Written Testimony of Eric L. Millis, PE
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Before the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources, U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing: The Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan
March 28, 2019

Thank you, on behalf of the State of Utah, for allowing me to submit testimony regarding the Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan. Utah is one of the seven Colorado River Basin states. More specifically it is one of the four Upper Division states, along with Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming.

The Colorado River provides a significant amount of water to Utah, comprising approximately 22% of the State's total water supply. This water is used largely by agriculture in the eastern part of the State but is also the supply for the Central Utah Project, a trans-basin diversion which conveys water to the Wasatch Front - a 30-mile-wide strip of land extending from 70 miles north of Salt Lake City to 70 miles south where most of the state's population resides. Central Utah Project water is used for municipal and industrial purposes in this rapidly growing population center. In the future, Utahns will rely on the Colorado River even more heavily as reserved water rights settlements with Native American tribes are implemented, industry and agriculture expand, and the state's rapid population growth likely continues.

For 19 years, the Colorado River Basin and the State of Utah have been in a severe drought situation - one of the worst in the last 1,200 years. Although Lakes Powell and Mead appear to be operating as designed through this dry period, both are at uncomfortably low levels. The unknown is whether this drought will continue or if it is a result of climate change that may make a permanent impact on the river as a source of water supply.

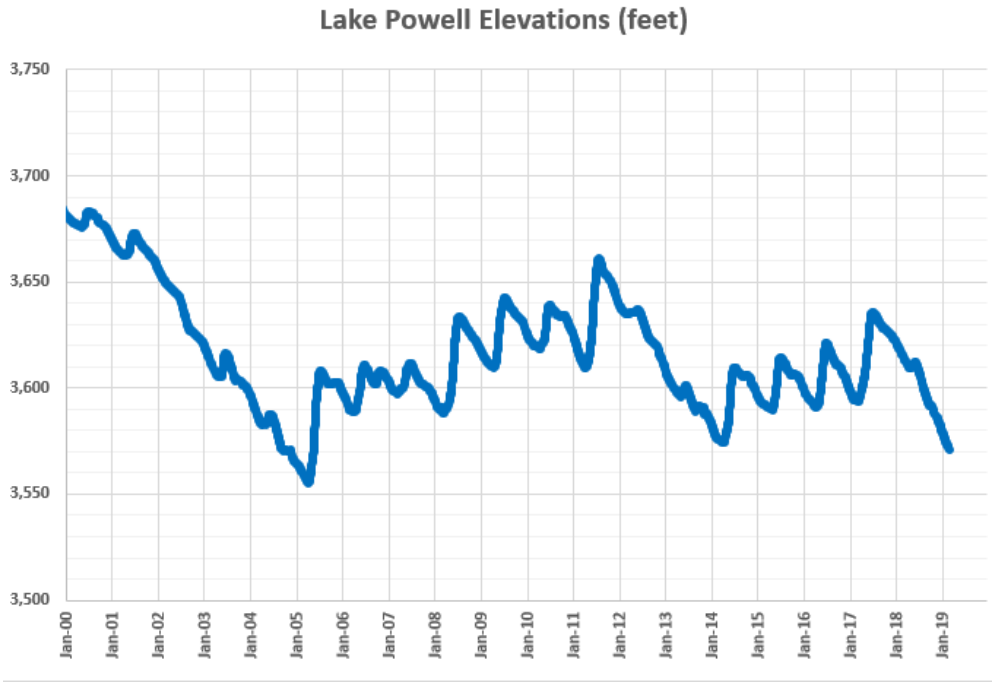
Given needs, which will only increase over time, protection of this water supply for Utah water users is essential. The Drought Contingency Plans that have recently been agreed to by the seven Colorado River Basin states will offer protection not only to Utah but to the other states as well. The protection afforded Utah and the other Upper Division states by the drought contingency plans will enable these states to maintain Compact compliance. This then protects the Upper Division states against a Compact call, which would require involuntary curtailment of uses of Colorado River water in each Upper Division state.

Involuntary curtailment is undesirable because it would require farmers and other water users cut back or cut off use of their Colorado River water. This would be financially devastating to businesses, individuals and the communities in which they are located due to cuts in production or having to purchase expensive replacement water. Included in this would be potential

reductions of supply to the Central Utah Project, which could also be required to purchase expensive replacement water or cutback on delivery.

The Upper Basin Drought Contingency Plan is aimed at protecting Upper Basin water supplies by keeping Lake Powell from falling below a specified critical elevation. If Lake Powell were to fall below this elevation (el 3525), hydroelectric power generation at Glen Canyon Dam would be reduced or could eventually be shut off altogether. Millions of customers throughout the West would be impacted by a reduction in hydropower generation. Additionally, such a reduction would cause a loss of power revenues. These revenues are critically important for the operation, repair and replacement of Colorado River Storage Project facilities. The revenues also fund a number of critical environmental programs such as the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and the Colorado River Salinity Control Program.

We are grateful for the excellent snowpack we have received this year in the mountains that feed the Colorado River. It is a marked change from last year when April 1 snow totals in Utah and in the Colorado River Basin were much lower than normal. In fact, the total rise in Lake Powell due to the runoff last year hardly made a bump on the graph (below – between Jan-18 and Jan-19) showing the water levels of the Lake. With the required releases from the Glen Canyon Dam, Lake Powell has dropped to within 10 feet of the lowest elevation it has seen since filling in the 1960s and 1970s. This graph shows the effects of the drought on the elevations of Lake Powell since 2000, when it was effectively full. There have been some good years such as 2005, 2008, 2011 and 2017, but most have been below average.



This year we are looking forward to near normal inflow into Lake Powell due to the excellent snowpack. This will help make up for the effects of the bad last year and bring us back to somewhat more comfortable lake elevations. It is hard to know, however, if this year will just

be one more good year among so many bad ones. It is therefore wise to have a plan and implementable actions to help ensure we can keep the system operating in a way that complies with the Law of the River and protects water users.

Utah wholeheartedly supports the drought contingency plans, the benefits they will bring and the straightforward legislation needed to implement those plans. We have worked with the other Upper Division states on the Upper Basin Plan. We have reviewed the Lower Basin Plan and worked with the Lower Basin states as they have developed it. We also note that Mexico will implement measures similar to those of the Lower Basin states when the Lower Basin Plan is ready for implementation. While all three of these plans individually provide great benefit, working together there will be synergism which will create an overall result that is larger than the sum of its parts.

Given the critical need, the benefits that will occur and the hardship that will be avoided, Utah asks Congress to pass the legislation required to make these drought contingency plans a reality.