

**Prepared Testimony of Phillip Lehr
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Colorado River Commission of Nevada
House Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Water and Power
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Good morning Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. My name is Phillip Lehr and I am the Environmental Programs Manager for the Colorado River Commission of Nevada. I appreciate your invitation today to speak to you regarding H.B. 5180. This bill authorizes the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program. I speak today on behalf of the State of Nevada, one of the three lower basin states directly impacted by the Program. Like its sister states of California and Arizona, Nevada fully supports this bill. I look forward to your comments and questions.

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program is an unprecedented, robust 50 year, cooperative effort among 50 federal and non-federal entities in Nevada, California and Arizona designed to protect 26 endangered, threatened and sensitive species on the Lower Colorado River. The Program provides for the creation of over 8,100 acres of riparian, marsh and backwater habitat for the species covered by the Program, and includes plans for the rearing and stocking of over 1.2 million fish to augment populations of two endangered fish covered by the Program. The Program also provides for the maintenance of existing, high-quality habitat, and a research, monitoring and adaptive management effort to ensure that Program elements are effective in helping covered species. In exchange for species and habitat protection, the affected water and power agencies of the three states are provided with assurances that their operations may continue upon compliance with Program requirements.

This Program is particularly vital to the State of Nevada. The State, through the Colorado River Commission of Nevada, an agency of the State of Nevada, and the Southern Nevada Water Authority, a political subdivision of the State of Nevada, currently diverts its entire apportioned share of Colorado River water. This Colorado River water constitutes the overwhelming majority of the water supply for the Las Vegas Valley area, almost 90%, with the remaining water coming from a limited groundwater supply. There are currently more than one and a half million residents living in the Las Vegas area. Southern Nevada is the fastest growing urban area in the United States. In the last ten years alone the population increased by almost 70% and for the next ten year period, the population is projected to increase by an additional 50%.

Southern Nevada also relies on the Colorado River for hydroelectric power. On behalf of the State and as principal in its own behalf, the Colorado River Commission receives electric power generated by various federal hydroelectric projects on the Colorado River through delivery contracts with the Western Area Power Administration of the U.S. Department of Energy. These projects include the Boulder Canyon Project, the Parker-Davis Project and Salt Lake City Area Integrated Projects. The Commission, in turn, contracts to deliver electric power from one or more of these federal projects to the several companies comprising the Basic Industries in Henderson, Nevada, the Southern Nevada Water Authority and to five power utilities that together serve southern Nevada.

Consequently, the sustainability of the Colorado River System is absolutely critical to the vitality of southern Nevada's future. For this reason, the State of Nevada was a significant participant in the development of the Program and is now one of the primary non-federal party funding contributors to the Program. In short, the Program provides for a total of \$626 million in

funding, indexed for inflation over 50 years, for the species conservation efforts that will be implemented under the Program. These costs are divided 50-50 between the state and federal entities covered by the Program. Accordingly, H.B. 5180 provides an authorization of appropriations for the federal share of Program costs and directs the Secretary of the Interior to manage and implement the Program in accordance with the Program Documents. These documents include the agreements that the parties have signed embodying their commitment to carry out the Program. As former Secretary Norton declared in the Record of Decision for the Program:

“The importance of the Colorado River to the southwestern portion of the United States cannot be overstated: the Colorado is the lifeblood of the southwest. The Colorado River provides water and power to over 20 million people (in such cities as Los Angeles, San Diego, Las Vegas, Phoenix and Tucson), irrigates over 2 million acres, and generates up to 10 billion kilowatt hours of electricity annually.”¹

H.B. 5180 gives the necessary strength and integrity to this monumental federal and non-federal collaborative conservation Program and virtually assures for its success over the next five decades. The State of Nevada supports this bill in its entirety and urges the Committee to approve the bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I’d be happy now to answer any questions you may have.

¹ Gale A. Norton, Secretary of the Interior, Record of Decision for the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Plan, April 2005, page 1.