

John J. Entsminger
General Manager
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**Statement of John J. Entsminger
General Manager, Southern Nevada Water Authority
Governor's Representative, State of Nevada**

**U. S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
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Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, Senator Cortez Masto, members of the Committee – thank you for the opportunity to address you on this issue of critical importance to both Nevada and the western United States. My name is John Entsminger; I am the General Manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority.

I am not a person prone to hyperbole, but I can assure you from on the ground that the ominous tenor of recent media reports is warranted. What has been a slow-motion train wreck for 20 years is accelerating, and the moment of reckoning is near.

While the situation is objectively bleak, it is not in my view unsolvable. There is little we can do to improve the Colorado River's hydrology. The solution to this problem—and by solution I don't mean fully restoring reservoir levels but rather avoiding potentially catastrophic conditions—is a degree of demand management previously considered unattainable.

Nevada's efforts are a case in point. With only 1.8 percent of the river's allocated flows, we are little more than a rounding error. Lake Mead loses twice as much water to evaporation than we use each year. However, this tiny volume of water sustains 70 percent of the state's population. Our population has increased by approximately 800,000 during the past two decades, but our water consumption last year was 26 percent less than it was at the turn of the century.

We achieved this by paying customers to replace grass with drip-irrigated plants, setting mandatory irrigation schedules and strictly enforcing water waste rules. We have removed enough grass to lay a roll of sod all the way around the Earth. And we're not done—in addition to even tighter restrictions on ornamental grass, our sights are now set on improving irrigation efficiency and reducing evaporative cooling water use. There are headwinds along this journey, including a reluctance of the business community to embrace conservation and ESG metrics that value energy efficiency over saving water.

Our key advantage is that we capture and recover virtually every drop of indoor water. This is why continued financial and administrative support for projects on the Las Vegas Wash—green infrastructure through which we return water to Lake Mead—is so important. We also encourage federal support of large-scale water recycling projects for communities without access to a large reservoir.

In engaging my colleagues in other states, it is clear they recognize the urgency of this situation and are ramping up conservation efforts. However—and there is no way around this—

cities alone cannot address this crisis, not because of indifference but because we simply don't use enough water to tip the scale.

As in the cities, the primary consumptive use in the agricultural sector is grass. Around 80 percent of Colorado River water is used for agriculture and 80 percent of that 80 percent is used for forage crops like alfalfa. I'm not suggesting that farmers stop farming, but rather that they carefully consider crop selection and make the investments needed to optimize irrigation efficiency.

My view has always been that you can't improve efficiency unless you can measure it, so I strongly support the current Open ET bill [S.2568] sponsored by Senator Cortez Masto. This legislation will provide access to more consistent, accurate water use data than is currently possible.

By reducing their use of Colorado River water, agricultural entities are protecting their own interest. If Lake Mead reaches deadpool, Nevada's allocation will undoubtedly be further reduced, but we can still meet critical needs because we invested \$1.4 billion to secure our access to water. However, at that same elevation, California, Arizona, and Mexico will be cut off entirely because water can't escape Lake Mead. We are at 150 feet from 25 million Americans losing access to the Colorado River, and the rate of decline is accelerating.

The burden of shortage cannot be borne by any single community or sector. Rather, I urge every Colorado River user to follow our lead and do all they can to preserve what remains of the Southwest's lifeblood. Our collective future depends upon it. Thank you for your time.