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### Two-hour comment period on river set up

By **Launce Rake** <[lrake@lasvegassun.com](mailto:lrake@lasvegassun.com)>  
LAS VEGAS SUN

The federal government is providing two hours Tuesday for Southern Nevada residents to contribute their thoughts toward what ultimately would be a new policy governing shortages along the Colorado River, the source of 90 percent of Southern Nevada's drinking water.

The Interior Department and the Bureau of Reclamation are working to design rules to govern how the seven states along the Colorado River would share the pain from cuts to the river resource if the volume of water in the river continues to fall.

The impetus for the rule-making process has been more than five years of drought that caused water supplies in the river to drop to about half of what it has been in wet years.

Although last winter's relatively wet season helped the Colorado River recover somewhat, the volume is still just 56 percent full. Regulators worry that an extension of the drought could require cuts for the states that use the river water, among them Nevada, Arizona and California.

Before drafting the rules for "shortage criteria," the Bureau of Reclamation is working to define how the rule-making process should go forward. The meeting from 10 a.m. to noon at the Henderson Convention Center, 200 S. Water St., is one of the first steps toward setting the process. A second meeting will be Thursday in Salt Lake City.

People will be able to submit written or verbal comments at the public meeting.

Robert Walsh, a bureau spokesman, said despite the narrow, two-hour period for the public meeting, people will have ample



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opportunity to comment.

"This is a scoping process," he said. "We have left that period open to the end of August. People can send us a letter. They can fax us information. They can send us e-mails. There's full opportunity to participate even if they can't attend the meetings."

As the policy is constructed over the next several years, there also will likely be other public meetings, Walsh said.

"There will probably be other opportunities for input and comment," he said.

One group that promises to attend the two-hour meeting is Living Rivers, which is dedicated to conserving the Colorado River. The group is probably best known for advocating the removal of Glen Canyon Dam, which spans the river from Utah to Arizona and forms Lake Powell.

Although Nevada and federal water officials have said Lake Powell has been a critically important upstream reservoir, Living Rivers members argue that Lake Powell has led to an unsupportable loss of water from the Colorado River system because of evaporation.

The main concern of the group is that the two-reservoir system with Lakes Powell and Mead is contributing to the demise of endangered species along the river.

"The Grand Canyon ecosystem is falling apart," said John Weisheit, Living Rivers conservation director. "They are sacrificing the Colorado River, is what they are doing."

Doug Hendrix, a spokesman for the Bureau of Reclamation's division that manages the upper Colorado River, including Lake Powell, said the upcoming meetings will not address the long-simmering debate over Glen Canyon Dam. Hendrix noted that operation of the dam and Lake Powell is congressionally mandated "for the long term use by the states that depend on that water."

He said the upstream reservoir with Lake Mead have been very important in regulating the water supply on the river. Southern Nevada and its neighbors have had a reliable source of water despite severe drought, he said.

"They have certainly proven their worth over the last five consecutive years of drought," Hendrix said. "That's what they were designed to do."

The Southern Nevada Water Authority, the water wholesaler for the region, also will have officials attending the meeting, said Vince Alberta, Water Authority spokesman.

He said the economies of all seven basin states, from Wyoming to

California, depend on effective management of the river.

"The primary objective in developing these guidelines must be the conservation of the water supply, consistent with the purposes for which Mead and Powell were authorized by Congress," Alberta said.

For information about the development of strategies to manage shortages in Lake Mead and Lake Powell, call Bureau of Reclamation at 293-8156.

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