



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Office of the Secretary

For release December 11, 1990

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**INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN SAYS NEVADA WATER SETTLEMENT
PROVIDES MAJOR FISH AND WILDLIFE BENEFITS**

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan today announced that legislation settling long-standing disputes over apportionment of water from the Truckee and Carson Rivers in Nevada will provide "major benefits" to fish and wildlife resources at Pyramid Lake and the Lahontan Valley.

"For far too long, the only approach to disputes over this water has been litigation," Lujan said. "Now that the parties have been willing to sit down and talk, we have a solution that benefits everyone. We can get on with necessary conservation actions for the threatened and endangered fishes of Pyramid Lake and for the Lahontan Valley wetlands, while providing greater certainty in supplying municipal and agricultural water users."

For nearly a century, conflicting demands for the use of waters from the Truckee and Carson Rivers have resulted in significantly adverse impacts to area fish and wildlife resources. Wetlands in the Lahontan Valley have been reduced by over 60 percent, and many of the remaining areas have been contaminated by concentrations of minerals resulting from low water levels.

In 1968, the cui-ui, a fish found only in Pyramid Lake and an important food and cultural resource of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Indian Tribe, was classified by the Department of the Interior as endangered. The population of the fish had declined due to low water flows that severely reduced access to its spawning habitat and seriously degraded the quality of spawning habitat in the lower Truckee River.

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The last spawning run of Lahontan cutthroat trout into the Truckee River occurred in 1938. By the early 1940's, the Lahontan cutthroat trout population was presumed to be extirpated from Pyramid Lake. Restocking of Lahontan cutthroat trout from various stream populations into the lake started in 1953 and is maintained largely through production of fingerlings at the Lahontan National Fish Hatchery and at Tribal hatcheries. Currently, the Lahontan cutthroat trout is classified as a threatened species.

With passage of the Truckee-Carson-Pyramid Lake Settlement Act, signed November 16, 1990, by President Bush as Public Law 101-618, these and other wildlife resources in the Lahontan Valley will have a more secure future.

Lujan credited extensive negotiations between the Interior Department, the Nevada congressional delegation, Nevada and California state officials, water users, and the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe with breaking the impasse.

The new law authorizes the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire, from willing sellers, sufficient water rights both to sustain 25,000 acres of wetlands in the Lahontan Valley and to promote the conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered fishes in Pyramid Lake. Provisions governing an Operating Agreement for the Newlands Project, operation of Stampede and Prosser Reservoirs, other Newlands Project facilities, and water use at Fallon Naval Air Station could make additional water available to enhance area fish and wildlife resources.

Other provisions contributing further to improved conservation of these resources include transfer of over 77,000 acres of land from the Bureau of Reclamation to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for expansion of the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, along with expedited revision of the recovery plan for the cui-ui, development of a recovery plan for the Lahontan cutthroat trout, and establishment of a Lahontan Valley/Pyramid Lake Fish and Wildlife Fund.

Finally, the law requires the closure of the "TJ" and related drains, which should significantly reduce the amount of mineral contaminants delivered to the Stillwater refuge.