

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

January 11, 2016

ADMINISTRATION

Minutes of the December 16, 2015 Meeting of the Colorado River Board

The draft Minutes from the Board meeting held on December 16, 2015 are included in the Board packet for review and approval.

Revised Schedule of 2016 Meetings

The February 10, 2016 meeting of the Colorado River Board will be hosted by the Coachella Valley Water District to partner with the Urban Water Institute's Spring Conference, which will be held in Palm Springs on February 10-12, 2016. Information about the conference can be found at: urbanwater.com.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT

As of January 5, 2016, the water level at Lake Mead was at 1,081.26 feet with 10.12 million acre-feet of storage, or 39% of capacity. The water level at Lake Powell was at 3,600.10 feet with 11.76 million acre-feet of storage, or 48% of capacity. As of January 5, 2016, the total system storage was at 29.58 million acre-feet, or 50% of capacity, which was the same as this time last year. As of January 3, 2016, the Upper Colorado River Basin reservoirs, other than Lake Powell, ranged from 56% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir to 86% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming, 75% of capacity at Blue Mesa in Colorado and 82% of capacity at Navajo in New Mexico. The observed unregulated inflow into Lake Powell for December was 81% of average, and the Upper Basin snowpack is currently estimated at 107% of average.

The Lower Basin water use accounting is based on the calendar year, and the Bureau of Reclamation will be compiling the initial draft of the water use accounting report for 2015 over the next several weeks, with the final accounting report expected to be completed by May 15, 2016. Based on the forecast dated January 4, 2016, water use forecasts continue to reflect decreased water uses by irrigation districts in California and Arizona, and all three states are projected to use a total of 7.4 million acre-feet out of a normal 7.5 million acre-feet apportionment. Pursuant to the System Conservation Pilot Program, approximately 17,000 acre-feet of water from Arizona (7,000 from Yuma Mesa and 10,080 from the Tohono O'odham Nation) and approximately 7,500 acre-feet of water from Nevada is scheduled to be left in Lake Mead for 2015 accounting. As of January 4, 2016, deliveries to Mexico in 2015 are forecast to be 14,922 acre-feet above the 1.5 million acre-feet Treaty obligation, and the amount of water conveyed to Mexico through the Welton-Mohawk bypass drain pursuant to Minute 242 is estimated to be 134,652 acre-feet.

The Colorado River Basin Forecast Center held a webinar on January 7, 2016, to review the

2016 Water Supply forecast - <http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/present/2016/wsupJan16.pdf>. Snowpack levels within the basin increased during the last half of December, and although it is still early in the season, the April through July inflow forecast for Lake Powell is at 89% of average. The Forecast Center is planning 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 December 29, 2015, 44% of the State continues to be in the “exceptional drought” category of drought and reservoir levels continue to be well below average. As of January 5, 2016, statewide water use reductions were at 26.3 percent for June through November 2015. The State Water Board is considering whether to make changes to the current water conservation requirements in response to comments received during a December workshop.

On December 18, 2015, the California Department of Water Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation issued a draft 2016 Drought Contingency Plan to help guide coordinated state and federal water operations for the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project through 2016.

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. 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. The Upper Basin States are looking at options for increasing operational flexibility with respect to management of the reservoirs throughout the basin and at additional conservation and efficiency programs. Both Basins continue to contribute to weather modification efforts in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming.

Although the most recent agreement reached among the Lower Basin States and large municipal contractors was the December 2014 Memorandum of Understanding, that agreement included a commitment to try to reach additional water conservation agreements in the Lower Basin. Consistent with the terms of the MOU, during 2015, the Lower Basin States and contractors continued discussions among themselves and with the Bureau of Reclamation regarding opportunities to decrease the likelihood that Lake Mead will drop below elevation 1,020 and increase flexibility for water users during low reservoir conditions.

A key element of the drought contingency planning activities has been the implementation of the Pilot System Conservation Program. The Bureau of Reclamation has continued to implement the program in the Lower Basin which is anticipated to result in 37,000 acre-feet of water generated for the system. In the Upper Basin, the Upper Colorado River Commission is overseeing the program and has approved an initial round of system conservation proposals, with additional proposals under consideration. Reclamation will prepare a report summarizing the results of the pilot program by the end of 2018.

Reclamation’s By-Pass Flows Work Group did not meet in December, 2015 but is

working on a draft report to summarize recommendations regarding 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 from Reclamation's Minute 242 wellfield for delivery to Mexico through the Northern International Boundary delivery point. Both options would require additional funding and time for construction, but would be expected to decrease the amount of water released from Lake Mead to meet the Mexican delivery obligations.

Colorado River Basin Supply and Demand Study

During the January 13 Board meeting, staff will discuss highlights from the Southeast California Regional Basin Study, the Los Angeles Basin Stormwater Conservation Study, the San Diego Basin Study and the Santa Ana Watershed Basin Study. These studies have been completed through Reclamation's Basin Study program and are independent of the Colorado River Basin Supply and Demand Study that has been the usual subject of reporting.

Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

The Board packet includes the summary page for the Salinity Control Program's Federal Accomplishments Report for Fiscal Year 2015. The report highlights the salinity control progress from each of the federal agencies involved with the program. Looking ahead to 2016, the Paradox Valley Unit EIS process remains on schedule for a draft to be issued in the fall of 2016 and a final Record of Decision issued in 2018. The plan is to continue with the EIS process as long as the existing injection well is working. If the existing well fails prior to completion of the EIS, Reclamation can move forward quickly with permitting for a replacement well. USGS and the US Fish and Wildlife Service continue to provide scientific support for the Paradox EIS process.

Reclamation plans to have all of the agreements from its 2015 Funding Opportunity Announcement executed by the end of February 2016 so that pre-construction activities and surveys can begin in the spring. There are about 15 projects expected for a total cost of about \$40M which would be spent over the next 3-4 years.

The 2014 Farm Bill created the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), a 5-year program that is intended to use federal funds to leverage non-federal (private) funds to solve specified issues on a regional or watershed level. In May of last year, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced that \$235 million had been set aside for FY2016 RCPP applications. There were six applications invited to submit full proposals for funding in the Colorado River Basin Critical Conservation areas. Announcements of selected proposals will be made at the start of 2016.

The Work Group has begun working on the 2017 Triennial Review, and the preliminary results will be presented at the fall 2016 Work Group meeting. In mid-April of 2017, the Work Group will present a draft report to the Forum for review.

The Salinity Economic Damage Model Subcommittee continues to work with Reclamation on updating the model used to determine an estimate of damages associated with salinity impacts in order to be able to better communicate the positive impacts of salinity control projects. The Forum Policies Subcommittee has begun reviewing the Forum's water quality policies and any updates

that are developed will be included in the 2017 Triennial Review.

This year's first Salinity Control Forum Work Group meeting is scheduled for February 17-19 at the Central Arizona Project offices in Phoenix, Arizona. 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 January 14-15 in Juarez, Mexico. The bi-national workgroups that will help guide the negotiations will continue to meet throughout the next several months. Members of the Mexican delegation spoke during the Colorado River Water Users Association meetings in Las Vegas on December 18 and a copy of the presentation is available (in Spanish):

<http://www.crwua.org/conferences/2015-annual-conference>.

Status of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

During 2016, Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (GCDAMP) activities will center around the finalization of the Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (LTEMP EIS), which will establish new baseline operating conditions for Glen Canyon Dam, as well as experimental and management actions. A public draft of the LTEMP EIS was released on January 8, 2016 and has a 90 day review period. The draft and helpful background information can be found here: itempeis.anl.gov. An initial public webinar to review the draft is scheduled for February 16, 2016. Publication of a Final EIS, Record of Decision, and Biological Opinion is expected sometime in summer 2016. The first experimental actions governed by this new EIS may take place in late 2016, including a potential fall High Flow Experiment.

