

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER OF ENGINEERING AND OPERATIONS
BEFORE THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 644 TO WITHDRAW CERTAIN LANDS FROM
MINERAL ENTRY**

JULY 21, 2009

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Subcommittee members. My name is Kay Brothers. I am the Deputy General Manager of Engineering and Operations for the Southern Nevada Water Authority, a cooperative seven-member agency formed in 1991 to address southern Nevada water resource issues on a regional basis. Among other things, the Authority is responsible for the operations and management of water treatment and delivery facilities which supply Nevada's Colorado River allocation to nearly two million residents in the Las Vegas Valley, as well as approximately 250,000 daily visitors. I appreciate the invitation to testify in support of H.R. 644 which has as its goal the protection of water quality in the Colorado River.

The Southern Nevada Water Authority withdraws its Colorado River allocation from Lake Mead. The Colorado River represents approximately 90 percent of southern Nevada's available water supply source. Drought conditions in the Colorado River Basin have had a significant effect on water management activities, both in terms of supply access and water quality. As of July 2009, Lake Mead's storage volume is at 43 percent of capacity and will reach a low elevation of 1092 this year. This poses a number of challenges for water managers that depend on Colorado River flows.

The Authority has two intakes in Lake Mead; the upper one located at elevation 1050 and the other at elevation 1000. If the drought continues, our upper intake could be dry by as early as 2012 reducing our pumping capacity. Also, among these challenges is our ability to continue to provide a high-quality, safe drinking water supply that meets applicable state and federal drinking water quality standards. As the lake declines the

upper, warmer water is captured by our intakes, resulting in water treatment challenges. The Authority has begun construction of a third intake in Lake Mead which will draw water from elevation 860. This intake is scheduled to be completed by 2013.

In addition, drought-induced reductions to Colorado River inflows, combined with substantially reduced Lake Mead storage, have increased the concentration of undesirable water quality constituents. This could require higher levels of treatment and implementation of enhanced operational management strategies.

With regards to H.R. 644, the subject of uranium mining and disposal has been an issue of consternation for many years. A decades-old tailing site in southern Utah has contributed contaminants into the Colorado River system. We are pleased with efforts underway to address this issue, and appreciate the concern and care the federal government has demonstrated in its investments toward remediation.

Recently, there have been concerns raised about the increase in uranium mining claims filed in the Colorado River Basin, including areas around the Grand Canyon National Park. This increase in mining claims raises fear of potential contamination of the Colorado River if, and when, active mining begins. We know that the Department of the Interior and its agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, will do all that is possible under applicable laws and regulations to address these concerns and protect the environment. We are also aware that the Environmental Protection Agency has considerable authority to regulate the discharge of any potential pollutants to the Colorado River. We will support the Department of the Interior in any way we can as you carefully evaluate the implications on Colorado River water quality prior to any federal authorization of mineral exploration or mining in areas near the Colorado River or its tributaries. Future authorizations for exploration or mining should be contingent on a comprehensive environmental impact analysis that includes broad stakeholder review, including that of downstream users of Colorado River Water. The Southern Nevada Water Authority supports the development of sufficient controls and oversight measures to ensure that any future mining activities in the Colorado River Basin do not impact

downstream water quality or otherwise impede our ability to deliver a safe and reliable water supply for the communities that we serve.

To this end, we ask for your continued support to ensure that any future mining activities, if authorized, are appropriately managed and monitored to protect Colorado River Basin flows. This includes developing a more comprehensive understanding of potential water quality impacts associated with uranium mining activities, the development of management strategies, and policies to avoid impacts.

The importance of maintaining water quality in the Colorado River Basin, particularly Lake Mead, is a critical priority for southern Nevada and other downstream users. This concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to address you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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