

# **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE COLORADO RIVER BOARD OF CALIFORNIA**

**December 8, 2014**

## **ADMINISTRATION**

### **Minutes of the November 19, 2014 Meeting of the Colorado River Board**

A copy of the draft Board meeting minutes from the meeting held on November 19, 2014 has been included in the Board packet for your review.

### **Adoption of the 2015 Colorado River Board meeting schedule**

The schedule proposed for 2015 continues the standard practice of holding a board meeting on the Wednesday following the second Tuesday of each month. The schedule proposed contemplates meetings in Ontario, California in every month except March (MWD), October (SDCWA), November (IID) and December (Las Vegas). Meetings held in Ontario will continue to begin at 10 am, and the details regarding the meetings at the other locations will be determined in coordination with the hosting agency. Notice of meetings will continue to be issued at least 10 days in advance of the meeting.

## **COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT**

As of December 1, 2014, the water level at Lake Mead was at 1,084 feet with 10.31 million acre-feet (maf) of storage, or 39% of capacity. At Lake Powell, the water level was at 3,602 feet with 11.93 maf of storage, or 49% of capacity. The unregulated inflow into Lake Powell in October was 716,000 acre-feet (140% of average), but the reservoir elevation is expected to decline until spring 2015. The total System active storage as of December 1, 2014 was 29.74 maf, or 50% of capacity, which is within 200 acre-feet of where the system was last year at this time. As of December 1 2014, the Upper Colorado River Basin reservoirs other than Lake Powell ranged from 88% full (Flaming Gorge in Wyoming) to 65% full (Navajo in New Mexico).

NOAA's National Weather Service's monthly precipitation report for October 2014 shows that the majority of the Basin received below-average precipitation, with some improvements coming in November in the Upper Basin. On December 9, 2014, NOAA and NIDIS released a new report documenting the severity of the current drought.

The next update session from the Colorado River Basin Forecast Center is scheduled for December 9, 2014 and participation details can be accessed here: <http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/news/wswebinar2015.html>. As of December 1, 2014, the basin-wide snowpack report is at 95% of average.

The final version of the 2015 Annual Operating Plan has been posted by Reclamation and will be finalized prior to the end of the year. The draft is available here: [http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/rsrvs/ops/aop/AOP15\\_draft.pdf](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/rsrvs/ops/aop/AOP15_draft.pdf). The plan confirms that Reclamation's most probable inflow scenario projects a water year 2015 release from Glen Canyon Dam of 9.0 million acre-feet. In the Lower Basin, the plan confirms that for 2015, Lower Basin water deliveries will be 7.5 million acre-feet, plus or minus any ICS deliveries or storage. Based on Reclamation's December 1, 2014 provisional forecast for calendar-year 2014, it does not appear that there will be any overruns by any Lower Basin contractors, but the final water use accounting will not be completed until March 2015.

On December 3, 2014, Southern Nevada Water Authority provided notice to Reclamation that it would like to direct between 40,000 to 65,000 acre-feet of its anticipated unused apportionment to MWD for storage during 2014. The interstate storage is allowed under the Storage and Interstate Release Agreement in place among the parties. SNWA anticipates that it may have between 60,000 and 80,000 acre-feet of unused apportionment in 2014 and the amount of the unused apportionment that is not stored with MWD would be left in Lake Mead as part of ongoing drought mitigation efforts. The final accounting for Lower Basin water uses in 2014 will be completed as part of Reclamation's annual accounting process as required by the Arizona v. California Decree.

## CALIFORNIA DROUGHT UPDATE

Drought conditions within California have not improved and Governor Brown's January 17, 2014 and April 25, 2014 State of Emergency Proclamations continue to be in effect. The Department of Water Resources has continued to issue bi-weekly Drought Briefs to provide updates on current conditions, key action items and drought response activities.

The November 25 and December 2, 2014 Drought Monitor maps for California both indicate that over 55% of the State continues to be in the "exceptional drought" category, which is the worst level of drought severity. Despite the benefit of recent rain events around the State, drought conditions are anticipated to continue for the foreseeable future. DWR anticipates that it will take precipitation of 150% of average to help California recover from the drought.

On December 1, 2014, the California Department of Water Resources announced an initial allocation of 10% for State Water Project contractors. The increase from 5% last year is in part due to recent storms.

## COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM REPORTS

### Basin States Drought Contingency Planning Efforts

During the November 19, 2014 Colorado River Board meeting, the Board authorized the Executive Director to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding for Pilot Drought Response Actions with the other Lower Basin States, the US and certain municipal water agencies (CAP,

SNWA and MWD) who have committed to use their best efforts to create additional storage volumes in Lake Mead under certain circumstances. The approval process for the MOU is underway, and the other states and agencies anticipate being able to execute the MOU by December 10, 2014.

The Pilot System Water Conservation Program is an initial step. Reclamation is in the process of reviewing the responses it has received to its October 8, 2014, invitation to the major Section 5 contractors in the Lower Basin to submit water conservation proposals. MWD, SNWA, CAP, Denver Water and Reclamation have contributed a total of \$11 million to conduct a pilot project over the next two-years to create system water through the conservation program. \$8.25 million is available to fund conservation actions in the Lower Basin and specific criteria for the program will be developed in connection with evaluation of the proposals that Reclamation has received.

