

THE COLORADO RIVER

A ROADMAP FOR THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

Significant progress is being made on the path toward more sustainable management of the iconic Colorado River, but the work is not complete. Key milestones are looming in 2017 that will plot the course of River operations for the years ahead, and also present an unmatched opportunity for an early win. It is essential that the new Administration's Secretary of the Interior signal **immediately** that high-level attention is focused on resolving the most pressing issues and moving forward on implementation of agreements recently achieved.



SEAL THE DEAL WITH MEXICO.

Discussions with Mexico on joint Colorado River management have been ongoing since 2008. The historic agreement known as Minute 319 to the 1944 Treaty on the Colorado River was executed in 2012 and its groundbreaking provisions, especially those addressing flows for the Delta, were applauded around the world. Less visible but critical to a reliable foundation for River operations, are the provisions addressing the sharing of water shortages between the two countries. Minute 319 will expire at the end of 2017. Negotiations for a successor agreement, dubbed Minute 32X, are at a critical stage. If not completed during the Obama Administration, the finalization of this document must be the first priority for the new Secretary. **A prompt meeting with the Mexican Ambassador to the U.S.** will demonstrate continued strong commitment to building upon the successes of the past and working toward joint management of this binational treasure as one integrated river. Designated Interior appointees should be laser-focused on working with the International Boundary and Water Commission and the Basin States to bring this deal to closure.

TAKE IMMEDIATE AND POSITIVE STEPS TOWARD BALANCE IN THE LOWER BASIN.

Existing operational agreements on the Colorado River provide for reduction of deliveries to some water users in the three Lower Basin States (Arizona, California and

Nevada) when Lake Mead reaches specified elevations. There is a 50/50 probability that the Secretary of the Interior will declare a shortage triggering these reductions in August 2017. While the rules are in place to govern this situation, it will not be pleasant. Arizona will lose more than ten percent of its normal allocation of Colorado River water. The Lower Basin states and key water agencies are in the midst of "drought contingency plan" (DCP) efforts that are intended to mitigate the impact of drought and over-consumption through increased conservation and amending the shortage schedules—to start earlier and cut deeper. Strong Interior leadership must continue to help drive these discussions to closure. A credible Federal alternative should be crafted that can be put in place should DCP efforts fail. **The Secretary should convene an early meeting with the Governors' representatives of the seven Colorado River Basin States** and emphasize Interior's commitment to facilitating an equitable solution.

SET THE STAGE FOR CONSTRUCTIVE RESULTS.

Other areas including Indian water settlements, Upper Basin demand management, and better coordination with USDA also require the focused attention of Interior Department leadership in 2017. The accompanying white paper explains these issues and recommends specific action. Early meetings between Interior personnel and key Members of Congress and Committee staff will help ensure that these issues remain non-partisan.