

**Statement of Congressman Scott Tipton**

**October 29, 2013**

**Before the House Natural Resources Water and Power Subcommittee  
Oversight hearing *A Roadmap for Increasing our Water and Hydropower Supplies: The  
Need for New and Expanded Multi-Purpose Surface Storage Facilities.***”

Thank you Chairman McClintock for convening today’s hearing as the subcommittee continues to pursue innovative ways to promote new water storage while also examining different obstacles that are impeding construction.

Last month a deadly storm struck my home state of Colorado causing unprecedented and lethal flooding that damaged over 16,000 homes and destroyed hundreds of local businesses. My heart goes out to all the families and business owners that are still struggling to recover from this tragic event. As the Chairman noted with exception of the Animas-La Plata project in southwestern Colorado, the Bureau of Reclamation has not built any large multi-purpose dams or reservoirs over the last generation. Preventing all the damage from a storm of this magnitude is impossible; however, our nation’s failure to develop new surface storage projects only continues to amplify the devastating results of storms like this one.

Increasing water storage is critical as the natural cycle of rivers in the West is one of boom and bust, surplus and drought. Streamlining the regulatory permitting process is just one way to reduce the ills associated with this cycle and can help better prepare those communities that rely on snow pack to support local economies. Colorado is a headwaters state, and as the Water Information Program in Southwest Colorado reports, more than 10 million acre feet of water, flows out of Colorado watersheds annually. Thanks to the foresight of previous generations water storage infrastructure was built throughout the West to capture this vital resource. This infrastructure helped reduce the threat of catastrophic flooding and provided a secure and reliable source of water. Many major western cities have grown and prospered in part thanks to

water that originated in Colorado. Without the ability to store water that falls on Colorado's slopes, the West as we know it would not exist. The Colorado Water Conservation Board has estimated that by 2050 Colorado will need an additional 1 million acre feet of water to meet projected demands. This figure accounts for water saved through conservation. Water conservation is something all westerners know the importance of but conservation alone is not enough. New water storage will play a role in meeting future demands and could also be utilized to meet environmental and species protection goals, support our farm and ranch communities, ensure recreational opportunities are consistent and also assist with reducing the destruction from wildfire caused by drought conditions. Unfortunately, select groups have failed to realize the potential environmental benefits from increased storage and have held up the development of new projects with endless litigation and a variety of other tactics.

Rather than increasing storage capacity, these short sighted groups instead focus on efforts to re-distribute water from rural to urban areas. This is frightening not only from the perspective of water rights but in terms of our nation's food supply. This problem is exasperated by the fact that Colorado farmers and ranchers have been enticed to sell over 191,000 acre feet of water for municipal and industrial use since 1987. To make matters worse, the Greeley Tribune recently reported that "In most years, many of Colorado's farmers lease extra water from neighboring cities to maximize production, but this year, cities — concerned about re-filling their depleted reservoirs — leased far less water than normal to farmers, forcing some crop growers to plant less acres, or plant crops that require less water."

The growing West needs new water projects and the federal government should be fostering a regulatory environment that encourages new surface storage production rather than stifling these efforts. Unfortunately, in too many instances this is not the case. The Grand Mesa Water Conservancy District had planned to rehabilitate breached reservoirs in the fall of 2008 but cited various regulations as the reason

preventing them from moving forward with these projects. Even more troubling is an example from 2011, where the Bureau of Reclamation sent nearly \$30,000 in cash for one survey to entice responders to go on record supporting the physical removal of four dams in California and Oregon.

My hope is that today's oversight hearing will shine a light on some of the obstacles that are preventing the construction of new federal and non-federal water storage as well as explore some of the innovative options and technologies that will increase capacity. Water is one of the most important natural resources in Colorado and a main driver of economic growth. Prudent supply management and the ability to store much needed water will allow communities to support jobs that depend on the availability of water, protect food security, control flooding, ensure continued recreational opportunities, provide water for the development of hydropower, and meet environmental protection needs. Thank you Mr. Chairman and I yield back.