efforts of NRCS's Salinity Control Program Coordinator have been critical to the Program's successes. Not only has the Coordinator been effective in coordinating and unifying NRCS's implementation of the Program, but has also been extremely helpful in providing input and expertise in the overall implementation of the Program. As one of the major implementing agencies, the Coordinator has provided a vital role in the overall Program successes. The Council sees an absolute need to continue this position and requests that it always be filled with a motivated and well-qualified individual, and that the position continue to be housed in the Bureau of Reclamation's offices so that full Program coordination can continue. With the retirement of the Coordinator, the Council strongly urges NRCS to quickly act to fill this position with a very qualified individual. The Council believes that this is a most critical and urgent need.

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

NRCS management has indicated that NRCS will work to fill the Western Salinity Coordinator position vacated by the retirement of Travis James when NRCS is again permitted to fill vacancies. The Department currently has a hiring freeze in place with limited exceptions.

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

The NRCS has many dedicated employees who have worked hard to accomplish irrigation improvements and advance the purposes of the Program. The Council recognizes and appreciates the recent filling of the engineer position in the Vernal office, and it encourages NRCS to fill similar position needs in Colorado. These two positions have provided key engineering and technical support in Colorado and Utah, as well as authored the annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports. The Reports prepared each year are most helpful and the Council applauds the involved NRCS staff for this effort. The Council urges that this work continue.

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

NRCS continues to recognize the importance and value of the monitoring and evaluation reports and will work to complete them in a timely manner for 2017 and beyond.

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

The Council recognizes the interplay between broad policy efforts and actual implementation of contracts by those in the field, and the importance of organizing and coordinating the offices of Area Conservationists and District Conservationists in such a way that the efficient implementation of the Program will continue and requests that NRCS make every effort to assure that each of these offices is adequately staffed. The Council recognizes that as efforts are completed or winding down in one salinity project area, implementation dollars will be shifted to other areas, and it requests that NRCS shift staff resources to service the needs. The Council also recommends that NRCS pursue salinity control in established salinity control areas before going to other parts of the Basin to expend salinity EQIP funds. The Council requests that NRCS specifically include in its response a discussion detailing the adequacy of staffing in moving the Program forward.

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

NRCS will continue every effort to meet demands by matching staff to workload. NRCS will also continue to work with our local and State partners to find innovative ways to stretch human resources, including the use of contribution agreements, Technical Service Providers, and other partnership arrangements. NRCS will continue to focus its salinity activities within the 12 project areas; only going to other parts of the Basin if opportunities would be lost and funds might be redirected to other programs outside the Basin.

However, NRCS is currently under a hiring freeze, which will continue until further notice. Once the hiring freeze is lifted, NRCS will proceed to fill approved vacancies as resources permit.

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

In the future, the Program may need to turn more and more to grazing lands (rangelands). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Agricultural Research Service (ARS), and USGS are now engaged in studies, in part funded by Basin States Program funds, to unravel the complex nature of salt loading from grazing lands. NRCS's Salinity Coordinator has been most helpful as this effort has moved ahead since NRCS has leading knowledge in some aspects of this complex puzzle. The Council requests that NRCS continue to support this effort in any way it can.

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

NRCS will continue to coordinate with BLM, ARS, and USGS to determine where NRCS programs and technical expertise can facilitate salt control on grazing land. In particular, NRCS has vast experience and knowledge in establishing and maintaining vegetation of grazing lands if, presumably, vegetation management manifests as the most effective salt control technique.

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:**

The Council recommends the following fiscal year allocations for salinity control in the Basin:

- Fiscal Year 2017—\$14,299,000;
- Fiscal Year 2018—\$14,467,750;
- Fiscal Year 2019—\$14,897,250; and
- Fiscal Year 2020—\$14,897,250 as a preliminary amount.

The Council also urges the agencies to provide adequate funding to support operation and maintenance, technical and education assistance, monitoring and evaluation of implemented projects, and planning for future projects. The Council recommends funds for these activities be provided in addition to the above recommended funds. The Council requests that in their responses, Federal agencies specifically address funding for these non-construction activities.

