



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

February 14, 2024

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

As of February 5<sup>th</sup>, the water surface elevation of Lake Powell was 3,564.61 feet with nearly 8.12 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 35% of capacity. The water surface elevation of Lake Mead was 1,073.45 feet with 9.48 MAF of storage, or 36% of capacity. As of February 4<sup>th</sup>, the total System storage was 24.93 MAF, or 43% of capacity, which is about 5.87 MAF more than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of February 4<sup>th</sup>, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 48% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 85% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 95% of capacity at Morrow Point and 69% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 66% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

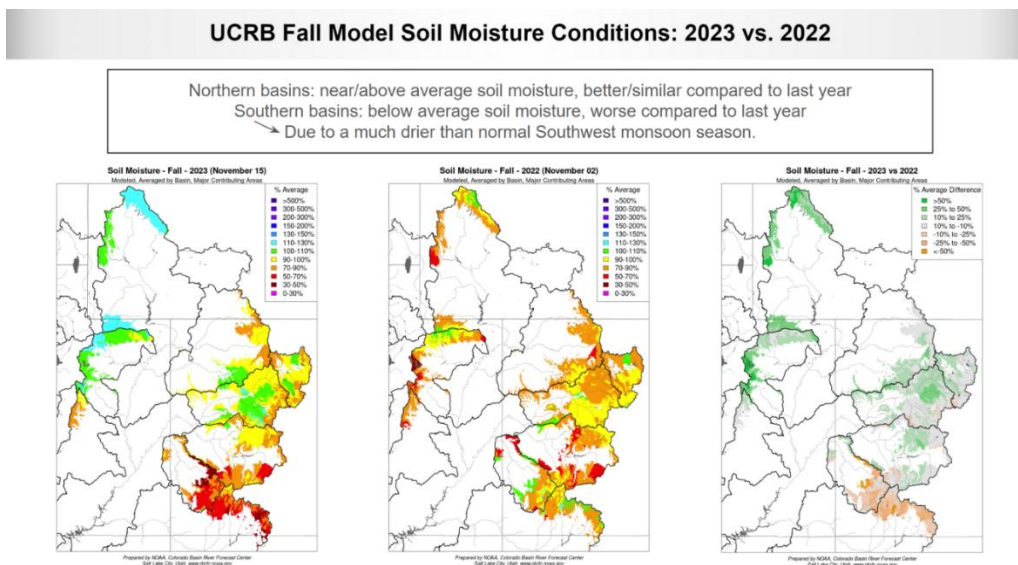
As of February 5<sup>th</sup>, January observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.28 MAF (84% of normal) and the February inflow forecast is 0.35 MAF (95% of normal). The forecasted inflow into Lake Powell for WY-2024 is 7.36 MAF (77% of normal). The forecasted April through July 2024 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell was 4.7 MAF (74% of normal). The precipitation to date is 92% of normal and current Basin snowpack is 92% of normal.

#### Colorado Basin River Forecast Center Water Supply Webinar

On February 7<sup>th</sup>, the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) held a webinar to review the Basin's current water supply conditions and forecasts. CBRFC began the presentation with a review of the Fall 2023 hydrologic model soil moisture conditions. The CBRFC adjusts its soil moisture model every Fall, after the irrigation season to consider early November streamflow observations, July to October reservoir inflows, and runoff conditions from previous seasons. Fall 2023 soil moisture conditions were near to below normal, with conditions in the Lower Colorado Basin ranging from 0% to 90% of average while conditions in the Upper Colorado Basin were improved, ranging from 30% to 150% of average. CBRFC explained that soil moisture conditions, along with SWE conditions and spring weather impact the timing and magnitude of spring runoff.

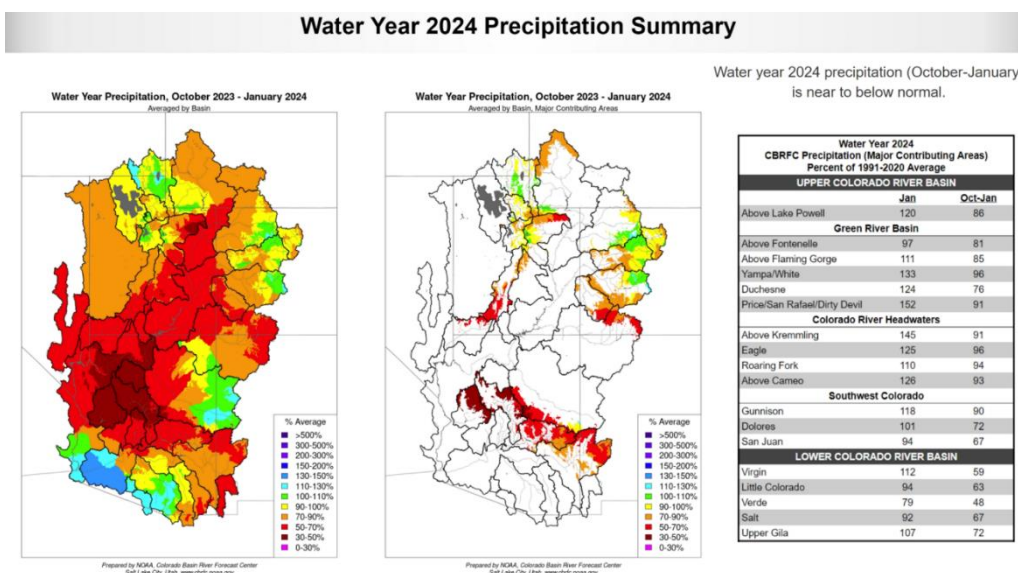
Figure 1 compares fall 2023 and 2022 model soil moisture conditions. The green shading in the image on the right shows improved soil moisture conditions since last year, while orange shading indicates worsened soil moisture conditions.