The Upper Basin States have also continued their drought contingency planning efforts through strategies including continued implementation of weather modification programs, planning for revised reservoir operations and planning for demand management actions and are expected to execute a Resolution regarding the Upper Basin Drought Contingency Plan during the December 10, 2014 meeting of the Upper Colorado River Commission.

#### Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study

The Report documenting the progress of Phase 1 of the Basin Study's Next Steps process is expected to be finalized in January of 2015. The Agricultural Conservation, Productivity and Water Transfers report includes an overview of agricultural water use in the Colorado River Basin as well as an analysis of the various water conservation programs and practices used in the Basin with highlights of certain projects, including certain QSA transfers and the lining of the All American Canal. The Environmental and Recreational Flows draft report provides a detailed description of ecological, recreational, and hydropower resources in the Basin and a more specific assessment of four focus reaches, which include the Upper Colorado River between the Gunnison and the Green Rivers, the White River below Taylor Draw Dam in Utah, the Bill Williams River below Alamo Dam in Arizona and the Henry's Fork headwater reach downstream of Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Utah. The M&I report demonstrates that there has been a reduction in overall consumption throughout the basin despite significant population growth and documents examples of successful M&I conservation efforts in several locations throughout the basin. Phase 2 of the process is expected to include several pilot projects, although the process of selecting the projects has not yet been determined.

#### Minute 319 Implementation

The U.S. is still waiting to receive feedback from the Mexican participants regarding the workshop held on October 28, 2014 in Mexicali to present information to the Mexican agencies and water users regarding the Pilot System Conservation Program. Several projects in Mexico may have potential for moving forward, including the lining of an additional portion of the Canal Revolucion, repairs/improvements of Module 18, and making payments related to land that would be out of commission during construction of the pilot project canal lining project that is scheduled to be funded through Minute 319.

The bi-national hydrology workgroup is scheduled to meet on December 17, 2014, to continue to work on developing additional methods of evaluating drought conditions and indicators. The workgroups focusing on bi-national desalination projects and implementation of the pilot projects are scheduled to meet on December 18, 2014.

Members of the environmental flows workgroup attended a workshop in Tucson, Arizona on December 2-3 relating to the modeling that will be utilized to evaluate the effect of the pulse flow and inform the negotiations for the next Minute. An initial monitoring report is expected to be completed by December 10, 2014. Bi-national monitoring efforts are continuing and a formal report will be presented to the Principal Engineers and the Environmental Workgroup in 2016, with a final report on the pulse flow results to be completed by 2018.

#### Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

As a follow up to the Salinity Control Forum and Advisory Committee meeting on October 27-30 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the Chairman (David Robbins of Colorado), and Executive Director met in Salt Lake City on December 3, 2014 with representatives of Reclamation's Upper Basin Regional Office to discuss the status and progress of the ongoing EIS for the Paradox Well replacement and reiterate the importance of assuring that a replacement for the Paradox Well is developed in a timely manner and to ensure that an emergency strategy is in place if the existing well should fail before the EIS process has been completed.

Reclamation has empanelled a Contractor Review Board to analyze the potential for constructing a solar evaporation pond and will also analyze drilling a second injection well and/or the potential commercial market for the brine or salt. The next cooperating agency meeting is scheduled for mid-January 2015. During that meeting, EPA representatives will give an overview of the EPA's Underground Injection Control permitting process.

During the October meeting, the Forum formally adopted the 2014 Triennial Review of the "Water Quality Standards for Salinity Colorado River System", and the California Water Resources Control Board is expected to confirm the standards in the near future. The 2014 Review notes that salinity control program has reduced salt-loading in the Colorado River Basin by approximately 1.3 million tons and describes a Plan of Implementation that would control an additional 67,000 tons of salt per year by 2017.

The Forum will continue to discuss the Lower Basin Fund's potential cost share shortfall and potential legislative amendments will be discussed among Forum members over the next several months with the goals of obtaining a larger cost share from the Upper Basin States (above the current cap of 15%) and including contributions from Arizonan entities to the existing contributions from power users in California and Nevada.

The next meeting of the Salinity Control Forum is scheduled for May 20-21, 2015 in Salt Lake City, Utah. California will be hosting the next workgroup meeting on February 17-19, 2015, which will highlight the impact of higher salinity levels on water recycling projects at the Eastern Municipal Water District.

### Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Work Group and Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan EIS

As reported during the November 19, 2014 Colorado River Board meeting, the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program's Technical Work Group (TWG) met in Phoenix, Arizona, on October 28-29, 2014. The next meeting is scheduled for January 21, 2015, also in Phoenix.

Regarding the Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan EIS, the co-lead agencies (Reclamation and National Park Service) and the Basin States have continued to work to develop a "hybrid" alternative that will be analyzed prior to the release of the first draft of the EIS, which is anticipated in February 2015. A draft Biological Assessment is expected from the Fish and Wildlife Service in the spring of 2015, and a draft Biological Opinion from the USFWS would be completed that summer.