**NRCS RESPONSE:**

NRCS leadership will continue to rely on the assessments of the State Conservationist to define and quantify the resource needs in their States when considering funds allocations. The demands for EQIP funding continue to grow and are impacted by the dynamics of the economy, critical natural resource concerns, and responses to extreme weather conditions. NRCS will continue every effort to meet demands by matching staff to workload and will continue to work with our local and State partners to find innovative ways to stretch human resources, including the use of contribution agreements, Technical Service Providers, and other partnership arrangements.



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Washington, DC 20240  
<http://www.blm.gov>



May 12, 2017

In Reply Refer To: 7240 (280)

Mr. Eric Mills  
Vice Chairman  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council  
1594 West North Temple, Suite 310  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84116

Dear Mr. Mills:

Thank you for your recent recommendations to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the Advisory Council's 2016 Annual Report on the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program. As requested, this letter addresses the Council's recommendations to the BLM.

## General Comments and Responses

1. "The Council understands that BLM is nearing completion of a salinity 'strategy' document. The Council would appreciate a presentation and report on the documentation at its spring meeting."

### Response

The BLM has prepared a draft document, *A Framework for Improving the Effectiveness of BLM's Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (2017-2022)*. We look forward to presenting and discussing this Framework at the June 2017 meeting in Jackson, WY.

2. "As BLM continues to fund Program efforts at these [\$1.5 M] levels, the Council requests that at the fall Council meeting, and maybe in the FAR, BLM not only report detail of efforts, as was done in the 2016 FAR, but also maybe, in coordination with the Work Group, create a summary table of expenditures and estimated salt savings by state and by control activity."

### Response

The BLM will coordinate with the other Work Group members to refine a table to provide additional information of BLM efforts in the fiscal year (FY) 2017 FAR.

3. "The Council appreciates BLM's efforts to create a better understanding of salt mobilization on public lands, including a significant literature review of rangeland salinity control. This has led to a number of presently on-going studies in conjunction with ARS and USGS. The Council is anxious to

hear the results of these studies and asks that BLM work with the Science Team and the Forum's Work Group in reporting out the results of these studies as they become available...the Council requests that BLM coordinate with ARS in letting the Work Group know where studies have been reported (i.e., journals, etc.) and report the status of the overall BLM and ARS efforts, as well as plans moving forward...the Council requests that BLM coordinate with ARS in letting the Work Group know where studies have been reported (i.e., journals, etc.) and report the status of the overall BLM and ARS efforts, as well as plans moving forward.”

### **Response**

The BLM will work with the Science Team and the Work Group to report the results of these studies as they become available. We will also provide: 1) an updated inventory of report products documenting results of relevant scientific studies conducted in partnership with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS); 2) information as to where studies have been reported (i.e., journals, etc.); and 3) the status of the overall BLM and ARS efforts, as well as future plans. A presentation on the status and intended plans for BLM-ARS studies was provided to the Forum Work Group at the February 2017 meeting in San Diego. The BLM will include this information in the 2017 FAR.

4. “In the 2016 FAR the Council notes significantly increased efforts to quantify and report the salinity savings associated with various BLM activities. The Council applauds these efforts and requests that BLM continue to refine the process and then report such to the Science Team and Work Group for peer review and input. Figure 16 (page 52) shows a correlation between salinity and sediment loading that is ‘generally accepted.’ The Council requests that in their studies BLM independently verify and quantify this generally accepted relationship. Included in this verification would be a review of the changes in flow paths that sediment retention activities may create and, therefore, net changes in salinity values.”

### **Response**

Figure 16 was provided as a conceptual diagram to support BLM's assumption that management activities rendered to reduce soil erosion and sediment transport from public lands also reduce salt loading to streams. The BLM will continue to refine this understanding of transport processes and report to the Science Team and Work Group for peer review and input. Additional information is being collected from the rainfall-runoff study sites within the Colorado River Basin; this information will be used to help quantify the relationship between salinity and sediment loading. The requested assessment to review changes in flow paths and net changes in salinity values may provide challenges for the BLM to provide, given a combination of factors, including the current level of scientific understanding of the sediment transport processes from terrestrial upland areas to streams and lack of baseline soil, sediment, and water quality data for many BLM-managed lands.

