

## Press Release

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### **Extra Water for California as Others Run Dry Environmental Groups Condemn Federal Water Giveaway to California**

Environmental groups today protested the U.S. Department of the Interior's proposal to give additional Colorado River water to California agricultural interests before the end of the year. Despite tremendous pressure to reduce its use, California irrigators have failed to stay within their limits in this time of scarcity. Citing plans and agreements for use of water in 2002 that have been in place for over ten months, environmentalists urged Interior Secretary Gale Norton not to expand uses of the Colorado River at the eleventh hour.

"The Colorado River is not a bottomless resource," warned Pamela Hyde, Executive Director for Southwest Rivers. "Secretary Norton should not be handing out additional water to users who – simply put – have failed to take into consideration our current drought conditions." Southern California agricultural interests, with a combined 3.85 million acre-foot block of water available to them this year, are on track to exceed use of that amount before the end of the year.

"It's amazing," said Michael Cohen, Senior Associate at the Pacific Institute, "that when California has committed to reduce its use of Colorado River water, it violates our faith and asks for yet more water." "Many Colorado River water users had to go without this year," added Jennifer Pitt, Senior Resource Analyst at Environmental Defense. "It's outrageous for California to expect more while others make do with less."

"Arizona should be particularly concerned about giving extra water to California because in times of severe drought, Arizona would be the first to have their allocation reduced," says Lisa Force of the Arizona office of Living Rivers.

The Department of the Interior has proposed to fill additional California orders for Colorado River water in the wake of unheeded warnings to users in the state that their uses would exceed the amount available to them. Over the past few years, all the Colorado River basin states came up with a plan to help California live within its legal limits. This giveaway of water circumvents the plan, ignoring the hard-fought consensus.

"If the Department of the Interior and Colorado River water users can't even stick to the agreements they have already made, what comfort can we find in assurances from these groups the health of the river will be addressed in the future?" asked Hyde. "The message we are getting loud and clear is: during times of drought, all bets are off."

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