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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SANTA FE, NM – Peter Nelson, chair of the Colorado River Board of California, issued the following statement today regarding ongoing discussions on Colorado River use.

“California recognizes the need to act urgently. We must continue to reduce demands to avoid an untenable situation on the Colorado River system. California water agencies are working in real time to build on previous water-saving actions and conserve significant volumes of water each year beginning in 2023. We are eager to partner with the Bureau of Reclamation to pursue funding opportunities to enable reductions in water use while also accelerating projects to address impacts at the Salton Sea. California calls on our basin partners to join us in finding ways to preserve the health of the Colorado River and this important water supply.”

Background:

California water users have stepped up in innovative ways to conserve water, including the largest-ever transfer of agricultural water to an urban area. As a result, over 1.5 million acre-feet of water has been conserved in Lake Mead over the past 15 years. Those conserved water supplies added critical elevation to Lake Mead and helped forestall a formal ‘shortage condition’ that would have required cuts from states such as Arizona as early as 2015.

California has invested billions of dollars in urban and agricultural water conservation across Southern California through programs that reach virtually every Colorado River water user in the state. Since 2003, these conservation efforts have resulted in over 13 million acre-feet of Colorado River water being conserved and transferred to other water users in Southern California. California has a track record of action and is willing to step up again because extraordinary measures are needed.

Additional quotes:

From Adel Hagekhalil, general manager, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California:

“The worsening conditions on the Colorado River are being felt across the West. This shrinking lifeline on which so many cities, farms and our environment depend is a call to action for all of us. California has developed agricultural and urban conservation programs to permanently reduce our Colorado River use, and we will build on those

efforts to further reduce our reliance on the River. Metropolitan is committed to working with our colleagues throughout the basin to double down on those efforts with an aggressive but realistic plan to reduce demands and restore reliability to our Colorado River supplies.” – Adel Hagekhalil, general manager, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

From Henry Martinez, general manager, Imperial Irrigation District:

“The sustainability of the Colorado River is critical to the Imperial Valley because it is our rural community’s only water source. IID’s water supports far more than this region, as it provides for a robust agricultural industry that grows food and fiber that sustains millions of people nationwide. Over the past two decades, Imperial Valley farmers and IID have conserved over 7 million acre-feet of water in support of the Colorado River and Southern California’s water supplies. IID believes the key to protecting critical elevations at Lakes Mead and Powell is cooperation, however any solution must respect the Law of the River and existing agreements. IID stands ready to assist with voluntary efforts to ensure the long-term viability of the Colorado River provided sufficient resources are made available to support additional conservation within our service area and address the rapidly declining Salton Sea.” – Henry Martinez, general manager, Imperial Irrigation District

From J.R. Echard, general manager, Palo Verde Irrigation District:

“Since 2005 the Palo Verde Irrigation District has been following agricultural lands in the Palo Verde Valley to conserve water for the benefit of Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. At its maximum, the Program can generate about 130,000 to 140,000 acre feet annually. In 2021 the farmers in the Palo Verde Valley agreed to follow 50% of the MWD program enrolled acreage to help slow declining water elevations in Lake Mead, rather than sending the conserved water to MWD. Palo Verde Irrigation District will continue to work with the Colorado River Board of California, its agencies, and our Colorado River basin states partners to seek solutions to mitigate declining Colorado River reservoir storage.” – J.R. Echard, general manager, Palo Verde Irrigation District

From Jim Barrett, general manager, Coachella Valley Water District.

“CVWD is fortunate to have a diversified water portfolio available to meet the needs of our local communities. Without directly impacting either the Salton Sea or the regional economy, we have presented an informal offer to Reclamation for their review. Because the offer is still being negotiated, we are currently unable to provide details at this time. We have discussed our proposal within the California Water Agencies and believe it can and will be supported as part of a larger collaborative plan. CVWD’s protection volumes could be extended as a multi-year program in response to the drought on the Colorado River.” – Jim Barrett, general manager, Coachella Valley Water District

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