5. “The Council notes improved coordination and involvement within BLM. This includes state/field staff, the salinity coordinator, Denver staff and Washington D.C. staff. This is much appreciated and the Council believes that this expanded involvement has, in part, been the reason for recent BLM accomplishments. Previously, the Council urged that BLM select a salinity coordinator whose assignment would be to work exclusively on Colorado River salinity issues. The Council's vision was that the three implementing agencies, with their coordinators domiciled together, would move ahead as a team through daily interfacing of their coordinators. Controlling salt mobilization on BLM administered lands is a monumental task and the Council requests that BLM continually evaluate

The BLM is committed to support for the Colorado Salinity effort, including continuing efforts to collaborate with other federal agencies, and enhancing the effectiveness of the program.

6. “The Council is concerned about the future of the Paradox Valley Unit. Currently Reclamation is involved in an EIS that addresses the future of the project. There are BLM issues to be addressed, particularly with respect to the potential future use of some BLM lands for PVU alternatives (e.g., evaporation ponds). The Council urges BLM to become very involved with these issues and facilitate, as part of Interior’s team, resolution of a workable brine disposal alternative.”

#### **Response**

The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office has been working with Reclamation on the Paradox Valley Unit Replacement Project since Reclamation initiated preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in September 2012. Reclamation is the lead agency for EIS development and project construction. The BLM will continue to work with Reclamation to identify workable project alternatives and help resolve related issues. The BLM is unable to undertake actions to support project implementation until Reclamation completes the EIS and issues a Record of Decision to select an alternative.

#### **Management and Budget Recommendations**

1. “BLM’s salinity control funding comes through its Soil, Water and Air Program. The Council requests that BLM continue to fund projects in the Colorado River Basin under this program... Moving forward, the Council recommends \$1.5 million for the next four fiscal years [FY2017 to FY2020] to be set aside for specific salinity control on public lands within the Basin...”

#### **Response**

The BLM will make every effort to continue funding from the Soil, Water, and Air Management Subactivity for Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program activities. Future funding for salinity control activities, however, will depend on availability of appropriated funds and associated Congressional direction.

2. “If BLM is successful in creating a line-item Colorado River Basin salinity control program, the Council asks that this amount [\$1.5 M] of funding be requested.”

#### **Response**

Congress provided appropriations language for FY 2017 directing the BLM to expend \$1.5M from the Soil, Water, and Air Management Subactivity to support ongoing implementation of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program. As previously mentioned the amount of future funding for salinity control activities will depend on availability of funds, as well as, the appropriate language received from Congress.

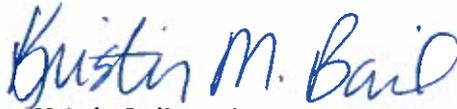
The BLM thanks the Council for their support and recommendations and will continue efforts to make measurable progress toward reducing salinity in the waters of the Colorado River Basin.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Miyoshi Stith, Division Chief for Environmental Quality and Protection, at [mstith@blm.gov](mailto:mstith@blm.gov) or (202) 912-7136.

The BLM thanks the Council for their support and recommendations and will continue efforts to make measurable progress toward reducing salinity in the waters of the Colorado River Basin.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Miyoshi Stith, Division Chief for Environmental Quality and Protection, at [mstith@blm.gov](mailto:mstith@blm.gov) or (202) 912-7136.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kristin M. Bail". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristin Bail, Assistant Director  
Resources and Planning

cc: Kib Jacobson, Program Manager  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program  
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
125 S. State Street, Room 8100  
Salt Lake City, UT 84138

Don A. Barnett, Executive Director  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program  
106 West 500 South, Suite 101  
Bountiful, UT 84010



# United States Department of the Interior

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
Office of the Director  
Reston, Virginia 20192

In Reply Refer To:  
Mail Stop 101  
GS17000786

MAY 02 2017

Mr. Eric Millis, Vice Chairman  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council  
P.O. Box 146201  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-6201

Dear Mr. Millis:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council's comments and recommendations presented in the 2016 Annual Report on the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (CRBSCP). We appreciate the Council's recognition of the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) science contribution to the CRBSCP. We look forward to continuing to work with the CRBSCP to provide data, interpretation, and analysis to facilitate the effective implementation of the Program.

