

Contact:

Mike Scerbo
Rose+Allyn Public and Online Relations
Work: 480.423.1414
Mobile: 602.615.6523
Email: mscrerbo@roseallynpr.com



Senator Mark Kelly Introduces Federal Legislation That Gives Arizona Drought Relief And Empowers Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT)

Enabling Federal Legislation Has Massive Support From Tribes, Local Governments, Environmental Groups, & Water Users

(PARKER, AZ.) The Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) is applauding the introduction of federal legislation that would enable CRIT to lease a portion of its federal Colorado River water allocation, clearing the way for critical drought relief in Arizona.

Senator Mark Kelly has introduced a bill, co-sponsored by Senator Kyrsten Sinema, that would give CRIT the authority to lease a portion of its Arizona allocation for off-reservation use within Arizona. The legislation gives CRIT similar rights to lease water many other Tribes currently enjoy and benefit from.

The Colorado River Indian Tribes Water Resiliency Act of 2021(S.3308) would clear the way for CRIT to lease water that was previously used on the reservation. This authority would enable the Tribe to allocate its water resources to protect natural habitats along the Colorado River and provide a short-term water supply for entities experiencing drought or shortages across the state.

“This legislation comes at a critical time in Arizona as drought conditions worsen.” CRIT Tribal Chairwoman Amelia Flores said. “Thanks to the Tribe’s wise use of resources and conservation, CRIT is able to help Arizona get through this drought, while being fairly compensated for our water. This legislation protects the life of the river, protects Arizona’s fragile groundwater resources, and, for the first time in more than 156 years, allows our people to receive the full benefit from our water rights. The time has come for CRIT to have authority over its resources and we are glad Senators Kelly and Sinema are moving this legislation forward.”

Overall water usage on the Colorado River would not increase because of CRIT water leases. CRIT is able to provide this water by fallowing farmland, changing crop patterns on existing agricultural lands, and improving water delivery systems. CRIT has actively pursued and been awarded several grants to improve water delivery systems for more efficient water use.

The legislation and implementing agreements ensure that CRIT will have ample water to address the needs of its community. CRIT has the first priority decreed water right to divert 719,248 acre-feet per year to serve lands in both Arizona and California.

“Arizona is dealing with the real-time effects of drought as water levels in Lake Mead and Lake Powell continue to decline,” said Senator Mark Kelly. “Our bill will help lessen the impacts of Colorado River drought restrictions in the coming years, while at the same time enabling the Colorado River Indian Tribes full exercise of their water rights.”

“Our commonsense legislation protects and strengthens Arizona’s water security, while boosting economic opportunities for the Colorado River Indian Tribes,” said Senator Sinema.

The legislation was written in collaboration with the Arizona Department of Water Resources, the United States and the Colorado River Indian Tribes. Last year the Arizona Department of Water Resources hosted a series of forums to get public input. Supporters include the Water for Arizona Coalition, the Salt River Project, the Central Arizona Project, the National Audubon Society, the cities of Phoenix, Gilbert, and Peoria as well as the Mohave County Board of Supervisors, the Arizona Municipal Water Users Association, which serves 10 municipalities, and Arizona House Speaker Russell Bowers.

The issue is so important, CRIT voluntarily put water leasing on the CRIT Tribal ballot in January 2019 to give its members the ultimate say. Nearly two-thirds voted in favor of allowing the Tribal Council to pursue the legislation.

About the Colorado River Indian Tribes:

The Colorado River Indian Tribes include four distinct Tribes - the Mohave, Chemehuevi, Hopi, and Navajo. There are currently about 4,572 Tribal members. The CRIT Reservation was created in 1865 by the Federal Government for “Indians of the Colorado River and its tributaries,” originally for the Mohave and Chemehuevi, who had inhabited the area for centuries. People of the Hopi and Navajo Tribes were relocated to the reservation in later years. The reservation stretches along the Colorado River on both the Arizona and California side. It includes approximately 300,000 acres of land, with the river serving as the focal point and lifeblood of the area.