

## **COLORADO RIVER: Greens challenge Reclamation deal with Utah**

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Environmentalists yesterday sued the Trump administration over a deal with Utah to take more water from the Flaming Gorge Dam out of the Colorado River's main tributary, contending the environmental review failed to take climate change and droughts into account.

The Bureau of Reclamation and Utah announced an agreement this week that would allow Utah to take up to 72,600 acre-feet of water released from the dam near the Utah-Wyoming border. In exchange, Utah gave up water rights on the Green River and its tributaries farther downstream from the dam.

In their lawsuit, the environmental groups challenged Reclamation's finding that the agreement would produce "no significant impact" in its National Environmental Policy Act review. In particular, they charge that the NEPA review did not do a full accounting of the amount of water in the river system.

"This review was appalling," said Robin Silver, a co-founder of the Center for Biological Diversity. "Drought, climate change and overallocation are sucking the Colorado River Basin dry right in front of our eyes. But officials ignored declining river flows, pretended this new Green River contract stands alone and ignored multiple proposed water projects."

The lawsuit was filed in federal district court in Washington, D.C., by the Center for Biological Diversity, Living Rivers, Colorado Riverkeeper and the Utah Rivers Council.

It comes days after the Colorado River's seven states reached major drought contingency agreements that include management procedures for the Flaming Gorge Reservoir ([/Greenwire/](https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060127745) [<https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060127745/>](https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060127745/), March 20).

In a statement Wednesday, Reclamation Upper Colorado Regional Director Brent Rhees said the agreement is a "partnership aimed at providing maximum value from available water resources."

Eric Millis, director of the Utah Division of Water Resources, added in the statement that the agreements "bring considerable value to the State of Utah by providing a reliable water source and benefiting the in-stream flows of the Green and Colorado Rivers."

The groups' lawsuit, however, contends that the environmental review

failed to consider impacts of the water withdrawals on a host of threatened species. They also claim it didn't include how Utah's proposed Lake Powell pipeline — a \$1 billion to \$2 billion project to ship Colorado River water 140 miles — would affect the river's flows.

Their lawsuit calls Reclamation's environmental review of the agreement "piecemeal," saying it sought to separate the deal with Utah from the pipeline project and the drought contingency plan, or DCP, when all affect the river.

"This lawsuit," the filing [https://www.eenews.net/assets/2019/03/22/document\\_gw\\_04.pdf](https://www.eenews.net/assets/2019/03/22/document_gw_04.pdf) says, "challenges [Reclamation's] attempt to break a large action into small component parts for the purposes of environmental review in order to obfuscate the combined significant impacts of the [Green River Block Exchange] contract, the Lake Powell Pipeline contract, and the Drought Contingency Plan ('DCP') agreements on the environmental resources of the Basin."

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