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To: John Shields
Subject: Secretary's Op-Ed in this morning's Arizona Republic

COLORADO RIVER AGREEMENT:

Guest Column: *Western states choose to be good neighbors*
Arizona Republic - 12/18/07

By Dirk Kempthorne, Secretary of the Interior

The people of Arizona and the six other states in the Colorado River Basin made history last week. In doing so, they helped ensure a better quality of life for their children and grandchildren.

After years of negotiation, the seven states reached a landmark agreement on the long-term management of the Colorado River. As secretary of the Interior and water master of the Lower Colorado River, I was honored to sign the record of decision implementing this remarkable agreement in Las Vegas on Thursday.

Currently, the basin is in the middle of what may be the worst drought in five centuries. The decision approved last week provides a way to move forward as we face the uncertainty over the length and impact of this drought.

In effect, the states decided to share adversity if the need arises. It is easier to be gracious and share surpluses. In times of scarcity, it is tough. Sharing adversity is what good neighbors do. The states have decided to be good neighbors.

The agreement provides more security, more transparency and more flexibility to people of seven basin states in four ways:

First, the agreement addresses the ongoing drought by encouraging creative initiatives for water conservation. For example, Nevada will pay to build a reservoir in California to conserve water that otherwise would be lost. Nevada will have the right to the water for 20 years, and then it will belong to all the lower basin states. It's a win-win agreement for the entire basin.

Second, the agreement establishes operational rules for Lake Powell and Lake Mead that will allow these two enormous reservoirs to rise and fall in tandem, thereby better sharing the risk of drought among the states.

Third, the new guidelines establish rules for water shortages, specifying who will take reductions and when they take them. This is essential for prudent planning in times of drought.

Fourth, the new guidelines establish rules for surpluses, so that if the basin is blessed with ample runoff, there will be rules in place to distribute the extra water.

The agreement avoids endless and fruitless litigation among the states and puts the entire basin in a much better position to deal with the impacts of when there is water and when there is not. This is the most important agreement among the seven basin states since the original Colorado River Compact of 1922. It is truly an extraordinary achievement.

The people of Arizona and the Colorado River Basin should be proud of this accomplishment. As the Colorado River navigates a 1,500-mile journey down mountains, through canyons and across desert landscapes, you have navigated the shoals of history. You have steered around the cataracts and sharp boulders of litigation and acrimony. You have found the serene waters of partnership and cooperation.

Equally important, the agreement will serve as a model to other states and nations that are dealing with water shortages, especially during a time when many areas of the world are suffering historic droughts.

The Economist magazine reported on this agreement to its worldwide readers recently. Representatives of the World Bank at a meeting not too long ago expressed interest in the innovations contained in the agreement.

I will cite the agreement as an example of cooperation over conflict when I meet this week with the governors of Georgia, Alabama and Florida, states that also are struggling to allocate scarce water in the middle of a historic drought in the Southeast.

Drought is not just a Western problem.

America is proud to be a world leader in many fields: medicine, agriculture, aerospace, computer technology and engineering among others.

With this agreement, the people of the Colorado Basin have ensured a brighter future for themselves as well as declaring the United States to be a world leader in the conservation and sustainable management of water.