

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

**November 16, 2015**

**ADMINISTRATION**

**Minutes of the October 14, 2015 Meeting of the Colorado River Board**

The draft Minutes from the Board meeting held on October 14, 2015 are included in the Board packet for review and approval.

**COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT**

As of November 9, 2015, the water level at Lake Mead was at 1,079.14 feet with 9.94 million acre-feet of storage, or 38% of capacity. The water level at Lake Powell was at 3,606.4 feet with 12.37 million acre-feet of storage, or 51% of capacity. As of October 4, 2015, the total system storage was at 30.12 million acre-feet, or 51% of capacity, which is 216,000 acre-feet more than this time last year. As of November 8, 2015, the Upper Colorado River Basin reservoirs, other than Lake Powell, ranged from 68% capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir to 90% capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir, both in Wyoming. The Basin has started off on a good foot with respect to precipitation with Reclamation reporting that the observed unregulated inflow into Lake Powell for October was 535,000 acre-feet, or 104% of average.

Lower Basin water use forecasts continue to reflect decreased water uses by irrigation districts in California and Arizona. As of November 6, 2015, deliveries to Mexico are forecast to be 18,428 acre-feet above the 1.5 million acre-feet Treaty obligation, and the amount of water forecasted to be conveyed to Mexico through the Welton-Mohawk bypass drain pursuant to Minute 242 is 146,523 acre-feet. Storage at Brock Reservoir through November 10, 2015 has been 125,690 acre-feet and storage at Senator Wash through November 12, 2015, has been 99,930 acre-feet.

**California Drought Update**

The National Drought Monitor map indicates that as of November 3, 2015, 45% of the State continues to be in the "exceptional drought" category of drought and reservoir levels continue to be well below average. On November 13, Governor Brown issued Executive Order B-36-15 that extends the existing drought proclamations and the April 2015 mandatory water use reductions. The new Executive Order provides that if drought conditions persist through January 2016, the Water Resources Control Board shall extend the existing restrictions until October 31, 2016, but the Order also provides that the Water Board "shall consider modifying its existing restrictions to address uses of potable and non-potable water, as well as to incorporate insights gained from existing restrictions". On a statewide basis, California's municipal water suppliers have again exceeded the 25% conservation mandate for the fourth consecutive month, and the cumulative

statewide savings since June 1 is 28%. The State Water Board will hold a public workshop on December 7 in Sacramento on the potential extension and modification of the emergency conservation regulations that are currently set to expire in February 2016.

On October 30, California Governor Edmund Brown declared a state of emergency for the removal of dead trees impacted by drought and bark beetle infestation, leading to an increased risk of falling trees and wildfires. The U.S. Forest Service recently estimated that more than 22 million trees have already died in California due to current conditions. The emergency proclamation directs the use of state resources for the identification of high hazard zones and the expedited removal of dead and dying trees for public health and safety.

In addition to the drought relief actions that are underway, the State has also been preparing for potentially strong El Nino conditions that could result in above average rainfall and flooding, and has launched a new California Storm Ready website at [storms.ca.gov](http://storms.ca.gov).

## **COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM REPORTS**

### **Basin States Drought Contingency Planning**

The Bureau of Reclamation has continued to implement the Pilot System Conservation Agreement in the Lower Basin and it is anticipated that additional contracts will be finalized within the next few months. In the Upper Basin, the Upper Colorado River Commission is overseeing the program and has approved an initial round of system conservation proposals. Pursuant to congressional authorization approved in connection with last year's Consolidated Appropriations Act, Reclamation will prepare a report summarizing the results of the pilot program by the end of 2018.

Reclamation's By-Pass Flows Work Group met on October 26, 2015 in Yuma, Arizona to continue discussion of potential options to reduce system losses and improve efficiencies in the Yuma area and with special focus on the options for utilizing more of the water that is by-passed through the Welton-Mohawk drainage system and delivered to the Cienega de Santa Clara in Mexico. Operations under consideration include operation of the Yuma Desalting Plant at some level and increasing pumping at Reclamation's Minute 242 wellfield. The ultimate goal of the Work Group process is develop recommendations to reduce the amount of over-deliveries to Mexico and increase the amount of water storage in Lake Mead.

### **Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program**

The Salinity Control Forum and the Advisory Council met on October 28-29 in Tucson, Arizona, with the Work Group meeting two days prior. Reclamation reported that the Paradox Valley Unit has disposed of 100,792 tons of salt over the past 12 months. Reclamation has extended the EIS completion date by 90 days to complete additional testing and review, and has an estimated completion date of the end of 2018.

A subcommittee has been formed to update the Forum's policies relating to NPDES permitting and a draft survey will be prepared in advance of the next Work Group meeting.

The Forum adopted the 2016-2019 funding request amounts to utilize in the annual

testimony to Congress in connection with the federal appropriations process. For Fiscal Year 2016, the requests are \$11.2M for Reclamation's Basinwide Program, \$1.5M for BLM's salinity specific funding from the Soil, Water and Air Program, and \$14.3M for NRCS's EQIP program.

During the Advisory Council meeting, the relevant federal agencies provided a report of their salinity control progress. David Susong of USGS reported that USGS continues to work with the Washington County Water Conservancy District in Utah on assessing the potential for a salinity control project at Pah Tempe Springs, which discharges about 100k tons of salt per year into the Virgin River. He stated that USGS will have a report on the Pah Tempe Springs experiment by the end of this fiscal year. USGS has also been working to update the SPARROW II statistical model. The updated version will help with estimating the total dissolved solids coming off rangelands, which has been difficult to quantify.

The Forum and Advisory Council continue to be concerned about the potential shortfall in cost-share dollars accruing to the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund (LCRBDF). Until a permanent resolution can be identified, Reclamation and the States continue to work on short-term management strategies for the LCRBDF in order to continue implementation of the Salinity Control Program at its optimal level based on the cost-share funding that is available. Some of the strategies include not making the repayment to the Treasury until the first balloon payment is due in 2026 and reducing expenditures for studies, administration and miscellaneous purposes.

The Work Group will next meet on February 17-19, 2016 at Central Arizona Project facility in Phoenix, Arizona. The next Forum and Advisory Council meetings are scheduled for June 8-9, 2016 in Keystone, Colorado.

#### Status of the implementation of Minute 319

The bi-national group that is evaluating options for the potential successor Minute to Minute 319 met most recently on November 11-12 in Mexicali, Mexico. The group continued to develop scopes of work for bi-national workgroups that will help guide the negotiations in areas such as system operations, bi-national conservation projects, salinity and environmental projects. Workgroup meetings are scheduled for November 19-20 in San Diego.

A tour of the Colorado River Delta in Mexico was held on November 5. The purpose of the tour was to provide representatives of the Basin States and other interested stakeholders with the opportunity to see some of the results of the 2014 Pulse Flow and impacts to habitat restoration projects. Sites visited during the tour included Morelos Dam, Miguel Aleman restoration site, the bridge at San Luis Rio Colorado, and the large Laguna Grande restoration site. Representatives of several NGO organizations and academic institutions provided an overview of preliminary monitoring results related to vegetation and species response to the spring 2014 pulse flow event and the continued effect of the periodic application of baseflows to maintain habitat quality. Based upon a preliminary assessment of monitoring data, the scientists believe that the pulse flow has had a positive impact on species and habitats in the Colorado River Delta region in Mexico.

## Status of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

Members of the Technical Work Group (TWG) of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Work Group met in Phoenix, AZ on October 20-21. The group discussed the invasive green sunfish population recently discovered below Glen Canyon Dam. The backwater the sunfish inhabit has been sealed off from the mainstream, and rotenone treatments of the backwater to eradicate the green sunfish are planned for November 4 and 14.

The TWG discussed recommendations by the angling community on the management of the area's trout fishery and created a new ad hoc group, the Trout Ad Hoc Group, to analyze the recommendations. Additionally, a recent study on mercury and selenium levels in the Grand Canyon was presented. Researchers reported that mercury and selenium, both known to impact survival and reproduction of fish, are relatively high in many components of the Colorado River foodweb. However, National Park Service sampling of trout from tributaries, which are often removed and consumptively used by Tribes, shows mercury levels well within the acceptable range and below the national average.

TWG members discussed the Long Term Experimental and Management Plan EIS and the science plan the Grand Canyon Monitoring and Research Center will be creating for the preferred alternative. The science plan will direct monitoring and research that will provide feedback on the plan's experimental treatments. The Department of the Interior is currently working to incorporate changes to the draft EIS in conjunction with its cooperating agencies, and intends to release a public draft in early December.

The TWG will meet on January 26-28 for a combined TWG and Annual Reporting meeting, during which the group will review the past year's research efforts.

On October 19, 2015, Jennifer Gimbel, the Department of the Interior's Chairperson for the Adaptive Management Work Group issued a notification that the Department would not conduct a High Flow Experiment this year based on concerns associated with the green sunfish invasion and the potential negative effect that dispersal of the nonnative sunfish could have on the native species downstream of Glen Canyon Dam.

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

The Steering Committee of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program met on October 28 in Las Vegas, NV. The committee received an update on the FY16 budget, which is \$30.7 million, with an additional \$8 million withdrawal of funds from the Land and Water Fund for the anticipated purchase of the Planet Ranch property. Non-federal parties will contribute roughly \$15 million for FY16. With the passage of congressional budget measures, federal parties anticipate full funding for FY16.

The Program received official concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the completion of conservation measures meant to benefit the flannelmouth sucker and the relict leopard frog, which is facing listing under the Endangered Species Act. With these additions, five LCR MSCP conservation measures have been completed and closed out. Reclamation also received official Section 7 coverage for the recently listed yellow-billed cuckoo, and has entered into formal consultation with the USFWS on the northern Mexican gartersnake, a

threatened species recently found at the LCR MSCP's Beal Lake Conservation Area. BOR and USFWS are working to develop draft conservation measures for the gartersnake if permit-holders decide to add the species to the program as a covered species.

On November 12, 2015, the Arizona Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Arizona Department of Water Resources in connection with the sever and transfer of water rights at the Planet Ranch property. The ruling will allow Reclamation to proceed with the purchase of the property as a LCR MSCP conservation area.

The LCR MSCP will hold its annual Colorado River Aquatic Biologists meeting on January 5-6 and its Colorado River Terrestrial and Riparian meeting January 26-28, both in Laughlin, NV.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

On October 9, 2015, Governor Brown signed legislation authorizing new actions to support restoration activities at the Salton Sea. The actions include restoring up to 12,000 acres of shoreline habitat over the next five years, restoring up to 25,000 acres of additional exposed shoreline starting in 2020, and convening a scientific advisory committee to ensure that the best available science guides the habitat restoration efforts, with the goal of accelerate planning, permitting and construction of "shovel-ready" restoration projects at the Salton Sea that are in either the final planning, environmental review or permitting phase by March, 2016.

On November 5, 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and IID held a "Playa Breaking" ceremony for the Red Hill Bay Restoration Project, which will include 420 acres of wetlands near the Alamo River outlet to the Salton Sea. Jennifer Gimbel represented the U.S. at the event along with local and state representatives. On November 4, 2015, the second meeting of a workgroup associated with the Governor's Salton Sea Task Force met in Coachella to continue discussions regarding potential habitat restoration efforts along the shoreline. Bruce Wilcox, formerly of IID, and now the assistant secretary for Salton Sea policy at the Natural Resources Agency, led the meeting.

No mark-up hearing has yet been publically announced on the pending drought bills, including the California bills, that were heard before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on October 8, 2015. Notwithstanding Mike Connor's direct responses to Arizona Senator Flake's questions about the Department of the Interior's authority to allocate unused apportionment from one Lower Basin State indicating that the current practice has been for Interior to consult with the Lower Basin States prior to any such allocation and that since the adoption of the 2007 Guidelines, no unused apportionment has been moved from one State to another State, Senator Flake still appears intent on moving forward a proposed amendment to preclude the Secretary's authority to allocate unused apportionment from one state to another state. Board staff has continued to assert to the Committee staff, California's delegation members and the other Basin States that support for the requested amendment would be contrary to the practice of collaboration within the Colorado River Basin, would adversely affect California's Colorado River interests, and should be opposed.

The Colorado Basin River Forecast Center held Stakeholder Forums on October 20-21, 2015 in Salt Lake City and provided interesting information regarding the effectiveness of the

forecasting process during a wildly fluctuating year like last year, where during the course of a few months the water supply status increased by approximately 50 percentage points.

The Southern Nevada Water Authority has begun outreach efforts with the other Basin States and Reclamation regarding the potential to develop a museum exhibit to document the history, current uses and potential development status within the Colorado River Basin. The exhibit would “travel” to several locations within the Basin and elsewhere around the country and would be developed with the assistance of a technical advisory committee that would include representatives of the Basin States. The first step for this project would be the development of a Preliminary Interpretive Plan through financial contributions from several sources including the Basin States and Reclamation. The Chicago Field Museum has expressed initial interest in partnering with the Basin States on this project.

Colorado River Board staff member, Angela Rashid, participated in the Upper Colorado River Basin Water Forum on October 28-29 in Grand Junction Colorado and heard detailed presentation on current hydrologic conditions with an emphasis on Upper Basin considerations. On November 17-20, the U.S. Commission on Irrigation and Drainage will hold its annual water management conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Chris Harris will be part of a panel presentation relating to Colorado River issues.

ACWA’s fall conference is scheduled for December 2-5 in Palm Desert, California, and will include a panel discussion on Colorado River issues.

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