

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**The Colorado River Basin is in Crisis.**  
**Congress Must Advance Historic Climate and Water Investments Now.**

*The U.S. Senate’s Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a key hearing on drought in the West.*

(PHOENIX, ARIZONA – Oct. 6, 2021) Today, the Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee of the United States Senate hosted experts such as the Director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources Tom Buschatzke and Colorado River Program Director Jennifer Pitt of the National Audubon Society to discuss the impacts of drought in the West and how funding through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will help improve the outlook.

In written testimony submitted for the meeting, which was spearheaded by Senator Mark Kelly (D-Arizona), Director Buschatzke said, “Many scientists believe that it is climate change, not drought, that is the root cause of declining flows in the Colorado River system.”

“Climate change has come barging through the front doors of the Colorado River basin. The Colorado River has lost 20% of its historic flows in the past 20 years,” highlighted Jennifer Pitt, of the Audubon Society. “In 2021, the Colorado River Basin snowmelt measured 90% of average, but runoff – the snowmelt that filled the rivers – was only 30% of average.

“Warm temperatures drive evaporation, soil desiccation, and increase water use by every living thing,” Pitt explained.

The IIJA would help address challenges in the Colorado River Basin through several allocations:

- **\$3.5 billion** to the Indian Health Service to provide access to clean and reliable water to Tribal communities across the nation.
- **\$1 billion** to support large-scale municipal and industrial water reuse and recycling.

- **\$1.6 billion** to fund alternative water supply development, including groundwater storage and recovery.
- **\$3.2 billion** to upgrade aging agricultural infrastructure and operations.

Resources allocated through the IJA would also help implement Arizona's Drought Contingency Plan and support ongoing endangered species recovery and conservation efforts.

In response to this important committee hearing, the [Water for Arizona Coalition](#) issued the following statement:

"Today's Senate hearing comes at a critical juncture for Arizona and the entire Colorado River Basin, and we want to thank Senator Kelly for his leadership and steadfast commitment to addressing the severe drought plaguing Arizona and the West. New projections released just last month show that water levels in Lake Powell and Lake Mead could reach critically low levels as early as 2022. The worsening hydrology against the backdrop of climate change and aridification underscores the need for federal investments outlined in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Budget Reconciliation Package currently before Congress.

"If passed, the IIJA would help Arizona make progress advancing immediate and long-term solutions to address drought impacts and build climate resilience, and improve access to clean and reliable drinking water.

"The IIJA's passage will be a critical step for supporting water resilience in the Colorado River Basin, but by itself is insufficient to address the climate crisis. Aridification caused by climate change is the root cause of diminishing water supplies in the Colorado River Basin, and Congress must also take bold action to face climate change head on and pass the Reconciliation package."

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### **About the Water for Arizona Coalition**

*[The Water for Arizona Coalition](#) is a community of Arizonans who support innovative practices and smart policies to ensure a reliable water supply to meet the state's needs. The Coalition was recently recognized as an Arizona Capitol Times "2020 Leader of the Year" for their efforts in protecting Arizona's most valuable resource. Organizational support is provided by solution-oriented groups like American Rivers, Audubon Arizona, Business for Water Stewardship, Environmental Defense Action Fund, and Western Resource Advocates that collectively have over 60,000 Arizona members, as well as hundreds of hunters, anglers, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts across the state.*