Reclamation and USGS are still analyzing the effects of the High Flow Experimental (HFE) release that began on November 10, 2014 and continued for 96 hours (4 days). Reclamation plans to hold an informational workshop in 2015 to review the results of the three HFEs that have occurred since the HFE Protocol was adopted in May 2012.

### Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

As was reported during the November 19, 2014 Colorado River Board meeting, the LCR MSCP Steering Committee met in Las Vegas, Nevada on October 22, 2014. The 2015 meeting schedule has been included in the Board packet. The next workgroup call is scheduled for February 25, 2015, and the next Steering Committee Meeting is scheduled for April 22, 2015 in Las Vegas.

On December 1-2, 2014, federal legislation authorizing the Hualapai Indian Water Rights/Bill Williams Settlement (S. 2503/H.R. 4924) passed the House and Senate and the legislation has been sent to the President for signature. As was reported during the August, September and October Colorado River Board meetings, the legislation approves a water rights settlement agreement that covers a portion of the rights of the Hualapai Indian Tribe in the Bill Williams River watershed in west-central Arizona, and also approves a lease of certain land and water rights associated with Planet Ranch on the Bill Williams River for the benefit of the Lower Colorado Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP). The settlement provides approximately 5,500 acre-feet of water to the LCR MSCP in exchange for \$8.3 million to be provided by the LCR MSCP. The agreement provides that Freeport will donate Planet Ranch (3,418 acres) to the Arizona Game and Fish Commission and a portion of the ranch lands will be restored to include 550 acres of new LCR MSCP habitat (cottonwood-willow and marsh). US FWS would also credit the LCR MSCP with an additional 396 acres of habitat associated with existing cottonwood-willow gallery forest habitat on the Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge. The LCR MSCP still needs to formally approve the transaction.

Reclamation is planning a tour celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of LCR MSCP implementation for April 7-9, 2015. The tour will start in Yuma, Arizona and conclude in Las Vegas, Nevada. Currently, it is anticipated that Interior Secretary Sally Jewell will participate in the formal dedication of the Laguna Conservation Area on April 7, 2015. As more details and information about the tour becomes available, it will be disseminated to the Board members and Agencies.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NOTICES

### Events/Announcements

On November 21, 2014, New Mexico Governor, Susana Martinez announced that Tom Blaine would be taking over as New Mexico State Engineer effective December 1, 2014. He replaces Scott Verhines, who had served as State Engineer since 2010. Mr. Blaine was previously working at the New Mexico Environment Department. Governor Martinez has not yet named a new Director of the Interstate Stream Commission to replace Estevan Lopez, now the Principal Deputy Commissioner for the Bureau of Reclamation.

On November 25, 2014, Reclamation hosted a workshop on “Recent Weather Modification Efforts to Enhance Winter Precipitation in the Western United States.” The workshop included an overview of the history of weather modification programs in the U.S. and was designed, in part, to help determine the level of participation in the programs by Reclamation in the future. Participants in the existing programs provided their perspectives on how the programs are being run and what the risks and rewards of the programs are. On December 10, 2014, the State of Wyoming’s weather modification program researchers will present the findings of their 9-year study to evaluate the feasibility of expanding the Wyoming weather modification program.

The Upper Colorado River Commission will hold its 269<sup>th</sup> meeting on December 10, 2014 in Las Vegas in conjunction with the Colorado River Water Users Association meeting. Anticipated action items include the adoption of a Resolution authorizing the Commission to administer system water conservation pilot program agreements as the program develops in the Upper Basin and adoption of a Resolution regarding the Upper Basin Drought Contingency Plan. The Commission will also receive updates on Upper Basin and Lower Basin hydrology and reports from the US FWS, USGS, NOAA and the Salinity Control Forum.

The CRWUA conference will take place in Las Vegas on December 10-12, 2014. The projected agenda is posted here: <http://www.cvent.com/events/2014-crwua-annual-conference/agenda-d816b1827a114f0c83fef7b1d1a523a2.aspx>

As a reminder, responses are due in connection with Reclamation’s most recent WaterSMART grant opportunity announcements for Title XVI projects and water conservation and efficiency projects. Title XVI grant proposals are due by December 15, 2014 and water conservation grant proposals are due by January 14, 2015. Details are available on Reclamation’s WaterSMART website at: <http://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/grants.html>

As an additional reminder, comments are due by January 9, 2015 on the Department of the Interior and the State of California's draft Renewable Energy Conservation Plan. The plan covers potential geothermal development at the Salton Sea, and additional solar development that may impact on Colorado River water supplies. A copy of the plan is available at: <http://www.drecp.org>

On December 4, 2014, members of California's delegation introduced the California Emergency Drought Relief Act, (HR 5781) which is scheduled for a House floor vote on December 8, 2014. It is not known whether there will be any action taken in the Senate on the bill. The status of the federal budget beyond December 11, 2014, when the current Continuing Resolution expires, is still unknown.

Tanya M. Trujillo  
Executive Director