

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 6, 2023

Hon. Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We write to respectfully request that the Department of the Interior (DOI) develop a robust and comprehensive funding plan to support drought mitigation and climate adaptation efforts in the Rio Grande Basin. We ask that DOI work with water users and stakeholders, including local governments, Tribes and Pueblos, traditional use communities, farmers, and ranchers within the basin to develop a plan that builds on existing programs and invests in locally-led efforts. As part of that larger funding plan, we urge you to consider the Rio Grande Basin as your Department works to identify additional basins across the West that can benefit from Inflation Reduction Act funding for mitigation of long-term drought.

The Rio Grande and its tributaries are of national and international significance, providing drinking water for an estimated 12-13 million people in the United States and Mexico. The basin is also critical to agriculture and food production, providing irrigation water for an estimated 1.8 million acres of crop and pasture land. The Rio Grande also supports a growing outdoor recreation economy and a diverse habitat range for fish and wildlife. Amidst aridification and ongoing drought, communities throughout the Rio Grande Basin are grappling with decreasing quantities and predictability of water supplies. Despite a relatively wet water year, the Rio Grande still needs substantial investment in long-term drought adaptation and natural hazard mitigation.

We appreciate DOI's dedication to supporting communities, improving water security, and working to mitigate the effects of climate change throughout the West. In the face of widespread and historic drought, a long-term mitigation strategy is needed to safeguard the water resources of Reclamation states. Robust and coordinated investment in the Rio Grande Basin is an essential part of such a strategy and will provide meaningful benefits to the environment, to water resources, and to communities across Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas.

Communities throughout the Rio Grande Basin are positioned to implement meaningful water conservation and watershed restoration efforts to address these challenges, and significant federal investment is needed to support these efforts. Local and state agency leaders have worked over the course of several years to identify projects that will increase water resilience and benefit water users, ecosystems, and communities, providing a strong basis for taking action to manage prolonged drought. While federal funds through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act are flowing, these investments don't reflect the true scale, need, and urgency to

enhance water security throughout the Rio Grande Basin. Furthermore, our offices continue to hear from many stakeholders that they are struggling to access federal funding to improve aging infrastructure, increase water conservation and efficiency efforts, or scale watershed restoration projects. Issues include a lack of information on available federal funding programs, limited resources and capacity to navigate and pursue federal funds, high federal cost-share requirements, limited funding for project development work, and lengthy permitting and contracting procurement processes.

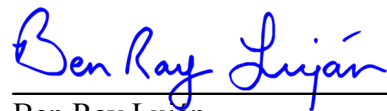
With these challenges and opportunities in mind, we respectfully request further dialogue between DOI, the Bureau of Reclamation, and other critical federal partners to develop a strategic plan to increase the pace and scale of locally-led water security efforts in the Rio Grande Basin. This plan should take full advantage of available drought mitigation funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, as well as resources from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other relevant DOI authorities. Our offices stand ready to support the facilitation of this dialogue and to help ensure that any basin-wide action reflects and builds on locally-led efforts, respects the traditional role of states in administering water resources within their borders, includes significant consultation with Tribes and Pueblos, and adheres to existing interstate and international agreements applicable to the Rio Grande Basin including the Rio Grande Compact.

The Rio Grande is a natural resource of inestimable value that is under severe threat. Ample, coordinated federal investment in the Rio Grande will enhance water security in the region, reduce risks to communities and agriculture, and increase the pace and scale of basin-wide water security efforts. We look forward to continuing to work with DOI to develop a robust federal funding plan in support of locally-led efforts as our communities work towards water security and drought resiliency in the Rio Grande Basin and throughout the West.

Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator