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Before the

House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife

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Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Bentz, Representative Napolitano, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. It is my pleasure to convey Metropolitan Water District of Southern California's (Metropolitan) support for H.R. 8090, extending the authorization for Reclamation's Basin Study Program for ten years. Metropolitan is the largest wholesale water provider in the United States. We are comprised of 26-member public agencies, including 14 cities, 11 municipal water districts, and one county water authority, that collectively serve drinking water to approximately 19 million people and businesses in more than 300 cities and numerous unincorporated communities in Southern California.

In 2012, the Bureau of Reclamation, in partnership with the seven Colorado River Basin States, completed the first, most comprehensive study of the future supplies and demands on the Colorado River. While the study itself confirmed what we already knew, the reservoirs were rapidly declining, it emphasized the shortfalls would be even more significant, up to 3.2 million acre-feet annually, if near-term actions were not developed to mitigate and adapt quickly to the supply and demand imbalances.

Metropolitan staff participated in the development of the 2012 study of the Colorado River. This study was the first comprehensive study by Reclamation that considered the impacts of climate change on River operations. It examined future water supply and demand scenarios based on factors such as projected changes in climate and varying levels of growth in communities, agriculture and business in the seven Basin States of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. Additionally, the study took into account environmental needs such as flows for fish and wildlife and the ecologic functions of the River. This comprehensive assessment, funded by Reclamation and the Basin States, was the first time the Basin States came together to consider the impacts of a drier future.

Subsequently, in 2014, Reclamation and the Basin States, in collaboration with the Ten Tribes Partnership and non-governmental organizations began the Colorado River Basin Tribes Partnership Tribal Water Study. This study compiled critical information about the member tribes who have reserved water rights, including unresolved claims, to divert nearly 2.8 million acre-feet of water per years from the Colorado River and its tributaries. The Tribal Water Study was released in 2018 and highlighted that imminent tribal water development will further widen the future gap of projected water supplies and demands.

One of the key components of the Basin studies is it allows Reclamation to bring together technical experts, state and local water managers, conservation groups, and other stakeholders to assess water supply and demand imbalances at the river basin level, as well as identify the disparities amongst the water users. The studies identified long-term challenges and served as a baseline to help make informed policy decisions. They encouraged innovative partnerships and conservation programs and policies to sustain current and future supplies.

For example, the 2012 Basin Study, coupled with ongoing drought conditions and the potential for water supply shortages prompted discussions and negotiations focused on how to conserve additional water supplies. On April 16, 2019, Congress authorized the Drought Contingency Plan agreements in the Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan Authorization Act (P.L. 116-14), which are scheduled to be in place through 2026.

As you have heard in Congressional hearings earlier this year, the western portion of the United States is experiencing severe drought made worse by a drying climate, with 85 percent of the West categorized as being under some degree of drought. The situation is particularly dire on the Colorado River where Lake Powell and Lake Mead are both in long-term decline and both hit record low levels this year.

Today, Reclamation is working with the Basin States to develop a plan that aims to conserve an additional 2 to 4 million-acre-feet of water next year, and perhaps into the foreseeable future. Collaboration, coordination, and cooperation across all the stakeholders in the Colorado River Basin in the United States and Mexico are needed to help meet this goal and adapt to our drier future. Reclamation's modeling scenarios have helped inform these difficult discussions. Federal Investments, like the funding for water storage, recycling, and conservation projects included in the bipartisan infrastructure bill, will help provide communities with resiliency in the face of changing climate.

The Basin studies ensure we are all operating from the same science and are aware of the risks we are facing. In addition to the Colorado River basin, Reclamation has conducted these studies in other watersheds across the West including the Los Angeles and Santa Ana basins in our service area and the Sacramento-San Joaquin system in Northern California. We can no longer deny the impacts of climate change on our water supply and must work together as one to adapt to the critical hydrological conditions in our watersheds. Metropolitan looks forward to working with Representative Porter, this committee, and Congress to reauthorize this helpful program.