



Southern Advisory Council Recommendations to the Colorado River Authority of Utah

BACKGROUND

The Southern Advisory Council (SAC) is composed of 10 members representing various perspectives from south and southeastern Utah. Members of the SAC represent diverse backgrounds and viewpoints from the region, including some with a state or local government background. Others represent the energy and agricultural industries. Other members work with water districts, academia, or advocacy organizations. We are grateful for the opportunity to present to the Board a few recommendations that have emerged from our conversations this past year.

I am here today as the co-chair of the SAC. Thank you again for the opportunity to share with you some of the things we learned over the past year. Before jumping into the recommendations, I wanted to take a moment to highlight some of the things the SAC accomplished in 2022, along with a few goals we've identified for 2023:

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2022

- Established the Southern Advisory Council (SAC) comprised of Wayne, Garfield, San Juan, Kane, and Washington Counties
- Brian Steed was elected the council Co-Chair
- Clarified SAC's purpose and established general operational procedures
- Hosted 4 meetings throughout 2022 - June (Loa), August (Loa), October (virtual), and November (Monticello)
- Started discussing major issues facing the southern region and began to coalesce around certain ideas and recommendations for the Board
- Recognized the historic nature of the Navajo water settlement

GOALS FOR 2023

- Schedule fact-finding site visits to key areas in the southern region (agriculture, water recycling efforts, conservation, and science on the river)
- Identify additional ideas/projects to recommend to the Board
- Monitor water legislation emerging from the 2022-23 legislative sessions
- Invite groups and individuals with water interests from within the region to help SAC members acquire a broader understanding of informed and unique perspectives (possible examples include: farm bureau, irrigation districts, conservancy districts, Tribal perspective, homebuilders, etc.)

Throughout 2022, the SAC held several discussions and explored various ideas. We'd like to share many of these with the Board as specific recommendations. However, before getting to the recommendations, it might be helpful to share with the Board some general observations we identified over this past year. These ideas help frame and provide context for our recommendations.

OBSERVATIONS

- **Listen to ag and rural voices.** The SAC believes that Utah's rural and agricultural communities are critical to Utah's economy and culture. Roughly 5.5 million acres of farmland rely on the Colorado River, with over 300,000 of those acres found in Utah. We believe agriculture and rural communities throughout the state must be fully heard and duly considered wherever and whenever water decisions are being made.
- **Protect local economies.** While we recognize changes are needed across the board, we hope any new policies or programs will give adequate consideration to how they impact local economies. Living with less will directly and disproportionately impact certain livelihoods and communities more than others. Anticipated impacts on citizens need to be taken seriously.
- **Utah is under the spotlight.** We recognize there is a national lens on activities that occur within our region, and that our actions and policies need to acknowledge they are being scrutinized and interpreted by a national audience.
- **Diversity of opinion.** It is also important to note that given the geographic diversity of the SAC, not all the issues facing SAC council members are the same. Washington County is the most developed area within the council region so many of the issues and concerns it faces are unique to that county.
- **Defend Utah's allocation.** Finally, the SAC acknowledges that any future development in the state must occur within the bounds of Utah's allocation - whatever that amount may be.

The SAC offers the following six recommendations to the Colorado River Authority of Utah Board:

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD

1. CONSERVATION

The Board should make every effort to encourage state policymakers to promote conservation. The state of Utah should set the explicit goal of becoming a conservation leader in the western United States. All Utahns must utilize their existing water supplies as efficiently and effectively as possible. Conservation measures of all sorts should be funded and prioritized.

2. FAIRNESS, NEGOTIATION, AND FUTURE WATER RIGHTS

We understand that possible reductions in water use are coming for the entire Colorado River system. We urge the Authority to continue to advocate for equitable reductions. Reductions should be fairly shared among all basin states. Historic overuse in the Lower Basin needs to be addressed, including looking at payment to the Upper Basin for excessive use. To achieve this, the Board could explore water allocation rate structures with penalties for states that use more than their allocation. These payments could be directed towards the Upper Basin for infrastructure projects such as enhanced water storage and electricity generation. We also urge the Authority and the River Commissioner to establish a strong negotiating strategy with other Upper Basin states to engage and, when needed, counteract the efforts of the Lower Basin States. While we understand that water uses throughout the Basin will need to be reconsidered and reduced as we face the current water crisis, we encourage the Authority to preserve Utah's right to future water development should additional flows become available.

3. ENERGY & STORAGE

Energy needs to be a key part of the Authority's focus. As the nation transitions to cleaner energy, new hydro, pump storage, and small storage programs can play an important role in this transition. Similarly, if Glen Canyon reaches minimum power pool elevation and loses its power-generating capacity, not only would millions of energy users in the region suffer, but it would shut off the primary revenue source for the dam's operations and maintenance. The dam also accounts for over \$100 million annually to fund critical environmental initiatives on the river. We encourage the Board to ensure that the dam's 174 utilities that receive power are protected. The Authority should prioritize preserving Lake Powell's 1,320-megawatt power plant capacity and take measures needed to avoid reaching minimum power pool.

4. WATER USE

The SAC supports maximizing usage of local water resources, including recycling, regional reuse systems, de-salting hot springs, and pursuing agricultural conversion on a willing-buyer/willing-seller basis (no condemnation). As the Board attempts to find smart ways to save and conserve water, we encourage you to continue your focus on agricultural optimization (including crop-switching and targeted rotational and seasonal fallowing) and to find ways to fund and encourage reuse and recycling.

5. MEASUREMENT AND TRANSPARENCY

The Board should commit to promoting and emphasizing cutting-edge and highly accurate measurement. As it has been said, you can't effectively manage what you can't measure. The Authority should work with the Utah Department of Natural Resources and other state agencies to ensure that Utah is using the most advanced, recent data and ensure that Utah's per capita use is being measured the same way as other states and municipalities. We would also encourage the Board to consider developing a one-stop "Informational Dashboard" to ensure key water information is readily available to the public and interested stakeholders.

6. PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

While human needs and interests need to be at the forefront, we would encourage the Board also to keep wildlife and habitat in mind as water policy is being made. For example, there are several important Endangered Species Act (ESA) considerations that need to be factored into our water discussions. While the primary water storage and delivery functions of the Glen Canyon Dam should be respected, policies that protect the environmental, cultural, and recreational resources of Grand Canyon National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area should also be promoted.