

# Feds Sued Over Plan to Drain More of Colorado River Basin

[TIM RYAN](#) March 21, 2019



FILE – In this July 25, 2017, file photo, rafters float down the Colorado River near Moab, Utah. Rivers are drying up, popular mountain recreation spots are closing and water restrictions are in full swing as a persistent drought intensifies its grip on pockets of the American Southwest. (AP photo/Dan Elliott, File).

WASHINGTON (CN) – Beset by the impacts of climate change, a drought and increased water demand, the Colorado River Basin was already running near empty before the Trump administration approved a new deal allowing additional extractions from one of its main tributaries.

While the administration found the deal would not have a significant impact

on the environment surrounding the river, a collection of environmental groups say in a new federal [lawsuit](#) that it will further deplete the river basin's supply – further endangering already threatened species that rely on its waters.

“Defendants failed to address the whole of the environment effects of the GRBE contract and all others connected or related pending actions and failed to meaningfully assess the combined environmental impacts of each project to the same resources of the Green River,” the 40-page complaint filed Thursday states, referring to the water deal. “By undertaking piecemeal review of these projects, defendants understate the impacts of this action and also undermine a meaningful alternatives analysis.”

The Green River flows from Wyoming through Colorado and Utah, where it joins the Colorado River before eventually cutting through the Grand Canyon. According to the lawsuit, the river is already giving out more water under other agreements than it can, a situation that is projected to only get worse as the river gets lower over the course of the next century.

Utah proposed a new agreement in 2016 asking to extract more than 72,000 acre-feet per year for 50 years from the Flaming Gorge Dam on the Green River. The Trump administration opened the proposal up for public comment two years later.

The administration conducted an environmental assessment of the proposal and found in February that Utah's proposal would have no significant impact on the region. Environmental groups say the Trump administration relied on old data and ignored the impacts of other current and proposed projects when doing so.

The Trump administration finalized the agreement Wednesday.

In the federal lawsuit, the Center for Biological Diversity and its co-plaintiffs say the deal threatens multiple species of fish, including the pikeminnow,

razorback sucker and others. In addition, depleted water levels in the region could dry up the fun for rafters, fishermen and others who frequent the canyons and national parks that make the region a popular spot for outdoorsmen.

Living Rivers, Colorado Riverkeeper and Utah Rivers Council joined the center in the lawsuit.

“The Bureau’s Green River Block environmental review is a disingenuous facade that ignores the agency’s own climate change warnings and myriad scientific studies about water-supply shortfalls to advance the largest new proposed diversion of the Colorado River, the Lake Powell pipeline,” Zach Frankel, the executive director of the Utah Rivers Council, said in a statement.

The Department of the Interior, which along with the Bureau of Reclamation is named as a defendant. An Interior spokeswoman declined to comment on the lawsuit.