



**RESOLUTION  
of the  
WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL  
regarding the  
RECLAMATION SAFETY OF DAMS ACT OF 1978**

**Reno, Nevada  
May 24, 2023**

**WHEREAS**, the Bureau of Reclamation’s dams and reservoirs are the primary source of water for numerous regions and communities throughout the West; and

**WHEREAS**, Reclamation’s dams and reservoirs provide essential benefits such as drinking water, irrigation, hydropower, flood control, and recreation, while also supporting wildlife and habitat; and

**WHEREAS**, the safe operation and maintenance of Reclamation’s dams is critical to sustaining these benefits and preventing dam failure, which threatens lives as well as private and public property; and

**WHEREAS**, many state<sup>1</sup> and federal agencies, including Reclamation, follow the 2004 FEMA hazard potential classification system for failures or mis-operation of dams (FEMA Pub. No. 333), defining “high hazard” as probably causing a loss of human life, and “significant hazard” as no probable loss of human life but resulting in substantial economic loss, environmental damage, disruption of lifeline facilities, or other considerable impacts; and

**WHEREAS**, in the FY2024 budget request,<sup>2</sup> Reclamation noted that half of their 489 dams were built between 1900 and 1950, with 90% of their dams built before the adoption of modern design and construction practices, and the agency has identified 361 high and significant hazard dams and recommended modifications to prevent safety or performance issues; and

**WHEREAS**, maintaining and rehabilitating dams and related infrastructure is one of the most serious problems that Reclamation currently faces; and

**WHEREAS**, the Reclamation Safety of Dams Act of 1978 provides Reclamation with authority to preserve and maintain the structural safety of dams under its stewardship; and

**WHEREAS**, in FY2016, the Congress provided an additional \$1.1 billion in budget authority for dam safety (P.L. 114-113, Section 204; 43 U.S.C. 509), giving Reclamation several more years before reaching its spending ceiling; and

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of State Laws and Regulations on Dam Safety (May 2020), Association of State Dam Safety Officials

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usbr.gov/budget/2024/FY-2024-Bureau-of-Reclamation-Budget-Justifications.pdf>

**WHEREAS**, failure to appropriate such sums as are necessary for Reclamation's dam safety activities will increase the chances of dam failures by hindering the agency's ability to carry out critical dam safety rehabilitation and modernization efforts, risking loss of life and public and private property.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Western States Water Council urges the Administration and Congress to work together and determine such sums as may be necessary for Reclamation to effectively carry out its dam safety program in a timely manner.

*(See also Position #442, 3/03/20, #401, 4/14/17; and #361, 4/03/14)*