



Bipartisan Colorado River Basin Conservation Act

Led by Reps. Susie Lee (D-NV), Melanie Stansbury (D-NM), & Debbie Lesko (R-AZ)

Why do we need this bill?

Nevada and the West are experiencing a water crisis. The water level of America's largest reservoir, Lake Mead — on which more than 25 million people across the West depend for drinking water, sourced from the Colorado River — has dropped approximately 170 feet since early 2000. This is a direct result of the worst drought in the recorded history of the Colorado River Basin, continuing still today.

The U.S. Department of the Interior ("DOI") [announced](#) in August 2022 that water shortages along the Colorado River passed a threshold for the first time that will require unprecedented water cuts in Nevada and Arizona, limiting the amount of water that the states will be allowed to withdraw from Lake Mead beginning in January 2023. Additional mandatory cuts can and will follow for these and other Western states without proactive efforts to conserve more of the region's increasingly precious water resources.

In July 2014, the federal Bureau of Reclamation ("BOR") [joined](#) the Southern Nevada Water Authority, the Central Arizona Water Conservation District, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, and Denver Water to launch a Pilot Program for Funding the Creation of Colorado River System Water Through Voluntary Water Conservation and Reductions in Use ("Pilot Program"). This agreement was historic, as water agencies from both the Upper and Lower Colorado River Basin and BOR agreed to jointly fund voluntary water conservation projects undertaken by individual water users throughout the Colorado River Basin to benefit the Colorado River System in its entirety.

BOR [reported](#) to Congress in January 2021 that the Pilot Program had "successfully demonstrated that voluntary, compensated water conservation projects can conserve water for Colorado River System storage to help mitigate the impacts of drought." The bureau credited the program with conserving an estimated 47,280 acre-feet of system water in the Upper Basin as well as an additional 175,347 acre-feet in the Lower Basin, emphasizing that DOI "supports system conservation program activities in the Colorado River Basin and recommends that such activities should be continued."

Congress formally [authorized](#) federal participation in the Pilot Program in FY2015, with an initial sunset date at the end of FY2018 — later [extending](#) the program authorization through FY2022.

What would this bill do?

The bipartisan, bicameral Colorado River Basin Conservation Act would allow DOI to continue to partner with Upper and Lower Basin states alike to keep more water in the Colorado River and its reservoirs by incentivizing and supporting voluntary water conservation projects at the user level.

Specifically, this bill would:

- Reauthorize the Pilot Program for Funding the Creation of Colorado River System Water Through Voluntary Water Conservation and Reductions in Use through the end of FY2026; and
- Require DOI to submit an updated report to Congress on the effectiveness of the program together with a recommendation on whether it should be continued by the end of FY2027.

For more information or to cosponsor or endorse this bill, H.R. 9173, please contact Mark Coombs in Congresswoman Susie Lee's office at mark.coombs@mail.house.gov.

The Senate companion, S.4579, is led by Sens. John Hickenlooper (D-CO) and John Barrasso (R-WY).