



August 6, 2022

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate

RE: Support for H.R. 5376, The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 and its provisions for addressing drought and climate resilience

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of our organizations' millions of members and supporters across the country, we write in strong support of H.R. 5376, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 with amendments related to drought funding in Reclamation states, which signifies historic federal investments to address the nation's climate crisis, including drought in the West. The American West is ground zero for climate change, threatened by ongoing aridification and wildfire crises that are daily impacting ecosystems and communities. Nowhere reflects the effects more than the Colorado River Basin.

More than 40 million people rely on the Colorado River and its tributaries for drinking water. This river system also irrigates over five million acres of ranch and farmland, and provides important benefits to Tribal nations, rural communities, recreational economies, and fish and wildlife habitat. The economic importance of the Colorado River system alone is estimated at over \$1.4 trillion annually.

Today, the Colorado River is facing significant crises. The impact of hotter, drier temperatures over the past twenty two years (and counting) are real and meaningful. Year after year of hot and windy Springs and early Summers in the Colorado River headwaters have caused snowpack to disappear into the atmosphere instead of melting and flowing into our rivers. Soil aridification is significantly compounding streamflow issues. Persistent drought conditions have also caused the country's two largest reservoirs (Lake Powell and Lake Mead) to be depleted to historic lows. These water supply conditions pose increasingly serious challenges for cities, farms that provide food and fiber for people throughout the country, invaluable wildlife, and recreational opportunities. While recognizing state and Tribal authorities to administer water

resources within their boundaries, the scale of challenges facing the Colorado River Basin requires the leadership, guidance, science, and accelerated funding support provided by Federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior (acting through the Bureau of Reclamation) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to help the Basin withstand, adapt and transform in the face of current and anticipated conditions at the pace and scale needed. Congress must use all available options to invest in both immediate and long-term solutions to mitigate current natural disasters and enhance the climate resilience of the Colorado River Basin and the communities that rely on this resource.

In the West, climate resilience is drought resilience. Western irrigators, Tribes, cities, ecosystems and economies need help and can benefit from having access to specific funding and programs geared toward improving climate resilience. In particular, significant funding coupled with important conservation programs that advance responsible management of unpredictable water supplies are especially critical throughout the West and specifically in the Colorado River Basin. The Inflation Reduction Act can do just that by providing the Bureau of Reclamation substantial funding to advance voluntary, multi-year reductions in water diversions and use, system conservation projects aimed at reducing water uses and/or providing environmental benefits, and ecosystem and habitat restoration projects in response to drought. In addition to specific drought response in the West, the Act could also provide meaningful support to producers, ranchers, Tribes, and landowners across the nation through USDA funding authorized to mitigate drought and build climate resilience through conservation technical assistance, and substantial investments in the voluntary, private land conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), among others. In this way, the Act could help producers implement conservation practices on their lands, incentivize sustainable practices, and expand public-private partnerships that all result in supporting farmers and ranchers and their communities to be more resilient in the face of drought and climate change.

Overall, we support the bill and urge swift passage in the Senate.

Sincerely,

American Rivers

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation
Partnership

Environmental Defense Fund

Trout Unlimited

National Audubon Society

Business for Water Stewardship