**Statement of Lorri Lee, Regional Director**
**Bureau of Reclamation Lower Colorado Region**
**U.S. Department of the Interior**
**Before the**
**Natural Resources Committee**
**Subcommittee on Water and Power**
**U.S. House of Representatives**
**on**
**Water Quality along the Lower Colorado River**
**Tucson, AZ**

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Chairwoman Napolitano and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the perspective of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) regarding the water quality of the lower Colorado River. I am Lorri Lee, Regional Director for the Lower Colorado Region. The Colorado River is the major water resource in the Southwestern United States. It supplies water vital to irrigated agriculture and provides drinking water to about 24 million people throughout the growing areas of southern California, southern Nevada, Arizona, and Mexico; fish and wildlife habitat; and water-based recreation for millions of people.

Reclamation, on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, manages the operation of the Colorado River in the capacity of Water Master to enable the holders of water entitlements to divert that water for beneficial uses. However, at the outset of this hearing, I wish to emphasize that Reclamation's statutory authorities do not include management or regulation of water quality issues other than the important – but limited – issue of salinity control and reduction.

Reclamation's Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program was authorized in 1974 by the Colorado River Salinity Control Act (Public Law 93-320). The success of the seven basin states and Reclamation in reducing salinity in the Colorado River has consistently allowed the United States to meet salinity requirements, including meeting the terms of our agreements with Mexico regarding delivery of Colorado River water to that country. Consistent with federal legislation, collaborative guidance for this program is provided through the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum, which includes representatives of the seven basin states.

House Report 108-212, which accompanied H.R. 2754, the Fiscal Year 2004 Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill, directed Reclamation to assess local community concerns and provide current information on the quality of water and municipal wastewater discharge and treatment needs along the River. In response to this directive, Reclamation prepared a study entitled *Wastewater Treatment Needs Along the Lower Colorado River*, March 2007 (2007 Study). Given its statutory role and expertise, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency participated in both the preparation and review of the Study.

The 2007 Study included population projections to 2025 provided by the cities and towns along the River; the number of wastewater facilities needed based on those projections; and estimated costs of the facilities. The work was coordinated with the Colorado River Regional Sewer Coalition (CRRSCo), which includes member communities along the River. The CRRSCo

previously completed a similar analysis in 1999, and the 2007 Study provided an update to that earlier work, including the following key points of information:

- Septic systems appear to be adversely impacting groundwater quality along the Colorado River.

- To meet Federal and state water discharge standards, communities along the Colorado River are being required to construct municipal wastewater systems.

- Total population of the 24 communities along the Colorado River is projected to increase from approximately 290,000 to 480,000 by 2025 according to State of Arizona projections.

- A total of over 1,400 miles of wastewater pipelines and 26 million gallons per day of wastewater treatment capacity may be needed.

- Construction cost estimates in the 2007 Study were provided by CRRSCo, and are not Federal cost estimates.

The 2007 Study was intended to provide useful information to the CRRSCo and its members. The projected capacities and cost estimates were presented for the sole purpose of providing a snapshot of potential needs of the communities. Reclamation did not endorse these cost estimates and cautioned against using them to assess the feasibility of wastewater projects.

The 2007 Study was not intended to be prescriptive to the individual communities, to be a substitute for site-specific wastewater management analyses, or to preempt or replace the appropriate roles, expertise, and judgments of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or the state regulators which possess the primary authority, responsibility, and expertise in the area of wastewater management and treatment.

The presence of invasive mussels, specifically the quagga mussel, is an issue that has risen since the publication of the study. These mussels have become established in the Colorado River from Lake Mead downstream. They have attached themselves to water intake facilities and have demonstrated the ability to quickly spread and impact water infrastructure systems conveying lower Colorado River water. Reclamation has formed an information-sharing partnership with other water facility managers to gather and share data, and develop and apply the best technology available to deal with invasive mussels impacts on water infrastructure. Reclamation recently held a Western Invasive Mussel Management Workshop in Las Vegas, Nevada, to discuss ways to address the quagga and zebra mussel infestation in the Colorado River and other western water bodies. The workshop featured presentations addressing issues of prevention and monitoring, control and mitigation, research, and outreach and education.

Concerns have been expressed regarding the effect of invasive mussels on overall water quality, or the role water quality plays in their spread. At this point, no specific relationships have been demonstrated, although various theories and predictions have been proposed. Reclamation will continue to share information with other agencies to help develop a sound body of information on this issue.

At an April meeting with the CRRSCo and other Federal and non-Federal stakeholders, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Reclamation led multi-agency discusses on water quality issues on the Colorado River. EPA representatives advised the stakeholders that it is the primary Federal agency for water quality issues and that each state is responsible for regulating water quality within its boundaries. The parties at the meeting also discussed the value of forming a working group to collaborate on wastewater and water quality issues along the Colorado River.

Reclamation continues to work in cooperation with the members of CRRSCo and other entities to monitor the overall condition of the River, including water quality and associated ground water under our existing authorities. Our monitoring programs provide information specific to salinity control and general trend analysis relative to Reclamation's operational and planning needs. That information is freely shared with all interested parties.

Reclamation, within the bounds of its limited authority, stands ready to cooperate with EPA, state regulators, and others to protect the water quality of the lower Colorado River. I hope this information is of use to the Subcommittee, and I would welcome any questions.