

**Statement of Gene Shawcroft, General Manager
Central Utah Water Conservancy District
in support of
H.R. 4094—Great Salt Lake Stewardship Act
House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
Hearing on Pending Legislation
July 27, 2023**

Chairman Bentz, Ranking Member Huffman, Congressman Curtis and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, I thank you for inviting me to speak in support of the Great Salt Lake Stewardship Act (H.R. 4094). This critically important bill amends the Central Utah Project Completion Act or as we affectionally call it, “CUPCA”, to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to redirect authorized and unexpended Central Utah Project funds towards new water conservation measures to help recover the Great Salt Lake—Utah’s most famous natural resource! I especially want to thank my good friend Congressman John Curtis along with all of Utah’s Congressional delegation members, for leading the introduction of H.R. 4094. As both General Manager of the Central Utah Water Conservancy District (District) and Chair of Utah’s Colorado River Authority, I can say unequivocally that Utah has “got the message” on the urgent need for water conservation. Water conservation is now one of the State’s top priorities.

The existing Congressionally authorized funding that is being repurposed in this bill is being diverted from old CUPCA priorities that were planned decades ago. Increasing water flow to the Great Salt Lake basin is now more paramount. This year, the Great Salt Lake experienced record low levels causing widespread concern about dust carrying airborne toxins, Brine Shrimp ecosystem health, and our ability to preserve fragile migratory bird refuge habitat. The State of Utah, water users and other stakeholders have been working to find immediate and sustainable

solutions to support the Great Salt Lake. While this winter and spring provided record breaking snow and ideal runoff conditions, water professionals know this granted a temporary reprieve. Extreme weather conditions are now the norm as evidenced by this summer's record heat. We have to adapt, permanently.

Overview of the Great Salt Lake Stewardship Act – H.R. 4094

H.R. 4094 will extend and expand the District's very successful water conservation program authorized originally in CUPCA. CUPCA was part of a monumental bipartisan omnibus water bill, P.L. 102-575, spearheaded and passed in 1992 by Senator Jake Garn (R-Utah) and Rep. George Miller (D-CA).

I want to emphasize that this bill does not require any *new* spending authorization. Funding would come through the programmatic funding Congress provides to the CUPCA program within the Department of Interior's budget each year. The federal funding that is allocated to CUPCA is paid back to the U.S. Treasury over time, with interest. Together with the Department of the Interior, the District estimates that as much as \$100 million of already authorized Central Utah Project funds could be reprogrammed to fund water conservation projects throughout the entire Great Salt Lake basin. The bill also would expand the program from the existing 8 counties to include a total of 12 counties along the populous Wasatch front. This will assist efforts by the State of Utah, local communities and water districts north of Salt Lake County from which the Great Salt Lake receives most of its water. These areas have also been hit by the state's worst drought conditions.

Section 207 of CUPCA

Under Section 207 in CUPCA, the District established a *Water Conservation Credit Program* to distribute funds for water conservation. Since the program's inception, we have received 132 applications from diverse project sponsors that include agriculture, urban, cities, water districts, and nonprofits. Under Section 207, even the State Director of Natural Resources can propose a conservation project. All projects are reviewed by the Utah Water Conservation Advisory Board consisting of nine members. They provide recommendations of the projects that should advance forward for funding. To date, 45 projects have been selected and funded at various stages of implementation. The highest weighted criteria for project funding is the amount of water conserved. Many are large scale capital-intensive construction projects, such as canal lining/enclosures, secondary water systems, irrigation improvements and recently turf grass removal projects. Over \$122 million in federal funds have been distributed so far, financing up to 65% of a conservation project's total cost.

In 2020 alone, the water savings from these projects were enough to nearly fill Deer Creek Reservoir, which has a capacity of 152,000 acre-feet. To date, funded projects have conserved a combined total of **2,242,450-acre feet**¹ with annual projections of approximately 140,000-acre feet of conserved water moving forward. The results of these projects have continued to exceed projections and established goals.

Until this bill, all conservation projects had to be within the footprint of the Central Utah Project service area, which includes the Uinta basin. The *Great Salt Lake Stewardship Act* would

¹ Section 207 Water Conservation Credit Program 2022 Annual Report.

expand the program to include any conservation project that provides demonstrable water saving benefits in the Great Salt Lake drainage basin.

Conclusion

If enacted, the *Great Salt Lake Stewardship Act* provides a mechanism for sustainable funding and support for water conservation projects that will benefit the Salt Lake basin. H.R. 4094 has the capability to expand conservation benefits without increasing federal spending beyond what has been already authorized by Congress for the CUPCA program. This will provide a stable access to funding for those projects that conserve water for the benefit of the Great Salt Lake.

Thank you.