

(In Mojave “Good morning, and thank you.”)

Good morning, and thank you.

I am Amelia Flores Chairwoman of the Colorado River Indian Tribes. I am here today to ask for your support and to answer your questions about the legislation we propose, S. 3308, the Colorado River Indian Tribes Water Resiliency Act.

I am Mohave. The Mohave people have always lived along the Colorado River and farmed with its waters.

I want to talk about the River that is our namesake. It is in trouble. Our watershed is hotter, dryer and windier. This means less rain and more evaporation. Multiple years with these conditions have created extremely low amounts of run-off for our River.

In 2007 the water managers at Reclamation implemented a plan to cut water deliveries if the amount of water in Lake Mead dropped—the shortage guidelines. In 2019 the shortage cuts were not projected to be enough to save Lake Mead and we have the drought contingency plan, the DCP. In December, we learned that even those additional cuts are not enough. We are now working to cut even more because forecasts show that the balance of water between Lake Mead and Lake Powell is at risk.

CRIT is doing its part. We have been following productive farmland to leave water in the Lake Mead since 2016. We have left more than 200 thousand acre-feet in the Lake, raising it by 3 feet. But without our bill, this is the only way we can help.

The River needs all the tools that can be made available to survive this continuing trend of less and less water. This legislation, S. 3308 will provide additional tools.

The CRIT water is the first and highest priority water on the River. The water used by the Arizona metro areas that is delivered by the CAP is the lowest priority, and is getting cut. But unlike many other tribes in the State, we cannot make our water available for deliveries to them until Congress allows it.

We do not know what the future will bring, and we all need all the tools possible.

Let me address some specifics about the legislation and the tools it can provide.

First, authorizing us to lease water will not increase the use of water from the River. We can only lease as much water as we stop using on our reservation—usually by fallowing farmland. The River will stay whole, as it does with our system conservation water.

Second, no new infrastructure is needed to deliver or treat this water. There will be no federal dollars needed to implement this bill.

Third, it will expand our ability to help save the life of the River. Right now we cannot make water available for off-reservation river habitat that is suffering as water levels drop. This bill will help us support the native plant and endangered fish restoration programs along other stretches of the river like we do on the reservation.

Fourth, and most important to our people, this legislation protects our sovereignty over our water. This River is our namesake, it is our life, and if we do not control our water, history tells us that others will.

My tribe has worked with the Department of the Interior, the Arizona Department of Water Resources, water users, and environmental organizations over the last six years to develop and promote this legislation. It was vetted in Arizona through two public State-run hearings and a months-long comment period. We have overwhelming support.

Let me close by saying, this is a critical time in the Colorado River Basin. We are facing a mega-drought, and Arizona is Ground Zero. The bill helps us save our river, and it helps us generate the revenue we need to adapt to the drier climate. It also allows us to help our neighbors. Senators Kelly, Sinema, my tribe, and many others in Arizona, believe this bill will help get us through the drought. I ask for your support.

Thank you for this opportunity, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.