

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 12, 2022

Hon. Tanya Trujillo
Assistant Secretary for Water and Science
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St., NW
Washington D.C. 20240

Dear Assistant Secretary Trujillo:

We write to respectfully request that the Department of the Interior allocate funds appropriated by the Inflation Reduction Act to support drought mitigation, resilience, and Tribal and Pueblo irrigation and water needs in the Rio Grande Basin. The Rio Grande is a critical natural resource in our states, supporting the water needs of agriculture, recreation, municipalities, 22 Native tribes, and industry, as well as endangered species, and a unique riparian ecosystem.

This year, sections of the Rio Grande as far north as Albuquerque, New Mexico ran dry for the first time in 40 years, following decades of aridification. As a result of this aridification, ongoing drought, and rising demand for water resources, the river's reservoirs are facing historic lows. In mid-August of this year, Elephant Butte Reservoir, which stores Rio Grande water for delivery to Texas under the Rio Grande Compact, stood at less than 4% of capacity, its lowest level since the 1970s.

We appreciate the ongoing effort by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to solicit input from states, tribes, and the public regarding the allocation of the \$4 billion provided in Section 50233 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to advance drought mitigation efforts in Reclamation states. The IRA gives priority for these funds to the Colorado River Basin and other basins experiencing comparable levels of long-term drought. The Rio Grande Basin clearly meets this criteria. The National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) reports that 97% of the Rio Grande Basin experienced drought in 2022 and 44% experienced "Exceptional" drought, the most severe rating. Exceptional drought occurred in only 7% of the Colorado River Basin this year. Since 2000, the two Basins have faced similar long-term crises, with an average of 30% and 33% of the Rio Grande Basin and Colorado River Basin respectively experiencing drought rated "Severe" or worse.

In the face of widespread and historic drought in the West, a holistic and multi-faceted mitigation strategy is needed to safeguard the water resources of Reclamation states. A failure to consider the needs of the Rio Grande Basin in this strategy would be shortsighted, endangering the citizens of our states and exacerbating the strain on other Western water resources.

The Rio Grande stretches for 1,900 miles from its headwaters in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado to its mouth in the Gulf of Mexico; provides water for 6 million people in Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico; and irrigates 2 million acres of land. Given the tremendous

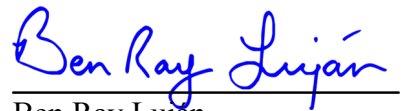
value of this water resource and the severity of the ongoing aridification of the region, we urge you to capitalize on the opportunity provided by Section 50233 funding in the IRA and robustly fund drought mitigation projects and programs in the Rio Grande Basin.

Thank you for your consideration.

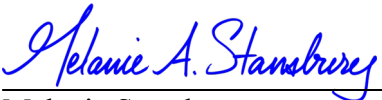
Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress