

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

**July 16, 2015**

**ADMINISTRATION**

**Minutes of the June 10, 2015 Meeting of the Colorado River Board**

A copy of the draft minutes from the Board meeting held on June 10, 2015 will be distributed to the Board in connection with the meeting scheduled for August 12, 2015 in Ontario, CA.

**COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT**

As of July 13, 2015, the water level at Lake Mead was 1,076 feet with 9.67 million acre-feet of storage, or 37% of capacity. Lake Mead's elevation dropped below 1,075 feet at the end of June, but is expected to continue to gain elevation through the end of the year. At Lake Powell, the water level was at 3,614.3 feet with 13.2 million acre-feet of storage, or 54% of capacity. The total system storage as of July 13, 2015 was 31.40 million acre-feet, or 53% of capacity, which is about 700,000 acre-feet more than this time last year.

As of July 1, 2015, the April-July unregulated inflow forecast for Lake Powell is estimated to be 6.29 million acre-feet, or 88% of average. The forecasted inflow is 31 percentage points higher than the May 15, 2015 inflow projection of 3.75 million acre-feet, or 52% of average. As of July 13, 2015, the Upper Colorado River basin reservoirs, except Lake Powell, were almost all full (99% full at Blue Mesa in Colorado, 94% full at Flaming Gorge in Wyoming, and 87% full at Navajo in New Mexico). After receiving a tremendous amount of precipitation in May, the Upper Basin region continued to receive above average precipitation in June and during the first half of July.

On July 14, 2015, Reclamation held a webinar to discuss the findings from the July 24-Month study. Reclamation reported that the forecasted December 2015 end-of-month Lake Powell elevation is 3,598.5 feet, which is above the 3,575 Upper Elevation Balancing tier/Mid-Elevation release tier. Based on July 2015 modeling, the most probable release amount from Lake Powell for WY-2016 is 9.0 million acre-feet and the minimum probable is 7.48 million acre-feet. Lake Mead's elevation is projected to be 1,082 feet at the end of CY-2015 and 1,078 feet at the end of CY-2016, and there is no chance of a shortage determination in 2016 based on the June 2015 CRSS model runs. Pursuant to the 2007 Coordinated Operations Guidelines, the final determination will be made next month. The June CRSS model run results show that the probability of a shortage in the Lower Basin is at 47% for 2017 and 65% for 2018. The probability for Lake Powell to be in the Upper Elevation Balancing Tier (releasing more than 8.23 maf) is at 49% for 2017 and 54% for 2018. The August 24-Month Study will be published on Monday, August 17. The second consultation meeting for the 2016 Annual Operating Plan (AOP) will be held on July 28 at the McCarran Airport in Las Vegas, Nevada.

## California Drought Update

The National Drought Monitor map indicates that during July, nearly 47% of the State continues to be in the “exceptional drought” category of drought. On July 1, 2015, the State Water Resources Control Board announced that statewide residential water use has declined nearly 29% in May, compared to water use in the same month in 2013. Fire activity has continued to remain well above average, with approximately 420 wildfires currently burning, and over 4,500 fires having occurred since January, over twice the average.

## **COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM REPORTS**

### Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

The Salinity Control Work Group met in Salt Lake City on July 8-10. Highlights from the meeting included a report from Harry Ruzgerian on the economic damages sub-committee’s modeling efforts to more carefully calculate the anticipated damages in the Lower Basin associated in increased salinity levels in the Colorado River. Reclamation is actively updating the existing model and has solicited additional information from water users in all three Lower Basin States. The sub-committee will hold a workshop in Denver, CO, in the near future.

The Work Group discussed the status of the potential cost-share deficit arising out of the Lower Basin Development Fund, and received word that the Bureau of Reclamation intended to honor the Forum’s request to decrease the treasury repayment to conserve more money in the fund again this year, similar to the action that was taken last year.

The Work Group has continued to review a draft report documenting the benefits of the Salinity Control Program to the Upper Basin, which is anticipated to be presented to the Forum this fall. Reclamation is in the process of reviewing requests for funding for new projects that would be implemented over the next three years.

Reclamation reported on the status of the Paradox EIS, which is scheduled to be released for public review in the winter of 2017, with the final ROD issued in the summer of 2018. Consultant Review Boards have finalized draft reports on evaporation pond and replacement well options. Reclamation recommends construction of a pilot evaporation pond to help characterize the evaporation rates and brine disposal options. Reclamation continues to confer with Compass Minerals personnel to understand the process of evaporation, harvest, and disposal of salt, and to look into other commercial salt disposal facilities. Reclamation has not yet budgeted funding for pilot evaporation pond or exploratory well options, would require about \$10 million. A pilot evaporation pond project would occur over 3 years, which would extend the EIS schedule. Reclamation committed to present a fatal flaw economic analysis of the pilot projects before the September Work Group meeting, and hopes to have the final analysis done by end of this year. Reclamation and Fish and Wildlife Service managers will be meeting in August to review the migratory bird treaty implications of a proposed evaporation pond alternative.

The Work Group received a report of the status of various ongoing studies from USGS researchers, including the results of analysis at the Pah Tempe Springs location Utah. The geology in the area is fairly permeable and approximately 100,000 tons of salt per year discharge into the Virgin River from that location. The study evaluated options for capturing the saline spring water and demonstrated the need for a system designed to minimize or eliminate freshwater capture. The

study estimated about 85,000 tons of salt per year can be captured depending on locations and seasons. A draft report of the study results should be available by end of the federal Fiscal Year.

The Work Group is working on increasing public and Congressional awareness of the program through the development of a video that would highlight the benefits of the program throughout the basin. The Work Group acknowledged the request from the Forum to incorporate water conservation assumptions into the analysis of future projects. The Work Group will meet again in September in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, and the next Forum meeting will be held in October in Tucson, Arizona.

#### Status of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

The Technical Work Group of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) met on June 11 and approved recommendations to the AMWG on the WY-2016 hydrograph and the FY-2016 budget and work plan. The Department of the Interior released a draft of the Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (LTEMP EIS) to the cooperating agencies at the end of June. Comments from cooperating agencies are due September 30. It is still anticipated that the public review draft LTEMP EIS will be released in late-fall 2015. The next AMWG meeting will be in Tempe, AZ on August 26-27.

#### Status of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) Steering Committee met via conference call and webinar on June 24<sup>th</sup> to approve the proposed FY-2016 budget and work plan. Additionally, the MSCP finalized its *Final Implementation Report, Fiscal Year 2016 Work Plan and Budget, Fiscal Year 2014 Accomplishment Report*, which is now available on the program's website, [www.lcrmscp.gov](http://www.lcrmscp.gov).

Reclamation briefed the Steering Committee about the recent sighting of a federally-listed threatened northern Mexican gartersnake at the program's Beal Lake Conservation Area. This sighting has been confirmed by the USFWS and Arizona Game and Fish Department and Reclamation has initiated Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation for activities being proposed at the Beal Lake Conservation Area. The committee also discussed the status of the proposed Bill Williams River Planet Ranch acquisition. On June 11, a district court ruled against the Arizona Department of Water Resources's administrative decision approving the transaction and that ruling is now on appeal to the Arizona Supreme Court.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

On July 16, the House of Representatives approved H.R. 2898, the Western Water and American Food Security Act of 2015, which is largely focused on California issues, but it is not clear how the bill will move forward in the Senate. The Administration has indicated it will veto the bill if it were to proceed in its current form.

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