



Board of County Commissioners

970-328-8605

970-328-8629(f)

eagleadmin@eaglecounty.us

www.eaglecounty.us

September 28, 2023

Lauren Ris, Director
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, CO 80203

RE: Non-Reimbursable Project Investment: Shoshone Hydro Plant – Water Right Permanency

Dear Director Ris:

As Chair of the Board of Commissioners of Eagle County, Colorado (Eagle County), I am pleased to support the Colorado River Water Conservation District's (Colorado River District) Non-Reimbursable Project Investment application to be considered as part of the 2024 Water Projects Bill. For more than 20 years, the Colorado River District and more than 17 other western Colorado governments and water entities, including Eagle, Summit, Grand, Garfield and Mesa counties and many of the municipalities therein, have been working together to find a way to permanently preserve the Shoshone flows. The 2013 Colorado River Cooperative Agreement between Denver Water and 17 West Slope governments/water user organizations including Eagle County expressly recognizes the importance of – and memorialized the need to provide permanent protection of – the historical flow regime created by the Shoshone Plant. Colorado River water users benefit greatly from Shoshone's flows, and I am motivated to protect those benefits in perpetuity.

The historical flow regime created by the Shoshone Plant supports dependable legal water supplies relied on by Eagle County constituents and citizens in other West Slope counties. Residential and commercial users depend on water supplies developed in reliance on the historical flow regime created by operation of the Shoshone Plant, and public water supplies will be impaired if these historical flows diminish.

Further, commercial river outfitters and recreationalists using the river need these flows as temperatures increase and flows decrease to keep local economies afloat and recreation a central economic driver for the state. Those economic drivers rely on the recreational flows provided by Shoshone's call to support a river recreation industry that contributes \$18.8 billion in economic output and over \$10 billion annually to the state's GDP, with nearly \$4 billion coming directly from the Colorado River basin on the Western Slope¹.

¹ 2019 Business for Water Stewardship Report (<https://businessforwater.org/co-rivers-key-to-economy>); Total economic output calculated with the multiplier effect.



Board of County Commissioners

970-328-8605

970-328-8629(f)

eagleadmin@eaglecounty.us

www.eaglecounty.us

In addition, communities large and small along the Eagle River and Colorado River mainstem also benefit from the enhanced water quality Shoshone flows provide. Water delivered through the Eagle River and Colorado River to the Shoshone Plant dilutes pollutants in the source drinking water for communities like Eagle, Edwards, Gypsum and downstream communities in Garfield and Mesa counties. Without the higher flows provided by the Shoshone call, Eagle County municipal suppliers experience higher pollutant concentrations in their supply sources, which increase costs to the public to achieve regulatory compliance for municipal drinking and wastewater treatment. Western Slope communities also depend on Eagle River and Colorado River flows for agriculture uses that include not only farms and ranches but irrigation for subdivisions, parks, and other public environments.

Shoshone's flows also provide critical habitat to four fish listed under the Endangered Species Act in the 15-Mile Reach of the Colorado River. For most of the year, the river would not come close to meeting the flow targets set by the Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Recovery Program. All Colorado River water users – both east and west slope users – rely upon the benefits of the Shoshone flows as a bedrock for the success of the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and to provide continued compliance with the Endangered Species Act. In addition, Shoshone permanency preserves Historic User Pool (HUP) water supplies and allows Colorado's \$11.9 billion agricultural economy to continue alongside critical habitat protections under the Recovery Program.² In addition, Shoshone flows are one of the four identified long-term protection measures for the Upper Colorado River Wild and Scenic River Alternative Management Plan.

During the last 23 years of severe drought, the benefit of the Shoshone call to the flow of the river has become even more evident and important. If the power plant were to cease operation without permanent protection of the water right through an instream flow, the negative economic and environmental impacts to Western Colorado and to the State of Colorado would be immediate and profound.

Sincerely,

Kathy Chandler-Henry

Chair

² Colorado Office of Economic Development & International Trade, 2019.