

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-3102**

June 10, 2021

Camile Touton, Acting Commissioner  
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
1849 C St. N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Commissioner Touton,

We write to you today to express concerns about the future of the Elephant Butte Reservoir and the need for all stakeholders involved to work together to protect this invaluable resource. Elephant Butte is both the hub for outdoor recreation for the state of New Mexico and the lifeblood of the prolific agricultural industry of Southern New Mexico and has been so for decades. However, the prolonged drought the desert southwest has been experiencing puts all of this at risk, as we are unfortunately seeing this year.

As the Bureau of Reclamation knows, Elephant Butte faces an existential crisis this year, with water levels the lowest in recent memory. Currently, Elephant Butte is only at 11% capacity, with projections showing it could reach less than 1% capacity once irrigation season ends and compact requirements with Texas and Mexico are met. This will make marinas inoperable and recreation on the lake nearly impossible, causing great economic hardship to the Elephant Butte and Truth-or-Consequences communities. In addition, with the lake being at such a low-level, agricultural producers in the region will only be given roughly 3 inches of irrigation water this year, which is not enough for just one irrigation cycle. The combination of these two problems highlights that this is not an issue of recreation versus water users, but that these two vital industries both require a healthy and sustainable Elephant Butte.

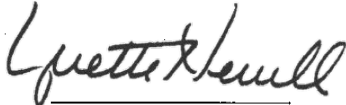
We all must come together to find solutions that can help mitigate the problems at Elephant Butte this year and in years to come. In the weeks ahead we all must work together to find common ground to protect Elephant Butte Lake this year, along with the communities and businesses that depend on it. Over the long term, innovative solutions like the creation of minimum pools and investments in water storage, desalination, removal of invasive species, and preventative river maintenance can all help to ensure that Elephant Butte is healthy and thriving.

Regulatory reforms are also necessary to protect our water supply in Southern New Mexico. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) are incredibly out of date and have handcuffed your agency and local water authorities. In addition, the ESA has been used as a weapon by radical environmental groups to stop forest management,

river maintenance, and the construction of dams across the west, all to the detriment of our water sheds.

We know that some of these solutions will take time and both federal and state funding. All of us are committed to working to secure these actions, as the communities we live in and represent depend on it. We ask that you join us in working in a collaborative way to solve the crisis we face at Elephant Butte and the entire Rio Grande watershed in New Mexico.

Sincerely,



Yvette Herrell  
Member of Congress

Letter Cosigners:

New Mexico State Senator Joshua Sanchez (30<sup>th</sup> District)  
New Mexico State Senator Crystal Diamond (35<sup>th</sup> District)  
New Mexico State Representative Rebecca Dow (38<sup>th</sup> District)  
New Mexico State Representative Gail Armstrong (49<sup>th</sup> District)  
Sierra County Commissioner Jim Paxon (1<sup>st</sup> District)  
Sierra County Commissioner Travis Day (2<sup>nd</sup> District)  
Sierra County Commissioner Hank Hopkins (3<sup>rd</sup> District)  
Catron County Commissioner Anita Hand (1<sup>st</sup> District)  
Truth or Consequences Mayor Sandy Whitehead  
Elephant Butte Mayor Edna Trager  
Earl Conway, President of Sun Country Outdoors and Conservation Director of New Mexico Bass Nation  
Neal Brown, President of Lago Rico

CC:

The Honorable Martin Heinrich, U.S. Senator  
The Honorable Ben Ray Lujan, U.S. Senator  
Lt. General Scott A. Spellman, Chief of Engineers and Commanding General of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers