

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

May 13, 2015

ADMINISTRATION

Minutes of the April 13, 2015 Meeting of the Colorado River Board

A copy of the draft Board meeting minutes from the meeting held on April 13, 2015 is included in the Board Packet for your review.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT

As of May 4, 2015, the water level at Lake Mead was at 1,079 feet with 9.92 million acre-feet of storage, or 38% of capacity. Lake Mead has never been at this low level since it was filled and continued declines are expected through the summer. At Lake Powell, the water level was at 3,590 feet with 10.82 million acre-feet of storage, or 44% of capacity. The total system storage as of May 3, 2015 is 28.32 million acre-feet, or 47% of capacity, which is about 233,000 acre-feet more than where the system storage was at this time last year. The April-July runoff forecast for the Upper Basin is estimated to be 42% of average as of May 4, 2015. As of May 3, 2015, the Upper Colorado River basin reservoirs other than Lake Powell ranged from 86% full (Flaming Gorge in Wyoming) to 69% full (Navajo in New Mexico). NOAA's National Weather Service monthly precipitation map for April 2015 shows that the majority of the Colorado River basin received below average precipitation. The last update session from the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center was held on May 7, 2015.

Basin States Technical Committee Meeting, April 28, 2015, Las Vegas, Nevada

The Basin States Technical Committee held its bi-annual meeting in Las Vegas on April 28 to receive updates on Colorado River Basin reservoir operations and hydrology, forecasting, and status reports on a variety of Basin projects and programs. Results from the April Colorado River Simulation System (CRSS) long-term planning and operations model runs indicates that the probability of shortage in the Lower Basin has increased to 33% in 2016 and 74% in 2017. The side inflows from Glen Canyon Dam to Hoover Dam will be critical as they may help avoid a shortage condition. The next CRSS run is scheduled for August 2015 unless conditions warrant an earlier run. Reclamation provided an overview of the Mid-Term Operations Model (MTOM), which is an additional tool to evaluate risk and uncertainty in the Basin. Reclamation plans to host a webinar to provide more details about MTOM on May 12.

The Colorado Basin River Forecast Center provided an update of the WY 2015 hydrologic conditions, trends, and forecasts. The WY 2015 water supply is projected to be well below average due to a combination of dry conditions and warm temperatures throughout the basin. We are on track to have one of the warmest temperatures on record and the snowmelt peak occurred about 1 month earlier than last year. Additional updates reviewed the status of

Reclamation's consumptive use and loss estimates, USGS's water census activities in the Basin, the Pilot System Conservation Program, Drought Contingency Planning efforts, the California drought, and Minute 319 implementation.

California Drought Update

The April 28, 2015, Drought Monitor map for California indicates that 47% of the State continues to be in the "exceptional drought" category, which is the worst level of drought severity. As reported last month, in response to the lowest April 1 snowpack report on record, on April 1, 2015, Governor Brown issued Executive Order B-29-15, which calls for the State Water Resources Control Board to impose restrictions sufficient to achieve a statewide 25% reduction in potable urban water usage through February 28, 2016 and several other elements that were outlined in last month's report. As of May 1, the average snowpack was reported to be 2% of average to date. Included in the Board packet is a copy of Executive Order B-30-15 relating to climate change. The order establishes new interim statewide greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

On May 5, the State Water Board adopted regulations for implementing the April 1 mandatory reductions which establishes reduction tiers for urban water providers of between 8% and 36% based on current per capita water use amounts and targets a goal of reaching a level of 55 gallons per person per day for indoor water use.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM REPORTS

Basin States Drought Contingency Planning Efforts

The Lower Basin States continue efforts to implement the Memorandum of Understanding for Pilot Drought Response Actions entered among the Lower Basin States, the U.S. and certain municipal water agencies (CAP, SNWA and MWD) in December 2014. The Bureau of Reclamation has evaluated the initial round of proposals for funding through the Pilot System Water Conservation Program in the Lower Basin and has requested follow up information regarding certain proposals. A public announcement regarding the awards may occur in May. The Upper Colorado River Commission will be administering the Pilot Program in the Upper Basin.

The Central Arizona Water Conservation District (CAP) submitted requests for approval of its proposed new program of Intentionally Created Surplus to the Colorado River Contractors who are parties to the Forbearance Agreement.

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 released on May 12, 2015. It provides an analysis of opportunities for additional agricultural and urban conservation.

Minute 319 Implementation

A bi-national meeting of the U.S. and Mexican Commissioners to review the progress of Minute 319 will be held on May 14, 2015 in San Diego. Discussion topics will include reports on the implementation activities from 2012 to the present, a review of pending Minute 319 projects and a review of the planning for a prospective future Minute.

Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

The Salinity Forum and Advisory Council meetings are scheduled to meet on May 20-21 in Salt Lake City, Utah, with the Work Group meeting two days prior. On May 19, a tour is planned to visit the Compass Minerals (formerly Great Salt Lake Minerals) facilities to learn their solar evaporation ponds, and the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

As one of the cooperating agencies for the Paradox Alternative EIS process, Board staff participated in the recent cooperating agencies meeting via conference call on April 27, 2015. Reclamation reported that the Paradox Alternative Study/EIS is on schedule, with a draft EIS anticipated for summer/fall of 2016. There have been no issues with the current operation of the well and the 18-hour weekly shutdown seems to be effective in reducing pressure. The Salinity Forum developed a PVU briefing document, which is included in the Board folder.

The draft report from the Evaporation Pond Consultant Review Board (CRB) has been released in advance of the upcoming May Forum meetings for discussion on the findings before the report is reviewed and finalized. The Evaporation Pond CRB was tasked to examine specific questions on the potential use of evaporation pond(s) as a disposal alternative for the PVU brine. Some of the important findings are: 1) the hydrogen sulfide gas in the brine will need to be treated before the brine is disposed; 2) there are alternatives for preventing incidental take of migratory birds such as construction of freshwater pond adjacent to the evaporation ponds; and 3) recommendations from the CRB for testing evaporation rates.

The final report from the Maximum Allowable Surface Injection Pressure (MASIP) CRB was received on March 30, 2015. The MASIP CRB was tasked to help characterize induced seismicity from the injection activities and potentially assist in siting a second injection well. Some of the findings are: 1) the pressure build-up is the result of far-field reservoir pressurization and thus work-over of the existing well will not solve the pressure build-up issue, 2) the methods for calculating the MASIP should be reevaluated to help constrain potential second-well sites, and 3) it is reasonable to assume that the maximum magnitude for induced earthquake will be in the 4.4-5.2 range over the next 5-10 years. Presentations will be made at the upcoming Forum meeting on the findings and recommendations from the MASIP CRB.

On April 27, 2015, under its Basinwide Program, Reclamation released a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) requesting applications for salinity control projects that reduce salinity contributions to the Colorado River system in the Upper Basin. Approximately every three years, Reclamation solicits, ranks, and selects new salinity control projects based on a competitive process open to the public. There is \$30-\$40M worth of projects, averaging at \$56 per ton over the next three years. The FOA remains open until July 17.

During the week of May 4, Executive Director Trujillo accompanied Don Barnett for Congressional and Administration meetings in Washington, DC to provide background information regarding the Salinity Control Forum and to request continued support for the program's administration and funding.

Status of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

The Technical Work Group (TWG) of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program met April 21-22 in Phoenix, Arizona. The group discussed the proposed hydrographs for 2016, which are intended to preserve sediment for a potential high flow experiment (HFE) without unnecessarily impacting hydropower production.

The TWG also discussed the endangered razorback sucker population in Lake Mead and the Lower Grand Canyon, which appears to be one of the only populations in the Lower Basin that is expanding and successfully recruiting. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is currently updating the recovery goals for the fish, and the Lake Mead population will likely be listed as one of the populations critical for the recovery of the species. Researchers also reported to the TWG on the rainbow trout fishery at Lee's Ferry, which has been declining steadily since its peak in 2011. The past winter seems to have further impacted the species, with January and April showing additional population decreases. However, surveys in 2015 seem to indicate that the young fish produced this year are currently abundant and healthy.

Members of the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG), Basin States representatives, and the Department of the Interior have continued discussions over the Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan (LTEMP) EIS. A cooperating agency draft EIS is still expected in May, with a public review draft available in July.

The AMWG will meet via webinar on May 28 to discuss agenda items for their August meeting, and the TWG will hold a webinar on June 11.

Status of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Steering Committee met on April 22 in Las Vegas, NV. The primary focus of the meeting was the Planet Ranch Decision Document, which authorized the lease for the Planet Ranch property on the Bill Williams River. The MSCP also released an Environmental Assessment for the property lease and discussed an update of the native fish augmentation plan.

The MSCP Work Group met in Phoenix, Arizona on May 6-7 to discuss the recently released *Draft Implementation Report, Fiscal Year 2016 Work Plan and Budget, Fiscal Year 2014 Accomplishment Report* and the specifics of the 2015 work tasks, which cover topics such as habitat creation and maintenance, fish rearing and stocking, and species research. The proposed FY16 budget, including the anticipated acquisition of Planet Ranch, is just under \$35 million.

Finally, the northern Mexican gartersnake was recently listed by the USFWS as a threatened species. This marsh and highly aquatic snake species had been recently discovered

along reaches of the Bill Williams River below Alamo Dam, and along other river and stream systems within interior Arizona. At the end of April, a large specimen of the northern Mexican gartersnake was located in the Havasu National Wildlife Refuge, which is the first recorded occurrence of the species along the mainstream in over 100 years. Currently, the northern Mexican gartersnake is not one of the LCR MSCP “covered” species and Program participants will need to review the provisions in the terms of the federal Section 10 incidental take permit, the terms and conditions of the CESA 2081 permit, and the LCR MSCP Implementing Agreement and make a determination on how best to proceed in addressing potential regulatory requirements for this threatened species.

The MSCP Steering Committee will meet via webinar on June 24 to approve the proposed FY-2016 budget and Work Plan.

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