

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Testimony
to the House Subcommittees on
National Parks & Public Lands
and Water and Power
by Ted Stewart, Executive Director
of the
Utah Department of Natural Resources
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Concerning the Proposal to Drain Lake Powell

More than 75 years ago, wise representatives of the seven Colorado River Basin States and the United States government negotiated a marvelous document, the Colorado River Compact of 1922. This Compact provided the foundation for the equitable apportionment of water from the Colorado River among the seven basin states and their water users. These representatives envisioned that significant carryover storage would be required to meet the provisions of providing 1) 7.5 million acre-feet of annual beneficial use for the lower basin (Arizona, California and Nevada), and 2) 7.5 million acre-feet of annual beneficial use for the upper basin (Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming). The compact provides that the upper basin shall deliver at Lee Ferry an aggregate of 75 million acre-feet in any 10-year period. With the signing of the Mexican Treaty of 1944, Mexico has a right of 1.5 million acre-feet annually.

Flows at Lee Ferry (just downstream from Glen Canyon Dam) have ranged from a low of 5.8 million acre-feet per year to a high of 24.5 million acre-feet per year. This wide variation in annual flows, coupled with a constant demand, necessitates a large volume of carryover storage. Hence, Glen Canyon Dam in the upper basin needs to release the aggregate of 75 million acre-feet in any 10-year period and still allow the upper basin to develop and use water. Additional hydrologic modeling now indicates the upper basin will only have 6 million acre-feet of depletion available after meeting the release requirements at Lee Ferry. Even this 6 million acre-feet figure assumes all the current storage, of which Lake Powell is the major component, stays in place. Without the carryover storage of Lake Powell, even current levels of water use in the upper basin, which are less than compact allocations, are jeopardized in some years and no additional water can be developed. This was the reason Utah supported the building of Glen Canyon Dam and the filling of Lake Powell when first proposed, and why it insists that its current use and operation continue.

The current major water resource benefit of Lake Powell storage to Utah is the ability to meet lower basin water use while not curtailing upper basin use in dry years. I strongly emphasize that **releases of water stored in Lake Powell allow Utah to use Colorado River water** in dry years when the natural flow is insufficient to meet all the demands on the river. This is why Utah requires that Lake Powell storage continue to be a part of the Colorado River management tools.

Future benefits include allowing Utah to complete the Central Utah Project which will allow part of Utah's

Colorado River allocation to serve municipal and industrial water along the populous Wasatch Front, provide water for Indian tribes in the Uintah Basin, meet anticipated industrial uses in the Colorado River Basin area of Utah and provide the water supply for the proposed pipeline from Lake Powell to southwest Utah.

Southwest Utah is one of the fastest growing areas in the country and the local water supply is already over-extended. Local water agencies have incorporated this water source (Lake Powell) as part of their plans for the future. They are already beginning the process, through preliminary design, commencing the environmental evaluation process and acquiring some of the necessary physical assets. Washington County has already applied to the Bureau of Land Management for permits for the proposed pipeline. The loss of water by draining Lake Powell would jeopardize southwest Utah's future water supply. The alternative is to put even more demands on the Virgin River Basin which includes Zion National Park.

While assuring the supply of Colorado River water for Utah (and the other upper basin states of Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming) is the primary purpose and benefit of Glen Canyon and Lake Powell, secondary benefits have accrued from the existence and operation of Glen Canyon and Lake Powell. These benefits include power production, tourism and recreation.

Clean and renewable hydroelectric power from Glen Canyon produces over 3,500 gigawatt hours yearly and generates power revenue in excess of \$80 million yearly. The revenue is used to repay, to the US Treasury, the costs of participating federal projects built under the auspices of the Colorado River Storage Project Act of 1956 and financed by the United States government.

Substantial regional economic benefits are derived from the tourist and recreation industry that has become associated with Lake Powell. For years, southern Utah has struggled to diversify its economic base beyond the traditional natural resource. The Lake Powell recreation industry is a shining example of success in this endeavor. Lake Powell has become a destination for visitors from around the west, the United States and the world. Recent National Park Service estimates put visitor days in excess of 6 million per year to the facilities associated with Lake Powell. As a recreation destination, these visitors spend substantial monies on boat rentals, fuel purchase, supplies and accommodations, as well as incidental expenses. This economic activity is estimated by the Park Service to generate direct revenues in excess of \$409 million per year to the local economy. Assuming the replacement of recreation industry currently in place on Lake Powell with a river-based recreation industry similar in magnitude to current in-canyon operations in the Grand Canyon, a direct economic activity of only \$15 to \$20 million will result. This could amount to a net annual decrease in regional economic activity in excess of \$380 million. Therefore, draining Lake Powell would devastate one of the crown jewels of economic diversification in southeast Utah.

The following vital concerns are not addressed in the proposal to drain Lake Powell:

1. How will these current benefits to the region and the nation be replaced?

2.How will the water stored in Lake Powell be replaced?

3.Which water users will have to curtail use when there is not enough water to meet all demands?

4.Where will the replacement power come from?

5.Who will reimburse the federal treasury for the investments that were to be repaid by power revenues from Glen Canyon?

6.How will substantial loss of the tourism/recreation economic benefits be made up?

This proposal has already received more attention than is commensurate with its merits. It is irresponsible to make such a proposal without having done the work necessary to answer the vital questions on how these major impacts on citizens of the Colorado River Basin will be mitigated and compensated.

Utah cannot and will not allow this proposal to proceed. It is contrary to the interest of our future use as well as jeopardizing the present use of water resources in Utah. Utah is prepared and committed to do whatever it takes to defeat this unbelievable and meritless proposal.

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