

Nathan Thayn Testimony on HR 231
House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Water,
Wildlife and Fisheries
Longworth House Office Building, Room 1324
January 23rd, 10AM

Thank you, Chair Hageman and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to present to you today.

My name is Nathan Thayne, I am a 4th generation farmer from Green River Utah. My great, great grandfather William Alvin Thayn put down roots in Wellington, Utah in the 1880's and started farming and raising cattle on land adjacent to the Price River. My father eventually moved to the Town of Green River Utah in the 1980's and purchased a large farm immediately adjacent to the Green River. I studied Agriculture Business at Utah State University and started full time farming with my father right after graduating college. My father is here today sitting in the gallery. I have two sons who are now working with me on the farm and plan on continuing our heritage of producing some of the best corn, watermelons and alfalfa in the West.

I am here this morning to testify in favor of HR 231, legislation that would reauthorize the Upper Colorado River System Conservation Pilot Program.

SCPP Background

As committee members know, the Upper Colorado River System Conservation Pilot Program, or SCPP, is an opportunity for temporary, voluntary, and compensated reduction in consumptive use of agricultural, municipal, or industrial water in the Upper Colorado River Basin. Projects typically involve full or partial season fallowing of fields, (where farmers forgo irrigation), changing to lower-water-use crops, or forbearing the use of excess reservoir water shares. Participants are compensated per acre-foot of conserved water to replace income lost by not using water for its typical purpose.

SCPP is administered in Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming by the Upper Colorado River Commission with support from local state agencies. SCPP is currently funded by Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 allocations to the Bureau of Reclamation of up to \$125 million. Just under \$50 million has been spent on SCPP to-date.

In 2022, SCPP was reauthorized for 2023 and 2024 as part of the Upper Colorado River Commission's 5-Point Plan responding to former Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Touton's request for the Colorado River Basin States to reduce use by an additional 2-4

million acre-feet of water annually to protect critical elevations at Lake Powell and Lake Mead.

In 2023, the SCPP program conserved about 38 thousand acre-feet at a cost of about \$16 million across the four Upper Division States. The state of Utah contributed about 16 thousand acre-feet for about \$5.5 million in compensation. In 2024, SCPP featured a more focused scope of eligible projects that supported innovation and local resiliency in water conservation. In 2024, SCPP conserved about 64 thousand acre-feet at a cost of about \$29 million across the four Upper Division States. Utah contributed about 22 thousand acre-feet for about \$10 million in compensation.

My Experience with the SCPP Program

As I mentioned previously, my family farms about 1600 acres of river bottom and bench land along the Green River. Our best money crop is feed corn followed closely by alfalfa. Green River is known nationwide for its melons and we love growing and eating those too! The products we produce end up putting milk, beef and melons on the tables of American families throughout the Nation.

My family farm conserved about 357 acre-feet of water in SCPP in 2023, and 1,981 acre-feet in 2024 by fallowing fields that usually grow alfalfa and corn.

If you know anything about farming, it's a lot like gambling. We spend a lot of money up front on seed, equipment, fertilizer, and fuel in the hopes of growing a good crop and then having a good market to sell it in at the end of the year to make our money back and maybe turn a little profit.

We have also spent a lot of money improving efficiency in our farming operations and in the use of our most precious resource, which is water. We were introduced to the SCPP program in 2023. We always try to maximize the use of our water. Occasionally, we have a need to pull a field out of production for one reason or another. We still use the water but it goes to more marginal ground and our financial returns go down. The SCPP has introduced us to the idea that we can conserve water, leave it in the river, generate a better financial return than putting it on less productive ground and restore the productivity of the fields we have pulled out of use by working on soil health, drainage issues and nutrients needed by the crops we grow.

We haven't traditionally used fallowing as a tool in our farming operations, primarily because of the financial hit we took by taking the ground out of production. We are learning that our water can be viewed as another type of cash crop that would allow us

to implement a type of rotational fallowing that would actually be very beneficial to our operations.

The SCPP program has also opened our eyes to the fact that the water we are saving and leaving in the river is benefiting Utah by meeting our obligations to our downstream neighboring States as well as benefiting the river environment and the endangered fish found in the Green River.

In summary, the users of the SCPP appreciate your support for this program. It is working. It is changing attitudes, making us better farmers, providing a little bit of certainty and security in our operations, and at the same time, helping our state and our downstream neighbors and providing a little extra water for the fish and environment. We have no interest in selling out to either developers or wall street. We want to keep farming in the family for at least another 4 generations or longer.

To wrap up, let me summarize two key takeaways:

1. PASS HR 231

I encourage the Committee to pass HR 231 quickly to ensure this program is reauthorized

2. LONGER TERM SOLUTION NEEDED

The SCPP is an important tool for farmers. At the same time, I would encourage the Committee to work with states and farmers like me to design a more flexible, longer-term policy that will provide water users with the tools needed to conserve water on the Colorado River in a transparent and effective fashion

Thank you again, Chair Hageman, and members of the committee for this opportunity.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.