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Aging Infrastructure

Colorado River Water Conservation District Policy Statements:

The Colorado River District supports federal and state appropriations and programs that support and encourage investment in capital maintenance, including extraordinary maintenance, to address and maintain – and upgrade where possible - the full function and benefit of Colorado’s aging water infrastructure. A comprehensive inventory of Colorado’s water-related infrastructure is a requisite first step to responsibly managing and maintaining these historical investments. Streamlining of the permitting process for capital maintenance is just one appropriate mechanism to encourage infrastructure maintenance.

Background & Discussion:

Water supply and delivery infrastructure provides Colorado with essential water supply for agriculture, drinking water, recreational opportunities, power generation and more. This infrastructure is often also an important component of flood control. Many of these systems, including those within the River District, were built 50 to 100 years ago and require increasing resources for maintenance, repair or replacement.

As these systems age, the corresponding increase in the frequency and cost of extraordinary maintenance needs often exceeds the financial capabilities the responsible end-users. Financial assistance programs are essential to address the needs of Colorado’s aging water infrastructure and to ensure the continuance of its many benefits and should be prioritized among public investments.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) in 2013, the average age of the 84,000 dams in the country is 52 years old. The Association of State Dam Safety Officials estimates that it will require an investment of \$21 billion to repair these aging, yet critical, high-hazard dams. ASCE grades the condition of America’s dams D+ or ‘poor’. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation estimates its backlog of “deferred maintenance” at \$3 billion.

A dedicated, comprehensive system of planning and investment will be required to ensure the continued viability and safety of our current water infrastructure, as well as investments to meet future water demands.

Assistance programs should include grant and loan programs to encourage and assist capital maintenance programs and regulatory permitting programs that facilitate and reward infrastructure repairs and rehabilitations.