**Figure 1: Modeled Fall Soil Moisture Conditions**



Precipitation conditions in January were above average in the Upper Colorado River Basin (95% to 152% of average) and portions of the Lower Colorado Basin, particularly in the Virgin River (112% of average) and the Upper Gila (107% of average). Figure 2 shows that Water Year 2024 (WY-2024) precipitation conditions from October 2023 to January 2024 are near to below average throughout most of the Colorado Basin.

**Figure 2: Water Year 2024 Precipitation Summary**



As of February 6<sup>th</sup>, snow water equivalent (SWE) conditions for the Upper Colorado Basin range from 75% to 105% of normal and 60% to 130% of normal in the Lower Colorado Basin. Storm activity during the first week of February improved SWE conditions in most areas of the Basin, especially in the Lower Colorado River Basin.

The February 1<sup>st</sup> water supply forecasts for April to July runoff have improved compared to last month due to storm activity in January. The forecasted runoff volumes for the Upper Colorado River Basin range from 50% to 115% of normal. In the Lower Colorado River Basin, the January to May forecasted runoff volume ranges from 70% to 140% of median.

Weather models indicate that active weather over the next week. El Nino conditions are expected to continue through the winter season with an increased chance for above average precipitation conditions across the Lower Basin.

## **COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES**

### Status of Basin States Activities

Representatives of the Basin States have been meeting over the last six months to discuss development of an alternative for the upcoming post-2026 operating guidelines for the Colorado River. Reclamation formally announced its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for post-2026 operations in June 2023. A public scoping period was initiated, and Reclamation issued a report in October 2023 describing scoping comments received. Reclamation plans to issue a public draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for post-2026 operations by the end of 2024. In late-2023, Reclamation also released the five hydrologic scenarios that it will utilize in its technical analyses and modeling tools as part of the post-2026 guidelines NEPA assessment.

Over the fall of 2023 and in January 2024, the seven states have held a series of meetings, webinars, and a multi-day workshop to exchange concepts and identify issues that need to be addressed in the next set of operating guidelines. To date, discussions among the states remain focused on proposed future operations for Lakes Powell and Mead; water use reduction volumes and triggers; conserved water supply creation, storage, and recovery rules; and other related topics.

### Status of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

On February 9, Reclamation released a draft Supplemental EIS (SEIS) for the Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan (LTEMP) that guides hourly, daily, and monthly releases at Glen Canyon Dam. The main impetus for the SEIS is the recent increase in warmwater nonnative fish below the dam, primarily smallmouth bass. The stretch of the Colorado River between Glen Canyon Dam and Hoover Dam is home to the vast majority of the Basin's humpback chub, a threatened species, and smallmouth bass could significantly impact this population. The SEIS analyzes new release regimes intended to disrupt spawning and/or reducing water temperature in order to prevent the establishment of smallmouth bass below Glen Canyon Dam. The SEIS also

aims to make modifications to the timing of high flow experiments (HFE). The draft SEIS can be accessed at <https://www.usbr.gov/uc/progact/amp/index.html>.

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

The State of California, through the Wildlife Conservation Board, has an opportunity to acquire 2,177 acres of farmland, located adjacent to the Colorado River at the southern end of the Palo Verde Irrigation District. If acquired, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) would accept fee-title for the property and the LCR MSCP would accept long term management responsibility and establish backwater and marsh habitat on the property. CRB staff have been working with CDFW, Reclamation, and the LCR MSCP Steering Committee in support of this potential purchase. Letters supporting the acquisition and incorporation into the LCR MSCP have been submitted to the Wildlife Conservation Board by: CRB, LCR MSCP state representatives (CRB is a signatory to this letter), CDFW and Reclamation.

The Steering Committee of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) met in Las Vegas, Nevada, on December 13th. The Steering Committee passed a resolution to initiate discussions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding changes to the LCR MSCP for Post-2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Lake Powell and Lake Mead.

The LCR MSCP is nearing a point when it may need to utilize the Habitat Maintenance Fund, which was created to maintain habitat that existed before the establishment of the LCR MSCP. To facilitate these expenditures, the Steering Committee passed a resolution finalizing procedures for requesting and transferring funds from State Parties' Habitat Maintenance Fund Accounts for the LCR MSCP.

The Steering Committee considered requests for changes to its membership. The Steering Committee approved a resolution accepting and approving Basic Water Company's assignment of its rights and obligations as a Permittee and Nevada State Participant Group Member of the LCR MSCP Steering Committee to Henderson WC LLC. Additionally, the Steering Committee approved Henderson WC LLC's application for Membership to the Steering Committee.

Finally, the Steering Committee discussed potential site visits during the upcoming year.

The LCR MSCP Financial Work Group is scheduled to hold a virtual meeting on February 22, 2024. The LCR MSCP Steering Committee is scheduled to hold a hybrid meeting with in-person attendance in Las Vegas, NV on April 4, 2024.

## **GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES**

### Lower Colorado Mainstream Evaporation Report Rollout

As part of Reclamation's action to prepare the supplemental environmental impact statement associated with the 2007 Interim Shortage Guidelines, Reclamation indicated that it would also

prepare a report describing reservoir evaporation and other system losses in the Lower Basin from Lake Mead to the Northerly International Boundary with Mexico. The intended purpose of this report was to provide additional information to the Basin states, Tribes, and water users for consideration in the post-2026 guidelines development process.

On February 8<sup>th</sup>, Reclamation released a report entitled, the “Lower Colorado River Mainstream Evaporation and Riparian Evapotranspiration Losses Report”. On February 7<sup>th</sup>, staff from Reclamation’s Boulder Canyon Operations Office hosted a webinar to present the report’s datasets, methodologies, and findings to a broad group of stakeholders in the Basin. In short, the report indicates that for the period 2017-2021, the reservoir evaporation for Lakes Mead, Mohave and Havasu averages about 800 KAF annually, riverine and backwater evaporation averages about 100 KAF annually, and the evapotranspiration for riparian vegetation averages about 400 KAF annually. The average annual total of combined Lower Basin system losses for the period is about 1.3 MAF.

The published report and associated technical appendices are accessible on Reclamation’s Lower Colorado Region webpage at the following link:

<https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/4200Rpts/LCRBEvapReport/evapreport.html>.

### Washington, D.C. Report

#### *Appropriations*

Funding for the federal government is set to expire in early March under two Continuing Resolutions (CRs). One of these CRs runs through March 1st, which includes funding for the Bureau of Reclamation under the Energy and Water appropriations bill. The second CR is scheduled to lapse on March 8th.

The Appropriations Committees have finalized agreements on 302(b) allocations, delineating the top-line funding for each of the twelve appropriations bills. While these allocations have not been publicly disclosed yet, appropriators have hinted at slight reductions compared to the fiscal year 2023 figures. Members are more inclined to support these modest reductions as opposed to the substantial cuts proposed by the House for fiscal year 2024.

The California Republican delegation will likely advocate for the integration of specific provisions from H.R. 215, known as the WATER for California Act (sponsored by Representative Valadao), into the Energy and Water bill. The House-passed Energy and Water bill encompassed the entirety of H.R. 215, but faced opposition and was never brought up for consideration by the Democratic Senate—a scenario likely to recur during negotiations regarding the final fiscal year 2024 Energy and Water bill.

#### *Legislation*

In January, Senators Kelly (D-AZ) and Sinema (I-AZ) introduced S. 3581, the Hydropower Delivery Rate-reduction Offset Act (HYDRO Act).

The HYDRO Act directs the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) Administrator to reduce fees paid by utilities if certain hydropower facilities operated by the Bureau of Reclamation do not generate a minimum amount of electricity due to drought.

We are still looking at the legislation and are staying closely coordinated with our water agency D.C. representatives as the bill moves forward.

#### *Reclamation Personnel*

Mr. John Watts, who served as a water staffer for former Senator Dianne Feinstein for many years, has now assumed the role of Senior Advisor in the Commissioner's office at Reclamation. His deep understanding of water policy intricacies, along with his extensive network within water user communities and non-governmental organizations, is expected to greatly enhance the Commissioner's decision-making process regarding Colorado River-related issues.

Lastly, Mr. Karl Stock has assumed the position of Regional Director for Reclamation's California-Great Basin Region, succeeding Ernest Conant, who held the position for the past five years until his recent retirement.