

Hon. Greg Stanton
AZ-09
Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day Hearing

Chairwoman Kaptur, Ranking Member Simpson, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Arizona's water resource needs and the importance of federal investments through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Arizona has long been a leader in the United States when it comes to effectively managing water supplies – it's how we have managed to flourish in a desert climate for so long.

Climate change, though, presents us with many challenges: temperatures rising even higher, less predictable, and consistent rain cycles, and more. These changes have left us in a prolonged drought in the Southwest. It's created more wildfires that threaten the entire state. The extreme heat wears on our water infrastructure and alters our watersheds. And heavy, intense rains combined with dry, hard ground makes many parts of our urban areas more prone to dangerous, life- and property-threatening flash floods.

We know the kind of infrastructure we need to adapt to these changes, but it requires federal investment – and your leadership. I've worked with community leaders—from small, rural, and tribal communities, as well as our major metro areas—to identify Arizona's highest priority projects to help us prepare for the challenges ahead. These projects address our environmental infrastructure needs, flood control and protection, and water supply preservation.

Arizona will have more than \$15 billion in drinking water and wastewater infrastructure needs over the next two decades, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers. To begin to address these needs and the fiscal constraints of our small, rural, and tribal communities to make these investments, the 2020 Water Resources Development Act included my legislation

to expand the existing Section 595 environmental infrastructure program to include the state of Arizona. The program will provide critical assistance to communities and tribal nations across the state to address their aging water and wastewater systems. This will allow them to improve their systems before performance and reliability are compromised while at the same time hardening them to mitigate the impacts of climate change and future disasters, including drought. Since this program focuses on needs across the state, it allows for flexibility to meet changing conditions, the ability to assist with multiple projects, and establishes a process for identifying priority projects. Earlier this year, the first project, a water line for the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, was funded under this authority and more than 15 communities across the state have submitted letters of intent to the Corps of Engineers to participate in this program. I urge the subcommittee to provide strong funding for environmental infrastructure.

Although Arizona is a desert state, it is no stranger to flooding. There are several projects in need of investment to protect Arizona communities from major flood events.

First, the Cave Buttes Dam in Maricopa County provides flood protection for more than a million residents within unincorporated parts of the county as well as the cities of Phoenix, Glendale, Peoria, Tolleson, and Avondale in an area with \$15 billion in residential and commercial property. Unfortunately, floodwater seepage in the dam has sounded the alarm for us to reduce the dam's risk of failure.

Similarly, thousands of residents and hundreds of critical facilities, including Luke Air Force Base and Interstate 10 depend on the Agua Fria River Trilby Wash, or McMicken Dam, a 9.5-mile long earthen embankment, constructed in 1955 by the Corps of Engineers, for flood protection. But because of dam safety deficiencies, land subsidence, earth fissuring, urbanization

and non-compliance with current dam safety standards, the dam's ability to maintain its current level of protection is questionable at best.

We must begin new feasibility studies for both Cave Buttes Dam and Agua Fria River Trilby Wash so the Corps of Engineers can investigate flood risk management needs as well as potential improvements to improve the safety of the two dams so we can strengthen flood risk protection for the region.

The second critical flood control project is Tres Rios, an ongoing ecosystem restoration project along the Salt and Gila river corridors in Phoenix. This project is partially complete, with more than \$100 million in federal funds spent to date. However, construction has come to a halt since the project has reached its authorized 902 limit. To adjust the 902 limit and complete construction of the project, funds are needed for a post authorization change report. Completing Tres Rios would improve the low flow channel for flow conveyance and support native riparian habitat, remove aggressive invasive species like the salt cedar, which consumes large amounts of water, improve native biodiversity and wildlife habitat, provide for safe, passive recreation in the area by creating trailheads, boost local community access to a natural space, and increase the opportunities to use Tres Rios as an educational resource.

Third, I urge the subcommittee to provide new construction starts that will allow projects such as the Little Colorado River at Winslow to proceed. Authorized in the 2020 WRDA, this project would protect the city of Winslow and part of Navajo County—including the community's critical public facilities. Right now, about 1,600 structures and 2,700 properties are in the 100-year flood plain and are at risk. The project will create new levees and reconstruct existing ones to protect residents and businesses.

And fourth, the Continuing Authorities Program (CAP), which is authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1948, provides the Corps of Engineers the authority to solve water-resource, flood-risk mitigation and environmental restoration challenges in partnership with local sponsors without the need to obtain specific Congressional authorization. By cutting the amount of time required to budget, develop, and approve a potential project for construction, this program helps the Corps more efficiently plan and build projects that are smaller, less complex, and less costly. Arizona has at least four of these projects, and I am particularly interested in Section 205 for small flood risk management projects and Section 206 for aquatic ecosystem restoration projects. Right now, though, the CAP program is overextended and underfunded. For example, Section 205 received only \$15 million this fiscal year but is authorized for up to \$69.3 million and Section 206 was funded at \$11 million and is authorized for \$63 million. I'm hopeful that the subcommittee can increase the size of these CAP programs to help these smaller projects.

Securing our water future in Arizona also depends on our ability to respond to the ongoing drought in the Colorado River Basin. I appreciate the subcommittee's past support for directing resources to help us implement the Drought Contingency Plan. This is essential, but we need to take even more action to conserve water as we face additional shortages. The Drought Contingency Plan passed by Congress and signed into law in 2019 directs the Secretary of the Interior to create or conserve 100,000 acre-feet per year or more of water in the Colorado River system to contribute to the conservation of water in Lake Mead. If the drought continues and leads to higher tier shortage declarations, other Lower Basin states and Mexico will also face reductions in water deliveries from the Colorado River. The Colorado River is the lifeblood of the Lower Basin States, providing water that is vital for drinking water in major urban areas including Phoenix and Tucson as well as a significant resource for tribes, agriculture, and

industry. Historic dry conditions combined with the current prolonged drought and future effects of climate change will likely continue to contribute to significant economic, environmental, and other impacts throughout the basin. I urge the subcommittee to provide the Bureau with the resources it needs to fulfill its commitment under the Drought Contingency Plan.

We also need to ensure the continued reliability of the water provided by the Salt River Project to the Phoenix metropolitan area and other communities, including federally recognized tribes, in central Arizona. Shortage conditions on the Colorado River exacerbate the need for central Arizona to have reliable alternative surface water supplies to supplement Arizona's relatively low priority of Colorado River supply. Unfortunately, the accumulation of natural sedimentation in the Verde River basin has significantly curtailed the water storage capacity of Horseshoe Reservoir on the Verde River, one of the seven federally owned reservoirs of the Salt River Project. Rising temperatures and higher variability of rainfall on the Verde River watershed make the carryover storage available in Verde River reservoirs critical to successful climate change adaptation in water management.

The Bureau of Reclamation, which holds title to the Verde River reservoirs, is conducting an appraisal study to evaluate possible solutions to restore storage capacity lost from sedimentation. I urge the subcommittee to include resources for the Bureau to conduct a feasibility study of the viable alternatives identified in the appraisal study so it can make recommendations to Congress for climate change adaptation in the Verde's basin. Putting to work a long-term, viable solution will ensure effective management of central Arizona's water supplies for more than two million residents.

Chairwoman Kaptur and Ranking Member Simpson, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your support for critical investment in our nation's water infrastructure.