

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20510

May 15, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As Members of Congress representing the headwaters of the Colorado River, we write to request that you designate the Colorado River basin as a Critical Conservation Area (CCA) under the 2014 Farm Bill's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Despite above average snowpack in some portions of the region this past winter, the Colorado River basin as a whole continues to be in the midst of historic drought conditions that are only projected to worsen in the coming years. The region is in need of coordinated federal assistance to continue providing robust agricultural and economic output into the future and would benefit greatly from the resources and programs offered through the RCPP.

We have seen strong support for designation of the Colorado River Basin as a CCA in our home state. The sentiments outlined in the enclosed letter from the Colorado River District – Colorado's largest water district – have been echoed across the ideological spectrum. We've heard from diverse interests, including ranching organizations, recreation businesses, sportsmen, and conservation groups about the many ways that a CCA designation will support agriculture, river system health and our state's economy.

Colorado's population is projected to double by 2050 and municipal water needs will continue to put pressure on agriculture unless we manage the Colorado River more sustainably. We feel the RCPP can help us meet the future challenges brought on by a growing population and a drier climate. We strongly urge you to designate the Colorado River basin as a CCA. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Mark Udall  
United States Senator



Scott Tipton  
Member of Congress



May 1, 2014

The Honorable Michael Bennet  
458 Russell SOB  
Washington, D.C. 20510

**RE: Colorado River Basin as Critical Conservation Area**

Dear Senator Bennet:

The Colorado River Water Conservation District (River District) respectfully requests your support for Secretary Vilsack's designation of the Colorado River basin as one of the eight Critical Conservation Areas pursuant to Section 1271 of the 2014 Farm Bill.

The River District is the largest water district in Colorado created 77 years ago by the Colorado Legislature to protect and develop the waters of the Colorado River and its tributaries to which Colorado is entitled. We have been a frequent partner with the National Resource Conservation Service and look forward to enhanced opportunities as a principal headwaters agency of a future Colorado River Basin Critical Conservation Area (CCA).

Establishing a Colorado River Basin CCA would:

- Underscore the national significance of the Colorado River Basin and bring in additional investment from other sources
- Allow NRCS to focus its resources on priority areas for addressing drought, soil erosion and other issues
- Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of NRCS programs by making system-wide investments and tailoring programs to meet regional needs
- Expand opportunities to improve irrigation on lands that don't rank high for salinity control

Fortunately, the seven states of the Colorado River basin have the institutional framework for communication, coordination and cooperation among the states as envisioned by these large landscape, regional partnerships, as proven by recent historic interstate and international agreements.

The River District looks forward to working with you and your office to secure the Secretary's designation of the entire Colorado River basin as a Critical Conservation Area.

Sincerely,

R. Eric Kuhn,  
General Manager

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