

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

November 7, 2016

ADMINISTRATION

Minutes of the October 12, 2016 Meeting of the Colorado River Board

A draft of the Minutes from the Board meeting held on October 12, 2016 has been circulated for review.

Elections of the Vice-Chairman

The Rules and Regulations of the Colorado River Board provide that the Board shall select a Vice-Chairman during the November Board meeting. The Rules and Regulations have not been updated since 1992 and it may be appropriate to review and update them in conjunction with a review and update of the status of the Six Agency Committee and the Colorado River Authority.

Discussion regarding the 2017 Board meeting schedule

A draft schedule of Board meetings for 2017 will be reviewed during the meeting. The Rules and Regulations provide that the Board's regular meetings shall be held on the first Wednesday after the second Tuesday of each month. An attempt has been made to coordinate proposed meeting dates with relevant conferences and to provide opportunities for three "field trips" to the Palo Verde Irrigation District's PVER properties, a coastal region location, and the Yuma area. Adoption of the final Board schedule will occur during the December Board meeting.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT

As of October 31, 2016, the water level at Lake Mead was at 1076.23 feet with 9.70 million acre-feet of storage, or 37% of capacity. The water level at Lake Powell was at 3,609.51 feet with 12.68 million acre-feet of storage, or 52% of capacity. As of October 30, 2016, the total system storage was 29.87 million acre-feet, or 50% of capacity, which is about 315,000 acre-feet less than where system storage was at this time last year. As of October 31, 2016, the Upper Colorado River basin reservoirs, other than Lake Powell, ranged from 66% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir to 85% of capacity at Flaming Gorge in Wyoming, 73% of capacity at Blue Mesa, 73% of capacity at Blue Mesa to 91% of capacity at Morrow Point in Colorado and 77% of capacity at Navajo in New Mexico.

On October 17-18, 2016, the Colorado River Basin Forecast Center held its annual Stakeholder Forum. The annual stakeholder forums are important for assessing stakeholder needs and determining priorities for the CBRFC. During the two-day workshop, the CRBFC gave an overview of the hydrologic modeling they use, discussed their work with various partners in the Basin, quality control & assurance measures and its calibration methods. The CRBFC also presented on how they implement "dust on snow" data and demonstrated tools for comprehensive water resources monitoring and outlooks.

On October 19-20, 2016, CRB staff participated in a workshop on drought and tools to improve water resiliency hosted by the California Department of Water Resources, the National Water Research Institute and the Southern California Water Committee held in Long Beach, CA. During the first day of the workshop, participants heard various presentations about California's drought conditions and response efforts, California's precipitation variability, including the influence of atmospheric rivers, as well as, a panel discussion about managing Southern California's groundwater basins.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM REPORTS

Basin States Drought Contingency Planning

Discussions have continued within each of the Lower Basin States to review some of the concepts developed among the Lower Basin States and Reclamation for a Drought Contingency Plan to encourage more water savings and storage in Lake Mead in order to decrease the likelihood that Lake Mead will drop below elevation 1,020 and to add flexibility and certainty for operations at lower reservoir levels. The new contingency plan would supplement the existing 2007 Interim Guidelines for the Coordinated Operation of Lake Mead and Lake Powell through 2026.

As described in a recent presentation before MWD's Water Planning and Stewardship Committee, each of the Lower Basin States would reduce diversions on an annual basis pursuant to a specific triggers tied to specific elevations in Lake Mead. Implementing agreements will be developed within each of the three States to facilitate the methods of generating the proposed storage and reductions. California's contributions would not be required until Lake Mead hit a January 1 elevation of 1,045, after the initial two tiers of shortages from the 2007 Interim Guidelines were imposed and after significant additional contributions from Arizona and Nevada had been made. During the term of the new agreement, and consistent with the existing terms in the 2007 Interim Guidelines, Lake Mead's elevation levels will continue to be monitored on an annual basis and additional consultations will occur if Lake Mead elevation levels continue to decline after implementation of the proposed drought contingency plan measures. The additional stored water could be recovered by the contributing agencies under specific conditions, or if Lake Mead reaches an elevation level above 1,110. During the term of the new agreement, the States and Reclamation will have clearly established rules regarding the storage and release of Intentionally Created Surplus water below Lake Mead elevation 1,075, eliminating uncertainty that currently exists for those operations.

The consultation process will continue within each of the Lower Basin States over the next several weeks and months, with potential approvals occurring in December or early January. If a new agreement is not finalized before January 20, 2017, the new federal administration and non-federal parties will have to determine how to move forward with their planning efforts. The California parties have continued to recognize that ongoing issues relating to operations in the Bay-Delta and planning and restoration efforts at the Salton Sea continue in parallel along with the Colorado River drought contingency planning efforts.

Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

The Salinity Control Forum and Advisory Council met on October 26-27 in Moab, Utah, preceded by a Work Group meeting on October 24. On October 25, Reclamation hosted a tour of the Paradox Valley Unit (PVU) to commemorate the 20th anniversary of operations, during which time it has prevented approximately 2.2 million tons of salt from reaching the Colorado River. Reclamation updated the Forum on the status of the current PVU operations and alternatives studies being evaluated in the EIS process. The PVU operations continue to dispose of approximately 100,000 tons of salt annually.

The Paradox Valley tour included a visit to the existing shallow collection wells and the deep injection well site, as well as potential locations for a second injection well, and potential evaporation pond sites. The preferred location for a replacement injection well would likely be near the existing deep injection well site where there are existing facilities, infrastructure, and power supplies. Four studies were recently conducted associated with the construction of the evaporation pond alternative and three potential locations have been identified for further suitability analysis. The third alternative under consideration is a commercial brine crystallization and disposal alternative. Reclamation expects to award contracts in February to gauge the feasibility of the proposed crystallization technology. The draft PVU Alternatives EIS is expected in November 2018 with a final Record of Decision expected by September 2019. Reclamation has stated it has sufficient budget and staffing necessary to meet the projected schedule and has committed to include funding in subsequent years for the planning and design of the chosen alternative.

As one of its routine annual actions, the Forum made recommendations regarding the funding levels for the ongoing implementation elements of the program. The Forum recommended \$8.16 million for Reclamation's Basinwide Program, \$1.5 million for salinity-specific funding for the BLM's Soil, Water, and Air Program, and \$14.3 million through NRCS's EQIP Program for FY 2017. These programs support ongoing salinity control projects that currently have measures in place to control approximately 1.3 million tons of salt per year. The level of federal funding for the program activities determines the amount of non-federal cost-share that is required on an annual basis. The cost-share formulas are set by statute and cannot be modified without Congressional action. The statute that authorized the Salinity Control Program established the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund, which contains funding that is used for several specific Lower Basin purposes, including the Salinity Control Program, and requires an 85% contribution from Lower Basin power contractors and a 15% contribution from Upper Basin power revenues. As a result of an inflexible cost-sharing formula and the fact that lower reservoir elevations at Lake Mead have resulted in lower power revenues and thus lower potential cost-sharing contributions from the Lower Basin power contractors, there is a chance that the pool of funding available to meet the potential non-federal cost-share contributions will not be large enough to match the anticipated federal appropriation levels for the program. The Forum and Advisory Council and Reclamation continue to work to address the long-term stability of the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund and the cost-sharing requirements for the Salinity Control Program, but as of yet, there is no consensus on an approach for how to add more flexibility to the cost-share formula. In the meantime, the Forum and Advisory Council have urged Reclamation to be as judicious as possible with the current spending out of the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund in order to retain as much funding flexibility as possible to continue the program's goals.

The next Forum and Advisory Committee meetings will be held during early June 2017.

Status of the implementation of Minute 319 and negotiation of Minute 32x

The bi-national negotiating group that is evaluating options for the potential successor to Minute 319 will meet on November 7-9 in San Diego to continue discussion of potential items to include in the next Minute. Mexico's participation in drought contingency planning efforts to increase and protect Lake Mead's elevation levels has continued to be a topic of the bi-national discussions. Elements under discussion also include whether to extend or expand some of the current provisions of Minute 319 through 2026 so that the new Minute would coincide with the timeline of the 2007 Interim Guidelines. The new Minute will build off elements of Minute 319, which included an agreement regarding operation levels at low and high reservoir levels, funding for conservation projects to create water savings for use in the US, Mexico and for environmental flows in the Mexican Delta, and an environmental component that includes water, habitat restoration and monitoring. No major modifications are anticipated to the Minute 319 framework, in addition to the uncertainty about the level of drought planning contributions Mexico may be willing to agree to, uncertainty also exists regarding the details of the specific water conservation projects that will be included in the next Minute. Development of the key domestic implementation agreements will start as soon as the basic elements of the new Minute have come together.

Status of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program and Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan

The Technical Work Group (TWG) of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program met in Phoenix, Arizona on October 18-19. The group approved the guidelines needed to develop its next triennial budget and work plan. Researchers described the science plan for the Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan (LTEMP) EIS, which includes a commitment to provide regular written reports on the outcome of experimental actions. The group also discussed the way in which the TWG and Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) process could potentially change under the new LTEMP EIS. The LTEMP Final EIS was released October 7, and a Record of Decision (ROD) is expected to be finalized in December. A Biological Opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to be available to the public in late November. The seven Colorado River Basin States are collaborating on a joint letter confirming their support for the preferred alternative, to be submitted by November 14.

As has been summarized in prior updates for the Board, the LTEMP will guide Glen Canyon Dam operations for the next twenty years and includes experimental activities meant to benefit downstream resources such as endangered fish, beaches used by rafters, and historic cultural sites, while maintaining water supply requirements, hydropower production and otherwise complying with the Law of the River. The preferred alternative includes a decision-making framework to include stakeholders in the process of determining which scientific experimental actions are carried out in any given year. The Final LTEMP EIS can be found at <http://ltempis.anl.gov/documents/final-eis/>.

Stakeholders have met several times over the past few months to evaluate the possibility of conducting a high flow experiment (HFE) in the Grand Canyon to mobilize sediment and combat the erosion of beaches. The main concern had been the potential of a HFE to disperse a newly established population of non-native green sunfish located below Glen Canyon Dam. The green sunfish are a concern because they multiply very quickly and will potentially displace (and consume) the endangered species the program has been trying to benefit for decades. A Glen

Canyon HFE Technical Team recommended that a HFE go forward if: 1) the green sunfish population is effectively addressed, and 2) the Department of the Interior commits to prioritizing the development and implementation of non-native species monitoring and mitigation within the next year. The population of green sunfish in question was treated with ammonia on October 20, and subsequent surveys showed that the population has been successfully eradicated. Moving forward with the HFE was therefore approved and the decision was confirmed in a memorandum from the chair of the Glen Canyon HFE Leadership Team to the Director of the Upper Colorado Region of the Bureau of Reclamation, which is included in the Board packet. The HFE is scheduled to start on November 7 and conclude on November 12, with a 96 hour maximum release of 36,000 cfs. DOI's press announcement is here: <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/high-flow-experiment-underway-glen-canyon-dam-simulates-natural-flooding-through-grand>

A combined TWG and Annual Reporting meeting, summarizing the previous year's research efforts, is scheduled for January 24-26, 2017 and CRB staff will report to the Board regarding the outcomes of those meetings.

Status of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) held a Steering Committee meeting October 26 in Las Vegas, Nevada. The group approved the addition of the recently listed northern Mexican gartersnake to the program as a covered species and is seeking Endangered Species Act protection for the entire program area, from Lake Mead to the Southerly International Boundary with Mexico. The LCR MSCP will initiate consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the regulatory requirements of the decision.

The LCR MSCP will hold its annual Colorado River Aquatic Biologists meeting January 4-5, 2017, and its Colorado River Terrestrial and Riparian meeting January 24-27, 2017, both in Laughlin, Nevada. These meetings provide researchers an opportunity to share their latest monitoring and research information.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) On November 15, 2016, the State Water Resources Control Board is planning to hold a Workshop Regarding the Status of the Salton Sea Management Program. More information regarding the Salton Sea Management Program can be found at: <http://resources.ca.gov/salton-sea/>.

(b) Funding opportunity announcements for WaterSMART Grants are expected to be published in November 2016, including the Title XVI Grant announcement that is included in the packet, and the funding opportunity announcement for the Phase II of the Cooperative Watershed Management Program is expected to be published in January 2017.

(c) The Colorado River Water Users Association meeting will be held on December 14-16, 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada. CRB staff is assisting with the development of the program and preparation of a video and slide show that will be presented during the program. If any agencies would like to contribute material, please contact Angela Rashid at arashid@crb.ca.gov.

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