



## MONTHLY REPORT TO THE COLORADO RIVER BOARD OF CALIFORNIA

May 10, 2023

### **ADMINISTRATION**

#### Fiscal-Year 2023/2024 Budget for the Colorado River Board of California

The State budget submitted by Governor Gavin Newsom in January 2022 and through the May revised budget process reflects a proposed budget for the Colorado River Board of California (Board) in Fiscal-Year 2023/2024 (FY-23/24) of \$2,615,000. At its June 15, 2023, Board meeting, the Board will be asked to approve and adopt its budget for FY-23/24.

### **COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT**

As of May 8<sup>th</sup>, the surface water elevation of Lake Powell was 3,530.67 feet with nearly 5.88 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 25% of capacity. The surface water elevation of Lake Mead was 1,050.55 feet with 7.72 MAF of storage, or 30% of capacity. As of May 7<sup>th</sup>, the total System storage was 20.41 MAF, or 35% of capacity, which is about 0.09 MAF more than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of May 3<sup>rd</sup>, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 40% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 71% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 94% of capacity at Morrow Point and 46% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 70% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of May 4<sup>th</sup>, the April observed inflow into Lake Powell was 1.40 MAF (155% of normal) and the May forecasted inflow is 4.0 MAF (193% of normal). The forecasted unregulated inflow into Lake Powell for Water Year (WY) 2023 is 14.17 MAF (148% of normal). The April through July 2023 forecasted unregulated inflow into Lake Powell is 11.0 MAF (172% of normal).

#### Colorado Basin River Forecast Center Webinar

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) held its last webinar to review the current and forecasted water supply conditions for this season. The CBRFC reviewed weather

conditions in April. Snowmelt began in April at lower elevations and streamflow runoff has exceeded 200% of average in several areas of the Upper and Lower Colorado River Basin. May 1<sup>st</sup> snowpack conditions are slightly above median to near record throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin. There has been minimal snowmelt in high elevation regions. Overall, the temperatures in the northern Colorado River Basin were below average for this time of year. In the southern Colorado River Basin, temperatures were normal to above normal for this time of year, and the region is experiencing snowmelt conditions.

Water Year-2023 precipitation conditions were average to above average throughout most of the Colorado River Basin, with the exception of portions of Colorado River Headwaters and extreme southeastern Arizona.

May 1<sup>st</sup> water supply forecasts for April to July runoff volumes for the Upper Colorado River Basin ranged from 80% to 270% of normal and 172% of normal for Lake Powell. The CBRFC stated that there are elevated flows across most of the Colorado River Basin, with peak flows reaching flood stage in several areas of the Upper Colorado River Basin. Finally, cooler temperatures and wet conditions are expected through the first two weeks of May.

## **COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES**

### Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program Implementation

#### *Salinity Control Forum Work Group Meeting*

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum Work Group met in Glenwood Springs, Colorado April 25-27. The focus of the meeting was to continue to work on the draft 2023 Triennial Review of water quality standards for salinity in the Colorado River System. The Federal Water Pollution Control Act requires that at least once every three years the Basin States review water quality standards relating to the salinity of the Colorado River. The Work Group also received updates from federal agencies funding program implementation or conducting research on salinity control activities. During the meeting, an update was provided on the status of the Paradox Valley Unit (PVU) salinity control project.

#### *Paradox Valley Unit Salinity Control Project*

At the Work Group meeting, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) provided an update regarding its intention to solicit ideas from the private sector on a long-term replacement of the existing PVU salinity control project. The existing PVU brine injection well is operating at 65%

capacity with approximately 65,000 tons of salt control per year. The existing project is expected to have approximately 5 years of remaining operation due to an increasing risk of seismic activity associated with brine injection in the deep underground formation. Reclamation expects to release a Request for Information (RFI) soon that would allow the private sector to propose new solutions to salt control in Paradox Valley. Reclamation is seeking solutions from any entity interested in contracting with the government to manage and dispose of concentrated brine collected by the existing Paradox Valley Unit extraction wells. In parallel to the RFI, Reclamation will release a Statement of Objectives describing the key objectives for salinity control in Paradox Valley. Reclamation would use the responses received to release a Request for Proposals at a later time.

### Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

The Technical Work Group (TWG) for the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (GCDAMP) met in Phoenix, AZ on April 12th – 13th.

With the goal of increasing opportunities for future High Flow Experiments (HFEs) to better manage sediment resources, and in response to direction from the GCDAMP Adaptive Management Workgroup (AMWG), the TWG is considering options for re-evaluating the sediment accounting window in the Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan (LTEMP). During the meeting, the TWG accepted an outline for this process to be presented to the AMWG for its consideration.

The TWG received a report on the multi-agency rapid-response activities to address detections of smallmouth bass below Glen Canyon Dam carried out from September through mid-December 2022. The effort resulted in the capture of 345 smallmouth bass. Smallmouth bass captured were almost entirely young-of-the-year. Two adult smallmouth bass were captured. Stomach contents analyzed for some of the captured fish showed young-of-the-year fish frequently consuming invertebrate species common to the area below the dam as well as some evidence of piscivory, consuming other fish. Piscivory by adult smallmouth bass remains a concern for the endangered humpback chub population if smallmouth bass migrate down river.

The TWG received a report on the Glen Canyon Dam/Smallmouth Bass Flow Options Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA) released by Reclamation in February. Reclamation received more than 7,000 comments on the Draft EA. Reclamation has determined that a Finding of No Significant Impact is not sufficient for the proposed action and will begin working on an Environmental Impact Statement to potentially facilitate smallmouth bass flows in 2024.

Reclamation reported on the ongoing process to select and install a fish exclusion device above Glen Canyon Dam. The subject matter expert panel convened by Reclamation will be making a site visit to Glen Canyon Dam on April 26th. Reclamation is tentatively targeting 2024 for installation.

The Secretary's Designee to the AMWG released a decision on April 14 authorizing a spring HFE at Glen Canyon Dam. The decision was based on identification of high resource benefits, including rebuilding of beaches in Grand Canyon, and that no unacceptable impacts to other resources evaluated through the LTEMP were identified. This HFE did not meet the explicit LTEMP triggers for an HFE. Due to the current unique hydrologic and sediment conditions, the proposed HFE was analyzed under a Supplemental Information Report (SIR). The HFE was carried out for 72 hours beginning on April 24th with a maximum release of 39,500 cubic feet per second.

Finally, the AMWG is scheduled to hold a meeting on May 17 and the TWG is scheduled to hold a meeting on June 14th – 15th, 2023.

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

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) held a hybrid Steering Committee meeting on April 26th.

The Steering Committee elected Mr. Seth Shanahan of the Southern Nevada Water Authority as Chair and Ms. Vineetha Kartha of the Central Arizona Water Conservation District as Vice Chair.

The focus of the meeting was budget, fisheries, conservation area, and adaptive management accomplishments in FY-2022. These accomplishments are detailed in the Draft Implementation Report, Fiscal Year 2024 Work Plan and Budget, Fiscal Year 2022 Accomplishment Report, available at: <https://lcrmscp.gov/publications/50767>.

The Steering Committee shared "Draft Procedures for Assignment or Transfer to Add and Remove Members of a State Participant Group (Permittee) of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program." This document is being prepared in response to notification from the Southern California Public Power Authority of their intention to withdraw from the LCR MSCP and have the agencies they represent individually join the LCR MSCP.

The next Work Group meeting of the LCR MSCP is scheduled for May 10th-11th at the San Diego County Water Authority. The next Steering Committee meeting will be held virtually on June 28th.

## Minute No. 323 Status Updates

The Minute No. 323 Oversight Group held a meeting in San Diego on April 27<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of the meeting was to receive status reports from several of the Minute No. 323 workgroups, including Projects, Desalination, All-American Canal Turnout, and Environmental workgroups. As there has been very little workgroup activity recently, workgroup co-chairs indicated that they were in the process of scheduling meetings over the next month or two. The Mexican delegation did report that it was interested in shifting desalination feasibility evaluation efforts from the Sonoran Gulf of California coast over to the Rosarito region on the Pacific coast in Baja California. Mexico is very interested in developing additional water supply reliability for urban sector water users in Tijuana, Ensenada, and Rosarito. In line with this need for water supply reliability, Mexico is also very interested in exploring the feasibility of developing a small desalination plant on the New River in the Mexicali Valley and investigating the feasibility of the proposed All-American Turnout project with the U.S. and Imperial Irrigation District.

Additionally, the U.S. and Mexican Sections of the International Boundary and Water Commission reported that they are working on developing a new Minute that could address new water conservation activities in Mexico that could result in the storage of additional conserved water supplies in Lake Mead. Mexico indicated that the water conservation measures being contemplated would be “proportional and in parity with additional reductions in water uses by users in the United States.” The two sections of IBWC are working to complete this new Minute by July 2023.

The Minute No. 323 Environmental Work Group held an Adaptive Management Workshop in hybrid attendance format on May 3rd-4th. The workshop included progress updates and lessons learned regarding water deliveries, management, and restoration activities. Restoration work is continuing and monitoring is providing useful data for comparing vegetation, ornithological, and other aspects of the restoration sites and control sites. The invasive species, Giant salvinia, *Salvinia molesta*, has been identified in some of the areas and can disrupt water flow in addition to causing environmental impairments. The workgroup is interested in obtaining additional outside expertise in identifying potentially effective options and mechanisms to control Giant salvinia.

## GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

### Basin States Activities & Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Near-Term Colorado River Operations

With the release of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for near-term Colorado River operations in April 2023, the three Lower Basin States have been diligently working to develop a package of potential activities and measures that could inform the development of a Final SEIS, preferred alternative, and Record of Decision. While work continues on this effort, progress is being made and the discussions have been productive. Currently, the seven states, tribes, water users, and other stakeholders in the Basin continue to review the draft SEIS and prepare comment response packages that are scheduled to be submitted to Reclamation on, or before, May 30<sup>th</sup>.

Reclamation has scheduled four virtual public meetings to provide information on the draft SEIS to supplement the 2007 Interim Guidelines to modify guidelines for operation of Glen Canyon Dam and Hoover Dam to address historic drought, historically low reservoirs, and low runoff conditions in the Colorado River Basin. During the webinars, Reclamation will provide information on current drought conditions in the basin, provide an overview of the DSEIS project, and information on the project impacts including detailed presentation of water supply impacts. Reclamation is also providing time to answer questions and take verbal comment from the public. Board staff are monitoring the webinars for pertinent information related to California's interests. The virtual public meeting schedule follows below and can be accessed from:

<https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/SEIS.html>

#### *Virtual Public Meeting Schedule*

- Thursday, May 4, 2023, at 5:30 – 8 p.m. Mountain time
- Monday, May 8, 2023, at 9:30 a.m. – noon Mountain time
- Wednesday, May 10, 2023, at 5:30 – 8 p.m. Mountain time
- Tuesday, May 16, 2023, at noon – 2:30 p.m. Mountain time

### Post-2026 Integrated Technical Education Workgroup

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Reclamation held their second Post-2026 Integrated Technical Education Workshop (ITEW) to review their post-2026 modeling plan and to solicit feedback from participants. The workshop was attended by Board staff and several of the Board agencies either in person in Lakewood, Colorado, or virtually, with approximately 100 total participants representing a broad

range of Colorado River stakeholders including representatives from basins states, water users, tribes, non-governmental agencies, and academia.

During the workshop, Reclamation reviewed the overall modeling strategy and key technical modeling tools to be used in the post-2026 process. Reclamation will use a technical approach, Multi-objective Robust Decision Making (MORDM), to facilitate Decision Making under Deep Uncertainty (DMDU), supported by the Colorado River Simulation System (CRSS) as the planning model. The objective of the technical approach is to identify trade-offs between system performance objectives under a wide range of uncertain future system conditions to assess robustness and vulnerability of different policies. Reclamation staff outlined a two-pronged strategy for including stakeholders in the modeling process: First, stakeholders will be able to submit their own CRSS models for analysis. Second, Reclamation will develop a web tool to enable stakeholders to make changes to CRSS, run the model in the cloud with many future scenarios, and analyze results, without needing to interact with CRSS directly. Reclamation staff also noted that they will provide modeling support as needed. Finally, Reclamation outlined a tentative schedule for the rest of this year for future ITEW meetings, which will focus on specific modeling needs, including hydrology, policies, trade-off analysis, and training for the web tool, among others. The ITEW did not include discussion of the scope of post-2026 policy options, which will be developed during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping process.

## Washington, D.C. Report

### *Budget Hearings*

On April 26<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development held a hearing on the FY24 budget for the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and Reclamation. The session followed a House Appropriations subcommittee hearing in March in which Mr. Mike Connor of the U.S. Army, Mr. Scott Spellmon of the Army Corps, and Ms. Camille Touton of Reclamation defended their budgets. Under the president's proposed budget, the Corps would receive \$7.4 billion in discretionary funds, as well as monies set aside in the bipartisan infrastructure law. Reclamation would receive \$3.39 billion under the proposed budget.

"The issues we face today are unprecedented as we experienced the worst drought in the 120-year history of this organization," Reclamation Commissioner Camille Touton told lawmakers. "Record snowfall and rain across parts of the West this year, and particularly in California, have brought some relief, but are not a resolution to our years — if not decades — long drought."

Ms. Touton touched on efforts to address shrinking water supplies across the West, including the Colorado River and Rio Grande basins. "The cyclical nature of Western hydrology highlights the need for immediate actions as well as thoughtful planning, and on the groundwork to make both

our infrastructure and our operational decisions more resilient to withstand future water resource variability," she said.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing to examine the President's budget request for the Department of the Interior (DOI) for FY24. Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ) emphasized that Congress provided resources to DOI through BIL/IRA and asked Secretary Haaland how much of that money is left to address Western drought.

Ms. Haaland noted that there was \$8.3 billion appropriated in BIL funding for drought and the Bureau of Reclamation has spent \$1.8 billion on water conservation, recycling, and storage. The Secretary is currently working to utilize the \$4 billion for water conservation in IRA funding including \$250 million for the Salton Sea.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing on the Corps budget for FY24 and the implementation of the 2022 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Lawmakers focused on the pace of environmental reviews along with how President Biden's budget feeds into the agency's needs.

Streamlining of water permitting has notably played a central role in the back-and-forth budget negotiations. One major target of the negotiations is Section 401, which hands states and tribal governments the right to approve or deny federal permits based on water quality assessments.

#### *Farm Bill*

Farm Bill discussions have been ramping up in the last few weeks as the House Agriculture Committee has set a June 17<sup>th</sup> deadline for member's feedback on the bill and the Senate Committee has already held two conservation hearings and plans to release a draft Farm Bill in June. Several Western Senators are pushing for drought support in this Farm Bill and are working with the Committee on potential changes to the Conservation Title.

#### *Status of the Waters of the United States Rule*

On December 30, 2022, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of the Army ("the agencies") announced the final "Revised Definition of 'Waters of the United States (WOTUS)'" rule. On January 18, 2023, the rule was published in the Federal Register, and the rule took effect on March 20, 2023. The WOTUS rule continues to face legal setbacks in the courts. The rule was enjoined in Texas and Idaho – that list has since grown as a federal judge in North Dakota blocked implementation of the rule in 24 additional states including Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming.

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