



May 16, 2022

Representative Raul Grijalva
Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources

Representative Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources

Representative Jared Huffman
Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and
Wildlife

Representative Cliff Bentz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and
Wildlife

RE: Support for water bills – H.R. 6238 and H.R. 7632

Dear Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, Chairman Huffman, and Ranking Member Bentz:

On behalf of our organizations' millions of members and supporters, we thank you, and your hard-working staff, for holding a legislative hearing on a variety of western water and drought bills on May 12, 2022. In particular, our groups are supportive of H.R. 6238, the *WaterSMART Access for Tribes Act* and H.R. 7632, the *Tribal Access to Clean Water Act*.

The Colorado River is one of the American West's national treasures. It is a foundation for the West's economy, supporting five million acres of irrigated farmland that deliver produce nation-wide, and providing drinking water for over 40 million people, including under-served Tribal and rural communities. Winding its way through eleven national parks, the river supports a \$26 billion recreational economy with total economic impacts estimated at over \$1 trillion. The river, though, is in crisis. Reservoirs in the Colorado River Basin are at historic lows after a twenty-two year drought. Resulting diminished stream flows pose increasingly serious challenges for cities, farms, wildlife, and recreation.

Funding programs and projects that help address historic Western drought conditions will support Tribes, communities, and agriculture as well as fish and wildlife. The bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) includes significant investments in addressing

western water infrastructure challenges, including addressing decades of underinvestment in tribal water and wastewater systems. While IJA is a significant step forward in addressing these challenges, Tribes and rural communities often lack capacity and resources to navigate the complex array of federal programs. Grant writing assistance, engineering evaluation and design of water infrastructure systems, and training of certified operators are all critical for ensuring that the infrastructure funding is utilized expeditiously and appropriately. Securing sufficient cash funding or collateral for meeting Federal match requirements is also a significant barrier to Tribes and other communities in accessing certain Federal funding opportunities such as the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART Program. Authorizing additional flexibility in meeting Federal match requirements will be an important step in making federal programs more accessible to Tribes and other stakeholders. Both H.R. 6238, the *WaterSMART Access for Tribes Act* and H.R. 7632, the *Tribal Access to Clean Water Act* make significant strides in addressing the barriers Tribes must navigate in terms of accessing federal funding for much needed water and wastewater infrastructure improvements. We look forward to continuing to work with you on removing such barriers and creating more equitable access to federal programs.

Our organizations have a long history of supporting Colorado River restoration, bird and wildlife habitat conservation, and diverse stakeholder engagement. Our organizations advocate for a balanced approach to 21st-century western water infrastructure, water supply security, and ecological resilience. We support solutions that offer multi-sector benefits wherever possible to protect the flow of the river, ensure greater economic vitality, and secure water resources for millions of Americans dependent on this critical natural resource. These bills include several provisions that will do just that—such investments are essential to making our water systems more resilient. We look forward to continued collaboration with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

American Rivers

Environmental Defense Fund

National Audubon Society

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Trout Unlimited

CC: Representative Stansbury

Representative Neguse