

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

**February 8, 2016**

**ADMINISTRATION**

**Minutes of the January 13, 2016 Meeting of the Colorado River Board**

The draft Minutes from the Board meeting held on January 13, 2016 are included in the Board packet for review and approval.

**COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT**

On January 8, 2016, Secretary Jewell issued the Annual Operating Plan for Colorado River System Reservoirs for 2016, which tracks the coordinated operations requirements from the 2007 Interim Guidelines. Nine million acre-feet of water is projected to be released from Lake Powell in 2016, but depending on the actual hydrology that develops, the release could be as low as 8.23 million acre-feet or as high as 11.43 million acre-feet. The AOP confirms that Intentionally Created Surplus will be allowed to be created and released during 2016 in accordance with the 2007 Interim Guidelines. Secretary Jewell's cover letter notes, "inflow to Lake Powell has been below average in 13 of the past 16 water years (2000-2015). This 16 year period is the lowest in over 100 years of record keeping on the Colorado River. Accordingly, all water users in the Colorado River Basin are encouraged to prudently manage the use of available supplies." The 2016 AOP is available on-line at: <http://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/aop/AOP16.pdf>.

As of February 1, 2016, the water level at Lake Mead was at 1,083.68 feet with 10.32 million acre-feet of storage, or 40% of capacity. The water level at Lake Powell was at 3,596.58 feet with 11.43 million acre-feet of storage, or 47% of capacity. As of January 31, 2016, the total system storage was at 29.395 million acre-feet, or 49% of capacity, which was almost the same as this time last year. As of February 1, 2016, the Upper Colorado River Basin reservoirs, other than Lake Powell, ranged from 49% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir to 84% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming, 71% of capacity at Blue Mesa in Colorado and 82% of capacity at Navajo in New Mexico. As of February 1, 2016, the observed unregulated inflow into Lake Powell for January was 86% of average, and the Upper Basin snowpack was 111% of average.

The Bureau of Reclamation has begun tracking the 2016 water use levels for each of the Lower Basin states. The total Lower Basin water use is forecast to be 7.1 million acre-feet. California's total water uses are forecast to be 4.152 million acre-feet, based on an assumption that MWD will create 200,000 acre-feet of ICS and IID will create 25,000 acre-feet of ICS. The uses will be continually monitored as the year progresses. Reclamation is in the process of preparing the water use accounting report for 2015, with the final accounting report expected to be completed by May 15, 2016. A draft of the California-specific use amounts should be available next month.

On February 8, the Bureau of Reclamation presented an overview of the CRSS projections for the system operations over the next 5 years. Reclamation projects a 17-37% chance of a first tier Lower Basin shortage in 2017, with projections of 59%, 60% and 59% in 2018, 2019, and 2020. In accordance with the 2007 Interim Guidelines, that determination would be based on an August projection of the following January's elevation level at Lake Mead. The range of outcomes is based on a variety of assumptions used for determining the amount of inflows into Lake Powell and within the Lower Basin. The information presented was the first update since the August 2015 run which demonstrated an 18% chance of a first tier shortage in 2017.

The Colorado River Basin Forecast Center held a webinar on February 4, 2016, to review the 2016 Water Supply forecast. After evaluating a highly variable precipitation pattern in the Basin during January, the Forecast Center estimates the April-July inflow amounts to be 6.7 million acre-feet, or 94% of average, but cautions that the majority of the snow accumulation season is still ahead. The Forecast Center is still predicting above normal precipitation over most of the Basin due to the strong El Nino conditions that exist. The Forecast Center will continue to hold monthly updates through May to track the status of the snowpack and runoff seasons.

### California Drought Update

The National Drought Monitor map indicates that as of January 26, 2016, 40% of the State continues to be in the "exceptional drought" category of drought and although reservoir levels are improving, they continue to be well below average. On February 2, 2016, the State Water Resources Control Board announced an 18.3% water use reduction amount for December Statewide. On February 3, 2016, the Board extended the mandatory conservation requirements through October, with some modifications to the methodologies used to create individual agencies' reduction amounts.

