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Critical Endorsement

Central Arizona Project Governing Board Supports Landmark Federal Legislation That Allows The Colorado River Indian Tribes To Lease Its Colorado River Water And Provide Drought Relief For Arizona

(PHOENIX) By a unanimous vote, the Central Arizona Project Governing Board has endorsed The Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) Water Resiliency Act of 2021 (S.3308). This bill, introduced by US Senator Mark Kelly and co-sponsored by Senator Kyrsten Sinema, would give CRIT the authority to lease a portion of its Arizona Colorado River allocation for off-reservation use within Arizona. It is a critical proactive tool to help Arizona cope with ongoing drought. The CAP vote took place during the regular meeting of the Governing Board on January 6th.

In 2020, prior to the introduction of the bill, the Arizona Department of Water Resources held public hearings on potential water leasing legislation. Arizona entities expressing support included:

- The Water for Arizona Coalition
- The National Audubon Society
- The cities of Phoenix, Gilbert, and Peoria
- The Mohave County Board of Supervisors
- The Arizona Municipal Water Users Association, which serves 10 municipalities
- The Pinal County Board of Supervisors

If passed, the legislation would allow CRIT to lease a part of its water allocation for use off the reservation to protect natural habitats along the river and provide direct drought relief to Arizona entities. Numerous other tribes in Arizona and around the country have the right to lease their water.

CRIT is currently using part of its allocation to help the State of Arizona maintain water levels in Lake Mead. Those efforts would continue if S.3308 were passed.

CRIT started leaving water in Lake Mead in 2016 to help avoid shortages. CRIT left 55,000 acre-feet of water in Lake Mead in 2020 and 2021, according to provisions in the Drought Contingency Plan, and will again in 2022.

CRIT has sufficient resources to accomplish all of its goals thanks to conservation efforts that include irrigation and farming efficiencies, as well as fallowing farmland. Indeed, CRIT comes to the table with actual existing water resources, as opposed to water that only exists on paper.

CRIT Chairwoman Amelia Flores said, “Because we have been serious about conserving water, we have the ability to protect the life of the Colorado River as well as providing short term drought relief to entities that need it. Conservation is paramount for CRIT and the CAP and we hope S.3308 becomes law so we can all work together and protect the life of the Colorado River.”

“We are pleased to support this legislation, allowing the CRIT – one of Arizona's largest and most senior Colorado River water rights holders – to have more flexibility in managing its water resources. This also allows CRIT to become more fully engaged in addressing the water-related challenges facing Arizona,” said Ted Cooke, CAP General Manager.

CRIT has the first priority decreed water right to divert 719,248 acre-feet (about 234 billion gallons) per year to serve lands in both Arizona and California.

About the Colorado River Indian Tribes:

The Colorado River Indian Tribes include four distinct Tribes - the Mohave, Chemehuevi, Hopi, and Navajo. There are currently about 4,572 Tribal members. The CRIT Reservation was created in 1865 by the Federal Government for “Indians of the Colorado River and its tributaries,” originally for the Mohave and Chemehuevi, who had inhabited the area for centuries. People of the Hopi and Navajo Tribes were relocated to the reservation in later years. The reservation stretches along the Colorado River on both the

Arizona and California side. It includes approximately 300,000 acres of land, with the river serving as the focal point and lifeblood of the area.