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U.S. House of Representatives
Rep. Sharice L. Davids
Kansas Third District

April 30, 2024

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable M. Camille Calimlim Touton
Commissioner
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland and Commissioner Touton,

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to combat drought and ensure access to clean water across the United States. This includes the Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program (LC Conservation Program), which was created by the *Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA) and administered by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). As you know, this effort is leading to increased water savings in the basin, ensuring stability in agricultural production, power generation, and water deliveries to millions of Americans.

Unfortunately, our nation's drought crisis is not exclusive to the Lower Colorado River Basin. Which is why I'm urging you to review the Kansas Department of Agriculture and the Kansas Water Office's request for funding via BOR's IRA drought mitigation activities.

In Kansas, drought conditions have expanded and worsened in recent years. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, more than one-third of the state experienced severe to exceptional drought (D2 to D4) from summer 2022 until fall 2023; in fact, during the first half of 2023, more than one-third of the state was under exceptional drought conditions.[1] This led to one of the worst wheat harvests in decades, threatening the economic stability of Kansans across the state.[2]

Additionally, many Kansans are dealing with worsening conditions for the High Plains Aquifer System, both in terms of quantity and quality, which are being exacerbated by climate change. The High Plains Aquifer System is comprised of the Ogallala, Great Bend Prairie, and Equus Beds aquifers and lies underneath much of western and south-central Kansas. The System is an irreplaceable resource for our local conservation activities, agriculture production, and the existence of vibrant economies across the state; it is also being rapidly depleted and the quality of water remaining has degraded.

[1] "Time Series," U.S. Drought Monitor, https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/DmData/TimeSeries.aspx.
[2] Colter Robinson, "Kansas wheat harvest worst in over 50 years," KSNT, July 14, 2023, https://www.ksnt.com/news/local-news/kansas-wheat-harvest-smallest-in-over-50-years/.

According to the Kansas Geological Survey (KGS), the overall water levels in the Aquifer declined by an average of 1.89 feet in 2022 and another 0.17 feet in 2023, marking four straight years of overall declines.[3][4] KGS estimates that some portions of the Aquifer have decreased in thickness by over 200 feet and that in some areas of the Ogallala region, fewer than 40 percent of the original Aquifer thickness remains.[5] State and local leaders in Kansas are taking action as the complete depletion of any part of the Aquifer could destroy local communities, threaten the biodiversity in our wetlands, and severely impact our national and global food supply. Local producers are voluntarily cutting water use, state legislators recently increased funding for the State Water Plan and water infrastructure projects, and the state's five groundwater management districts will begin regularly reporting their water usage and conservation activities.[6]

According to the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of the Inspector General, BOR plans to use $500 million of the $4 billion it was appropriated via the IRA for mitigation projects in other basins with comparable levels of drought to the Colorado River Basin.[7] In August 2023, Kansas Governor Laura Kelly wrote to you, asking that the BOR expand the LC Conservation Program to Kansas, including the High Plains System and the Ogallala aquifer.[8]

Given the dire and ongoing threat of crippling drought in Kansas, and the impacts it will have on our state's economic success and global food security, I ask that you kindly review the plans submitted to you by the Kansas Department of Agriculture and the Kansas Water Office last summer and give their request full and fair consideration for funding via BOR's IRA drought mitigation activities.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Eric Dunay in my office at eric.dunay@mail.house.gov or (202) 225-2865.

Sincerely,

Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress

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[3] Brownie Wilson, "Groundwater levels fall across western and south-central Kansas," The University of Kansas, March 13, 2023, https://news.ku.edu/news/article/2023/03/13/groundwater-levels-fall-across-western-and-south-central-kansas.
[4] "Groundwater survey shows 'mixed' results in western Kansas," Hays Post, March 20, 2024, https://hayspost.com/posts/bfb26476-ab5a-4256-aae9-02eba7a5aeaa.
[5] "Water Levels," Kansas Geological Survey, https://www.kgs.ku.edu/HighPlains/HPA_Atlas/Water%20Levels/index.html.
[6] Rachel Mipro, "New Kansas laws focus on saving depleted Ogallala Aquifer," Hays Post, April 20, 2023, https://hayspost.com/posts/e8d6fdbe-c0d2-43bd-82ad-ae8c95cb1ebd.
[7] "Flash Report: The Bureau of Reclamation's Drought Mitigation Plans and Activities," U.S. Department of Interior Office of Inspector General, March 2024, https://www.doioig.gov/sites/default/files/2021-migration/FlashReport_DroughtMitigation.pdf.
[8] Sarah Motter, "Gov. urges extension of water conservation efforts to Kansas as drought worsens," WIBW, August 22, 2023, https://www.wibw.com/2023/08/22/gov-urges-extension-water-conservation-efforts-kansas-drought-worsens/.