During 2016, monitoring and research will continue for resources such as humpback chub, rainbow trout, sediment, water quality, vegetation, and nonnative fish. These activities are directed by the FY15-17 Triennial Budget. It is believed that the recently discovered nonnative green sunfish population below Glen Canyon Dam has been eradicated, but monitoring to detect remaining individuals is expected to continue into 2016.

The Technical Work Group (TWG) will meet on January 26-28 in Phoenix, for a combined TWG and Annual Science Reporting meeting, during which the group will review the past year's research and monitoring efforts. In addition, the Adaptive Management Work Group is scheduled to meet on February 24-25 in Tempe, Arizona.

Status of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) will continue to acquire and restore habitat in 2016. Restoration Development and Monitoring Plans, which guide the construction and planning of new conservation areas, will be developed for Parker Dam Camp, Three Fingers Lake, and Planet Ranch. In addition, restoration work is expected to begin at Mohave Valley Conservation Area near Needles, CA. Work is also ongoing to secure

acreage in California to fulfill the CESA 2081 permit habitat requirements.

Monitoring and research work will continue at existing conservation areas. Fish augmentation is ongoing, guided by the recently released Native Fish Augmentation Plan 2015-2020. The 2015 Final Implementation Report, which will be released in June, is expected to summarize recent and upcoming Program activities.

The LCR MSCP Work Group will meet on January 25 in Las Vegas, followed by the annual Colorado River Terrestrial and Riparian (CRTR) meeting on January 26-28 in Laughlin, Nevada. Finally, the Work Group will meet via teleconference on February 25.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) As a follow-up to the workshop held on March 18, 2015 regarding Salton Sea activities, the State Water Resources Control Board held a Public Workshop on January 5, 2016 to receive updates from the following agencies:

- The California Natural Resources Agency regarding efforts to improve public outreach and local partnerships and implement habitat creation and dust suppression projects;
- The Colorado River Regional Water Quality Control Board regarding efforts to improve water quality in major tributaries to the Salton Sea;
- The California Air Resources Board regarding efforts to address air quality impacts from the Salton Sea; and
- The California Energy Commission regarding consideration of renewable energy opportunities at and around the Salton Sea and the region.

Governor Brown's FY 2016-17 budget included \$80 million in funding for Salton Sea initiatives to support restoration efforts guided by the Salton Sea Task Force established in May 2015 and in accordance with state legislative authority to restore habitat and exposed shoreline. A follow-up meeting of the Natural Resources Agency stakeholder group will be held on January 20, 2016.

(b) On December 16, 2015 the Department of the Interior launched a new, interactive web tool titled: Drought in the Colorado River Basin – Insights Using Open Data - <https://www.doi.gov/water/owdi.cr.drought/en/> which provides an interesting perspective on the multi-year drought underway within the Basin.

(c) Bureau of Reclamation Funding Opportunities:

Reclamation is seeking cost-share funding proposals with non-federal stakeholders within the Lower Colorado River Basin as part of its Water Conservation Field Service Program, whose mission is to improve the efficiency of water use and management. Grants of up to \$100,000 are available, with project applications due January 22, 2016. More information can be found at: <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppId=280231>

Reclamation's WaterSMART program, which provides cost-share funding for water conservation and energy efficiency projects, is currently accepting grant applications for the \$21 million in funds available in FY16. Grant proposals are due January 20, 2016, and more

information can be found at: <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html?keywords=R16-FOA-DO-004>

Reclamation is currently accepting grant applications for water treatment research, laboratory studies, and pilot-scale desalination and water purification projects as part of its Desalination and Water Purification Research Program. The first phase of applications is due by February 8, 2016. <http://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/newsrelease/detail.cfm?RecordID=51727>

Tanya M. Trujillo
Executive Director