We appreciate the Council's emphasis on the timely results from USGS investigations supporting assessment of potential salinity control measures at the Paradox Valley Unit (PVU) in Colorado and at Pah Tempe Springs in Utah. The USGS has a number of studies associated with the PVU that are nearing completion and the final reports are being prepared. These data and analyses will be conveyed to the CRBSCP as well as the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) PVU staff and their Alternative Study/Environmental Impact Study team to assist with understanding the feasibility and efficiency of potential control measures. The USGS is beginning a new phase of investigation at Pah Tempe Springs to improve understanding of the hydrogeologic characteristics of the spring complex that are relevant to salt-load mitigation through pumping. We will be working closely at Pah Tempe with Reclamation and the Washington County Water Conservancy District later this year to drill wells into the fault zone and to establish a data set and assessment tools to support the design of a feasible mitigation project.

The USGS update of the SPATIally Referenced Regression on Watershed Attributes (SPARROW) model was recently completed and provides a new framework for assessing salinity loading throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin (UCRB). We would be happy to provide a briefing on the new model and modeling results to the Forum and Advisory Council at its next meeting. We encourage the Council to communicate to David Susong, Director of the USGS Utah Water Science Center and current USGS representative to the Forum, whenever it wishes to be briefed on USGS activities in support of the CRBSCP. We will be glad to report out on progress and results, as appropriate, at any stage of the work.

Mr. Eric Millis

2

The USGS will continue to be an active participant in the Salinity Control Program Science Team and recognizes the benefit of that participation in the development of collaborative and relevant research in support of CRBSCP activities. In particular, we recognize the importance of long-term data collection to the CRBSCP and 20-gage network in providing key data for the management of salinity in the UCRB.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to respond to and address the Council's comments and recommendations. If you would like any additional information or have questions, please contact David Susong, (801) 908-5033, or [ddsusong@usgs.gov](mailto:ddsusong@usgs.gov).

Sincerely,



William H. Werkheiser  
Acting Director

Copy to:

✓ Don A. Barnett, Executive Director, CRBSC Forum  
Kib Jacobson, Designated Federal Officer, CRBSC Advisory Council



# United States Department of the Interior



## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Colorado Ecological Services

IN REPLY REFER TO:  
FWS/R6/ES CO

Front Range:  
Post Office Box 25486  
Mail Stop 65412  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0486

Western Slope:  
445 W. Gunnison Avenue  
Suite 240  
Grand Junction, Colorado 81501-5711

ES/CO: BR/Salinity  
TAILS 06E24100-2017-CPA-0004

May 10, 2017

Eric Millis, Vice Chairman  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council  
1594 West North Temple, Suite 310  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84116

Dear Mr. Millis:

We have reviewed the Advisory Council Annual Report (Report) on the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program-2016, and offer the following response to comments addressed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service).

The Service participates in the Salinity Control Program by providing technical assistance on fish and wildlife resource impact assessment, restoration, and management, through implementation of Federal statutes including the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The Service provides independent review and oversight of program aspects dealing with fish and wildlife resources, including our assessment of the degree to which fish and wildlife have received due consideration in project planning and incidental fish and wildlife values foregone have been replaced.

We continue to consult with the Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau) under Section 7 of the ESA regarding water depletions associated with piping projects, which affect the endangered fish in the Colorado River Basin. Several other listed species occupy wetlands and riparian areas, such as the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) and Ute ladies'-tresses orchid (*Spiranthes diluvialis*), which can be affected by projects related to salinity control. We continue to consult with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Bureau on both salinity control and wildlife replacement projects that may impact these listed species and their critical habitats.

