

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

**January 9, 2017**

**ADMINISTRATION**

**Minutes of the December 14, 2016 Meeting of the Colorado River Board**

A draft of the Minutes from the Board meeting held on December 14, 2016 has been circulated for review.

**Confirmation of the 2017 Colorado River Board meeting schedule**

On December 14, the Board approved the schedule of meetings for 2017. The schedule complements relevant conferences, such as the Urban Water Institute in February, ACWA in May, and CRWUA in December, and provides opportunities for three “field trips” to the Palo Verde Irrigation District’s PVER/MSCP properties, a coastal region location during the summer, and the Yuma area in the fall.

**COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT**

As of December 27, 2016, the water level at Lake Mead was at 1,079.66 feet with 9.98 million acre-feet of storage, or 38% of capacity. The water level at Lake Powell was as 3,601.44 feet with 11.9 million acre-feet of storage, or 49% of capacity. As of December 26, 2016, the total system storage was at 29.45 million acre-feet, which is 49% of capacity, and is 240,000 acre-feet lower than where the system storage was at this time last year. As of December 26, 2016, the Upper Colorado River basin reservoirs other than Lake Powell ranged from 60% of capacity at Fontenelle and 84% of capacity at Flaming Gorge in Wyoming, 93% of capacity at Morrow Point, 72% of capacity at Blue Mesa in Colorado and 77% of capacity at Navajo, in New Mexico. As of December 27, 2016, the Water Year 2017 precipitation was 111% on average throughout the Basin and the Upper Basin snowpack was 126% of normal.

The Colorado Basin River Forecast Center held a webinar on January 9 to review the water supply conditions and forecast. After a dry and warm start to Water Year-2017, the Colorado River basin received significant precipitation in December that continues to carry forward into the new year. Precipitation in December was above average throughout the basin, with some areas receiving more than 200% of average. Snowpack levels have increased since December and, although it is still early in the winter season, the April through July streamflow volume forecast for Lake Powell is at 91% of average. The Forecast Center is planning to provide monthly updates through May to track the status of snowpack conditions and runoff.

The Forecast Center's website has information about registering to join the briefings and general conditions throughout the Basin at: <http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov>.

On January 4, 2017, the Climate Science Symposium Planning Committee met by phone to discuss research priorities for the potential symposium. The Planning Committee suggested organizing the symposium around how climate changes may impact short and long-term water management issues with goals of highlighting the accuracy of models used for streamflow predictions and anticipated run-off volumes, as well as, how to best incorporate climate change data into long-term management plans. The Planning Committee created sub-groups to further refine the short and long-term research topics and to identify potential speakers. The proposed symposium would be held in the spring.

On December 14, 2016, the Secretary of the Interior approved the 2017 Annual Operating Plan for Colorado River System Reservoirs. The final AOP can be found at: <https://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/rsrvs/ops/aop/AOP17.pdf>

## **COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM REPORTS**

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

Discussions have continued within each of the Lower Basin States to review 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.

Details regarding the Drought Contingency Plan's initial concepts have been reviewed during prior meetings and have not changed over the past several months. Intra-state implementation agreements are still under development within each of the three Lower Basin States. The California parties have continued to explain 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, including during presentations made at the CRWUA conference in December.

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

A draft of Minute 32x has been developed using input from binational workgroups on Hydrology, Salinity, Flow Variability, Environmental Flows, Binational Projects, and the All-American Canal Turnout, but the necessary domestic implementing agreements are still under development. Pursuant to a statutory provision in Arizona, the Arizona legislature must take action to authorize the Director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources to execute the domestic implementation agreements that would support Minute 32x, and that step must also still be completed.

The existing Minute 319, which runs through the end of 2017, contains the basic elements that have been incorporated into the planning for the new Minute 32x, which also includes the addition of a binational drought contingency plan. The existing basic elements are: (1) provisions that address operational issues such as shortages and surplus flows, salinity calculations and delivery flow variability on a day by day basis; (2) the opportunity for US investments in conservation projects to generate water savings in Mexico; and (3) a Mexican environmental flows program. It is anticipated that efforts will continue to develop Minute 32x after the new federal administration officials take office.

#### Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

Reclamation continues to make progress on evaluating studies for the proposed alternatives in the Paradox Valley Unit Alternatives Study / EIS. The alternatives that are being evaluated include a replacement well, evaporation ponds, and commercial disposal through a brine crystallization process. It is anticipated that additional studies will be completed in the coming months and that a cooperating agency meeting will be scheduled in spring 2017. The Work Group will meet on February 7-9 in San Diego, and anticipated topics of discussion include the 2017 Triennial Review, a review of potential additional salinity control project areas and potential additional scientific research projects.

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

The Record of Decision for the Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (LTEMP EIS) was completed and signed by the Secretary of Interior on December 15, 2016, and the LTEMP activities will be implemented incrementally, beginning this water year. The Department of Interior is working to finalize a Science Plan by mid-January, which details the expected monitoring that will accompany the actions in the LTEMP EIS. The final LTEMP documents and the ROD (including the Biological Opinion) can be found here: <http://ltempis.anl.gov/documents/>.

The Technical Work Group will meet January 24-26, 2017 in conjunction with the Annual Reporting meeting, which will summarize the previous year's research and the status of relevant resources. The group will also be initiating discussions on the FY 18-20 Triennial Budget and Work Plan, which will be the major task of the program throughout 2017.

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

The LCR MSCP will hold its annual Colorado River Terrestrial and Riparian meeting on January 24-27 in Laughlin, Nevada. This meeting will provide researchers with an opportunity to share their latest monitoring and research information with stakeholders.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Ryan Zinke, a current member of the US House of Representatives from Montana, has been nominated to be incoming the Secretary of the Interior. Although a confirmation hearing has not yet been announced by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, it is expected to be held in the near future. As of the date of this report, no nominees have been named for other relevant positions within the Department of the Interior such as the Commissioner of Reclamation or the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science.

(b) On December 15, 2016, the Department of the Interior released its 2010-2016 WaterSMART Progress Report, which estimates that projects completed over that period will have saved 1.14 million acre-feet of water per year. The report includes information on the WaterSMART Basin Study Program, the WaterSMART and Title XVI grants, USGS Water Availability and Use Program, and several other efforts. The report can be found at: <https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/docs/2016/2016watersmartprogressreport.pdf>. Funding opportunities are available for water and energy efficiency projects and small-scale efficiency projects, with project proposals due on January 18, 2017: <https://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/newsrelease/detail.cfm?RecordID=57320>. Funding is also available for drought contingency planning and drought resiliency projects, with project proposals due February 14, 2017: <https://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/newsrelease/detail.cfm?RecordID=57256>

(c) The Colorado River Water Users Association meeting was held on December 14-16, 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Many of the presentations are available for viewing on CRWUA's website at: <http://www.crwua.org/conferences/2016-annual-conference>. The CRWUA video is located here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22-YnOPVI6A>, and the opening panel that features California and Lower Basin members can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWGU5DcgXbQ&t=387s>.

(d) Using funding from several sources throughout the Basin, including the Six Agency Committee, the Chicago Field Museum staff have prepared an overview of a draft Interpretative Plan that has been developed for a potential Colorado River traveling exhibit. The draft plan identifies the objectives of the exhibit to prepare an educational overview of Colorado River Basin history and issues, describes some ideas for the exhibition experience, and includes a proposed budget and project timeline. Preparation of the final exhibit is expected to take approximately 3 years and the proposed budget for the project is approximately \$8 million. A fundraising phase for the exhibit development will be one of the next steps addressed if the project moves forward.

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