



ADVOCACY GROUP
Shannon McGahn
Chief Advocacy Officer

January 29, 2026

Scott J. Cameron
Acting Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Acting Commissioner Cameron:

On behalf of the 1.5 million members of the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR), I am providing comments on the on-going negotiations related to the management and operation of the Colorado River. Sustainable water resources are critical to healthy real estate markets and NAR offers these comments to help ensure water supplies remain viable over the long-term.

For those reasons, NAR urges the Colorado River negotiators to create a set of rules and guidelines that protect property rights and encourage a sustainable supply of water resources.

Eleven percent of the country's water resources are used by residential and commercial property. The Colorado River Basin (Basin) provides essential water supplies to approximately 40 million people in 7 states, nearly 5.5 million acres of agricultural lands, hydroelectric renewable power, recreational opportunities, habitat for ecological resources, and other benefits across the southwestern United States.

Lack of adequate water resources can have far-reaching impacts on real estate markets. New housing and commercial developments are dependent on having sufficient water resources and more attention is now being paid to implementing water efficiency best practices in new and existing residential and commercial property that save water and decrease utility costs. In addition, the lack of water hinders the development of new housing units. For example, Colorado is currently experiencing a severe shortage of housing (106,000 units short, according to the Colorado State Demographer), due in part to the lack of viable water resources. More supply would clearly help alleviate this shortfall and help address the affordable housing issue.

However, this once-bountiful water supply is running into a perfect storm of unsustainability, with far reaching implications for future users: increased energy demand combined with increased population and long-term systemic changes in climate that have contributed to the region's worst mega-drought in 1,200 years. Over the past decade, the two largest reservoirs in the U.S., Lake Mead and Lake Powell, saw water levels dip to record lows. In turn, the Hoover Dam and the Glen Canyon Dam that impound these reservoirs saw their hydroelectric power production dwindle.

The purpose of the current negotiation process is to assess how to effectively manage and reduce water usage across the American Southwest to avoid a water supply crisis in the Colorado River basin. Existing rules and guidelines are set to expire soon, and a substantial re-evaluation and revision of Colorado River management is expected at that time.

Regardless of how the negotiators proceed with managing the Colorado River system, real estate markets and consumers must be a critical factor in these discussions.

REALTORS® believe that there are many approaches that property owners, communities and the private sector can take to enhance the viability and sustainability of current water resources, including:

Water Rights

NAR recognizes the fact that water rights are property rights and must be honored. Water rights are essential because they establish the legal framework for water allocation, facilitate economic growth, protect the environment, and promote long-term stability. They provide a foundation for managing and preserving water resources and ensuring its availability for present and future generations.

The concept of water rights traces back to the doctrine of prior appropriation, which governs water allocation in many western states. This doctrine establishes a system where the first person or entity to use water for a beneficial purpose obtains the right to continue using it, known as "first in time, first in right." This legal framework provides a basis for regulating water allocation and resolving conflicts over water use.

Water Storage and Infrastructure

NAR urges states and localities to take advantage of the resources at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation that provide programs to enhance water storage and infrastructure efforts. Investing in these activities is crucial for optimizing water resource management, enhancing resilience to climate variability, and supporting sustainable development. They provide a foundation for water security, economic growth and overall resilience for communities and ecosystems.

Water Efficiency and Conservation

Government entities and water management organizations play a pivotal role in developing and implementing policies that encourage water efficiency. Promoting the use of water-saving technologies and enforcing regulations on water usage can significantly contribute to reducing waste and increasing overall water conservation efforts. Additionally, financial incentives, such as tax rebates, credits or subsidies, can be provided to individuals and businesses that invest in water-efficient infrastructure and practices.



(800) 874-6500

500 New Jersey Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20001

Ecosystem Water Resources

Another area of focus should be the restoration and protection of natural water resources, including rivers, lakes, and wetlands. These ecosystems not only provide habitats for diverse wildlife but also act as natural water reservoirs. By implementing conservation measures and adopting sustainable land management practices, the long-term viability of these ecosystems will be ensured and their contribution to water sustainability protected.

Education and Awareness

Education and awareness campaigns should be initiated at various levels of government to promote water-conscious behavior. Educating consumers about the importance of water conservation and providing practical tips on reducing water consumption will empower communities to make informed choices.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Cooperation among governments, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and communities is vital to addressing the complex challenges of water efficiency and conservation. By fostering dialogue and sharing best practices, we can leverage collective wisdom and resources to develop innovative solutions that benefit everyone.

Thank you for consideration of NAR's comments. NAR remains committed to supporting initiatives that promote water conservation, efficiency and storage that help support consumers and real estate markets and looks forward to seeing positive action on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Kevin Brown
2026 President, National Association of REALTORS®

