

Tom Jankovsky, Chair

District 1

Perry Will, Chair Pro Tem

District 2

Mike Samson

District 3



July 7, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

As Garfield County Commissioners representing rural and agricultural communities across Colorado's Western Slope, we write to strongly support full federal investment in the Shoshone Water Rights Preservation Project. This is not just a water project – it's a matter of economic security, rural sovereignty, and fairness for the communities that fuel America's energy, grow its food, and continue to support President Trump's America First agenda.

For over a century, the senior Shoshone water rights have anchored flows in the Colorado River and helped to provide the water that irrigates our farms and ranches, sustains our small towns, and powers one of the country's most productive energy basins. These water rights don't just support Western Colorado – they serve the entire Colorado River Basin. By stabilizing flows year-round, they improve water quality which helps protect rural agricultural producers from costly federal mandates under the Endangered Species Act.

If the Shoshone water rights disappear, that burden will fall squarely on the backs of farmers, ranchers, and families from Grand County to Grand Junction and beyond. On the other hand, without Shoshone's senior call, municipal water providers in Front Range cities like Denver, Boulder, and Fort Collins stand to benefit from more water and more control over the river.

Preserving the Shoshone water rights is about keeping water where it belongs. In this case, that's on the Western Slope and in the communities that rely on it to grow crops, raise livestock, and provide clean drinking water to rural families. If this deal falls apart, it's not just our local economies that will suffer. The loss of Shoshone flows would trigger increased water calls, more fallowing of productive land, and diminished support for energy operations in the Piceance Basin which rely on Colorado River water to sustain drilling operations. All of that would undermine the very economic backbone of rural communities along the Colorado River and by extension, America's food and energy security.

This project is also directly aligned with President Trump's *Executive Order on Unleashing American Energy* (January 16, 2025). The Piceance Basin relies on Colorado River water to sustain drilling operations, completions, and field logistics. Protecting the Shoshone flows

ensures the long-term viability of this basin by reducing regulatory risk and keeping our region on the frontlines of domestic energy production.

In conclusion, this project is a textbook example of how to do things right. It relies on local leadership, broad regional buy-in, and will strategically leverage federal funds to deliver long-term returns for agriculture, energy, and rural America. To date, more than \$57 million has been secured by local counties, municipalities, and water users across the West Slope, with \$20 million from the River District and another \$20 million from the Colorado General Assembly. Now, it's time for Washington to step up and help us finish the job.

We respectfully urge the Department of the Interior to finalize its share of funding and help deliver a permanent win for rural Colorado and the entire Colorado River Basin. Let's protect the water that built the West, keep it working for the people who live and work here today, and protect it for future generations of rural Americans.

Sincerely,

Tom Jankovsky, Chairman

Mike Samson, Commissioner

Perry Will, Commissioner

CC:

The Honorable Jeff Hurd, U.S. House of Representatives

Mr. Scott Cameron, Acting Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, U.S. Department of the Interior

Mr. David Palumbo, Acting Commissioner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation