

**Testimony of Ken Calvert**  
**Member of Congress, California's 41 District**  
**The House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Water,  
Wildlife, and Fisheries**  
**On H.R. 9515, the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation  
Program Amendment Act of 2024**  
**November 20, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chairman Bentz, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on my bill, H.R. 9515, the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program Amendment Act of 2024. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the National Audubon Society, Colorado River Board of California, and Bureau of Reclamation – all three of whom are here today to testify in support of this bipartisan legislation.

My district is the only one in California directly served by the Colorado River. The eastern portion of my district includes the desert community of Coachella Valley which is almost exclusively served by Colorado River water and groundwater. Unfortunately, my district and others served by the Colorado River have dealt with significantly reduced water flows as a result of a 24-year prolonged drought in the Colorado River Basin. What's more, an unreliable Colorado River puts more pressure on the entire California water system, which is comprised of both the State Water Project and Central Valley Project. For a state that provides fresh water to 40 million people and supplies one-third of the nation's food supply, this is extremely problematic. That is why I have spent much of my time in Congress advocating for the resources necessary to ensure all Californians have a reliable and affordable supply of water. As negotiations for the post-2026 Colorado River operating guidelines continue, it's my belief that conservation on the Colorado River is necessary to sustain these supplies for future generations of Americans and the farms that feed the nation, and that conservation must be achieved through a seven-state consensus.

As Colorado River water uncertainty in the Basin continues to increase, we must do everything we can to find ways to reduce costs and optimize the way the federal water system operates.

That is why I introduced this legislation. This bipartisan, good-governance bill would support Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (Program) activities by establishing an interest-bearing account at the Department of Treasury to hold the funds contributed by the states of Arizona, California, and Nevada for the Program.

Congress first authorized the Program in 2009, and it is supported by agencies within the federal government, as well as State, Tribal, and local agencies. The goal is to establish over 8,000 acres of native riparian and aquatic habitat from Lake Mead to the Mexican border. The Program's budget for the 50-year term of its enactment was \$626 million with the federal government contributing 50 percent and the three states providing the rest of the funding: California pays 25 percent and Arizona and Nevada pay 12.5 percent each. However, over time, the pace of funding has exceeded work expenditures, and the Bureau of Reclamation has accumulated over \$70 million in contributed funds for future costs.

Unfortunately, the accounts in which the Bureau of Reclamation holds the contributed funds do not earn interest or any investment return. Luckily, there are multiple examples of funds established by congressional action that are directed to be invested or to earn interest such as the Social Security Trust Fund.

The establishment of an interest-bearing account for States' contributions to this successful Program would provide expanded opportunities for long-term investments in critical habitat restoration projects. Finding new efficiencies in government operations is going to be a priority in the next administration and this bill is a great example of having our tax dollars stretched further to make a real impact. I hope all my colleagues on both sides of the aisle can support this commonsense approach.