On January 19, 2016, the California Department of Water Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation issued the 2016 Drought Contingency Plan to outline operations for the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project in 2016.

On January 26, 2016, the Department of Water Resources increased the State Water Project allocation from 10% to 15%.

## **COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM REPORTS**

### Basin States Drought Contingency Planning

Since 2013, the Basin States have met in coordination with the Department of the Interior to address the potential for continued declining elevation levels at Lake Powell and Lake Mead. As a follow up to the December 2014 Memorandum of Understanding among the Lower Basin States and major water users, the Lower Basin States are concentrating on additional tools that can supplement the 2007 Interim Guidelines to enable more water to be saved in Lake Mead in order to decrease the likelihood that Lake Mead will drop below elevation 1,020 and increase flexibility for water users during low reservoir conditions.

## Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

The Salinity Economic Damage Model Subcommittee met on January 25 in Phoenix, Arizona to work with Reclamation on refining the damages model to include additional water use data, population projections, and other information from each of the Lower Basin states. Any new or updated information provided to Reclamation will be considered in the 2017 Triennial Review and can be used in connection with advocating for support for the program.

The Salinity Control Forum Work Group is scheduled to meet on February 17-19 in Phoenix, Arizona. The draft agenda for the meeting is included in the Board packet. The Work Group will also be meeting on April 11-13 in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Forum and Advisory Council are scheduled to meet on June 8-9 in Colorado.

## Status of the implementation of Minute 319

The bi-national negotiating group that is evaluating options for the potential successor to Minute 319 will meet on February 11-12 in Las Vegas, NV. The bi-national workgroups that will help guide the negotiations will continue to meet throughout the next several months.

## Status of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

A public draft of the Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan (LTEMP) EIS was released on January 8. The LTEMP EIS will guide experimental management of the Colorado River below Glen Canyon Dam through flow and non-flow actions for the next 20 years. The document has a 90-day public comment period, ending on April 7. A series of public meetings is planned: webinars will be held on February 16 and March 1, and public meetings are scheduled February 22 in Flagstaff, AZ and February 25 in Tempe, AZ. Information on the public meetings can be found at: <http://ltempis.anl.gov/involve/pubschedule/>.

The Technical Work Group (TWG) of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (GCDAMP) met in Phoenix, Arizona, on January 26-28 for both a TWG meeting and an Annual Science Reporting meeting, at which research results from the past year were discussed. TWG members discussed the potential for a spring high flow experiment (HFE). Under the current HFE Protocol, 2016 is the first year in which a spring HFE could be conducted, but current sediment conditions make the flow release unlikely to occur. The TWG also reviewed the status of treatment for the invasive green sunfish population below Glen Canyon Dam. The sunfish population was concentrated in a backwater, which was successfully treated with rotenone in early November. However, it is possible that low temperatures drove some of the fish out of the area before the backwater could be treated; future surveys will determine whether sunfish successfully established elsewhere. Finally, the TWG discussed a new humpback chub Recovery Plan under development by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has an anticipated public release date of spring 2017.

During the Annual Reporting meeting, stakeholders received updates on the status of fish species such as rainbow trout and humpback chub, as well as the impacts of the most recent high flow experiments (HFEs). Sandbar gains from the November 2014 HFE had all been lost to erosion by October 2015. Sandbar size has slightly increased from 1998-2014, but recent HFEs

have not demonstrated that they can progressively increase sandbar size; most HFE-linked sediment gains are lost in the months between HFEs.

The rainbow trout fishery below Glen Canyon Dam had been in decline since late 2014, but 2015 surveys showed a population increase and the greatest trout growth rate in several years. Brown trout, a high-risk predator which has historically been present in low numbers throughout Glen and Grand Canyons, has increased significantly over the last several years and may be cause for concern. Researchers reported that although the population of humpback chub currently seems stable, the fish have been in poor condition since 2014, causing them to skip spawning in 2015. However, recent surveys have indicated that humpback chub may be increasing in the lower, warmer reaches of the river where they have not traditionally had a strong presence.

The Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) will meet February 24-25 in Tempe, Arizona, and the TWG will meet again April 19-20 in Phoenix, Arizona.

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

Members of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) Work Group met in Las Vegas, NV on January 25. The group discussed the northern Mexican gartersnake, a federally threatened species which is not currently covered in the program. The species was recently discovered at Beal Lake Conservation Area and is known to be present near the newly acquired Planet Ranch property. Discussion over whether and how to include the species in the program is ongoing. The Work Group also received an update on the Hoover Dam power contracts, which have been renegotiated and will be finalized in summer 2016.

The LCR MSCP held its annual Colorado River Terrestrial and Riparian meeting in Laughlin, Nevada, on January 26-28 to discuss the past year's research and monitoring results. Some important highlights from the meeting included the following:

- Southwestern willow flycatcher surveys indicate that the species is now being detected in habitats below Parker Dam (e.g., Palo Verde Ecological Reserve-PVER). Prior to this, the species had only been found in habitats above Parker Dam.
- PVER is now the Yellow-billed cuckoo "hotspot" on the entire Lower Colorado River. Nearly 40 nests were found along the LCR, and 90% of the nests were located at the LCR MSCP PVER restoration site. Additionally, GPS locators were attached to three birds and they were tracked on their annual migrations down to Venezuela and Columbia and back again.
- Riparian bird monitoring that is being conducted on an annual basis by the LCR MSCP is providing data which shows that bird populations, including LCR MSCP covered species, have significantly increased since implementation of the Program began in 2005.
- Mexican researchers provided an excellent overview of marsh bird monitoring occurring along the LCR in Mexico. More than 75% of all Yuma clapper rails in the entire Lower Colorado in the U.S. and Mexico are currently found in the Cienega de Santa Clara (i.e., about 6,000 individual birds).
- Annual bat monitoring has shown a dramatic increase in the number and diversity of species of bats being detected along the LCR, and that many bat species are now foraging and roosting in LCR MSCP created habitats.

- The invasive Tamarisk (Salt Cedar) beetle has not yet moved down south of Hoover Dam. This has been somewhat of a surprise to biologists. LCR MSCP surveys continue to monitor the progress and status of the beetle along the LCR.

The LCR MSCP will hold a Financial Work Group conference call on February 25 and its Steering Committee meeting on April 27 in Las Vegas, NV.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

(a) On February 8, 2016, the Bureau of Reclamation released its spending plan for \$166.2 million provided to Reclamation in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016, enacted in December 2015. Funding available for Lower Colorado River Region activities include: \$11.5 million toward the Lower Basin's drought response actions (eg Yuma Desalting Plant, Minute 242 wellfield), \$5 million for the system conservation pilot program, \$3 million for Salton Sea research, and \$22.6 million for WaterSMART and Title XVI projects.

(b) The President is expected to release the Budget for FY 2016-17 on February 9, 2016. Reclamation's portion of the budget is expected to include funding for the Lower Basin's drought programs and the system conservation pilot program and continued funding for the WaterSMART programs.

(b) The White House Office of Science, Technology and Policy is planning a Water Summit on March 22 in conjunction with World Water Day to highlight innovations in water use efficiency, scientific research, technology development entrepreneurship and the use of science-based tools to inform decision making. The goal of the workshop is to offer water management agencies from around the country the opportunity to describe their ongoing efforts and share ideas about better water management options.

(c) The Public Policy Institute of California issued a report in early February titled "Improving the Federal Response to Western Drought". The report can be found at: <http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=1174>.

(d) The Colorado River Board has been asked to become a cost-share partner with the USGS for stream gaging along the Lower Colorado River in the amount of \$20,290 for the period of October 1, 2015 through October 1, 2016. The funding would supplement the USGS's existing funding for 6 gages along the river pursuant to the USGS's National Streamflow Information Program. A proposed form of agreement will be presented at the March Colorado River Board meeting.

Tanya M. Trujillo  
Executive Director