In your report you acknowledge the role of the Service in finding, reviewing and supporting viable wildlife replacement projects, as well as reviewing and tabulating replacement acres by salinity control unit (SCU) areas. The Service plans to continue these activities and assist the other agencies in moving the Salinity Control Program forward. We have been working with the Bureau and NRCS to come up with habitat replacement plans that all parties, including state wildlife management agencies, agree will provide long term habitat replacement.

It has been recognized that there is a need to consider "off-site" projects to be able to fully replace

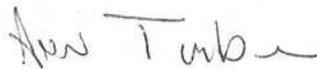
wildlife values foregone in several SCU project areas. The Fish and Wildlife salinity coordinator has reviewed and approved some off-site wildlife replacement proposals presented to us by NRCS staff in Colorado. Because it has been very challenging for NRCS to come up with replacement projects with willing landowners, the Service continues to remain flexible and allow some off-site replacement to be credited to designated SCU's. As noted in your Report, the Advisory Council and the Service would rather have something on the ground and be proportional and concurrent, than to restrict wildlife replacement opportunities for only on-site replacement.

The Council noted their appreciation for tables provided in the 2016 Federal Advisory Report (FAR) that indicate the status of wildlife replacement acres for each SCU. We will continue to provide these tables annually in future reports. Over the past year several wildlife habitat replacement projects were implemented, including the planting of native shrubs at the Grand Junction Wildlife Area, tamarisk and Russian olive removal at the Orchard Mesa Wildlife Area, and wetland pothole creation at the Billy Creek State Wildlife Area. Also, the salinity coordinators representing the Bureau, NRCS, Service, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have continued discussions exploring the potential of implementing riparian restoration projects on BLM land that might be counted as wildlife replacement acres for some of the SCU's.

The Service continues to participate as a cooperating agency in the evaluation of alternatives for salt control at the Paradox site, with the Service salinity coordinator attending most cooperating agency meetings. The Service salinity coordinator continues to be involved with the review of environmental contractor proposals that address potential impacts to migratory birds from evaporation ponds and potential impacts to listed species (e.g., Gunnison sage-grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*)) from deep well injection, and provides feedback to the Bureau. The Service is committed to working with the Salinity Control Program to evaluate Paradox alternatives, with the goals of controlling salinity loads in the Colorado River while also minimizing impacts on the environment and to trust resources, including migratory birds and listed species.

We will continue to work with the Federal partners to address fish and wildlife values forgone and assist with meeting their mitigation goals. Please contact Creed Clayton on any wildlife related issues at (970) 628-7187.

Sincerely,



Ann Timberman  
Colorado Field Supervisor

cc: Kib Jacobson, Program Manager, Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, 125 S. State Street, Room 8100, Salt Lake City, UT 84138

Don A. Barnett, Executive Director, Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum, 106 West 500 South, Suite 101, Bountiful, UT 84010



THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

May 5, 2017

Mr. Eric Millis  
Vice Chairman  
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council  
P.O. Box 146201  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-6201

Dear Mr. Millis:

Thank you for your letter transmitting the 2016 Annual Report on the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program. We appreciate the recognition of the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency's participation and support to the Council. In response to the Advisory Council's comments presented in the report summary, we offer the following.

The EPA will continue to participate and support efforts for the 2017 review and update to the Water Quality Standards for Salinity, Colorado River System. Consistent with your recommendation, we will continue to provide discharge permit data and information and support individual states and tribes, where applicable, when they submit their adopted standards for approval.

We clearly understand the importance of the Paradox Valley Unit and the ongoing Environmental Impact Statement process. As a cooperating agency in the process, our Underground Injection Control and National Environmental Policy Act program representatives will continue to support the review efforts of the Bureau of Reclamation.

Finally, staff at EPA Region 8 will continue to represent the EPA in the Colorado River Salinity Control coordination efforts.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Scott Pruitt", written over a horizontal line.

E. Scott Pruitt

cc: Kib Jacobson  
Program Manager, Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum  
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Don A. Barnett  
Executive Director, Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum