

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

June 12, 2019

**ADMINISTRATION**

Minutes of the May 15, 2019 Meeting of the Colorado River Board

A draft of the minutes from the May 15, 2019, meeting of the Colorado River Board of California (Board) was held in Ontario, California, has been prepared and is included in the Board folder for review and proposed adoption during the May Board meeting.

Proposed Fiscal Year-2019/2020 Budget for the Colorado River Board of California

The proposed Fiscal-Year 2019/2020 budget for the Colorado River Board of California is attached for review and consideration. The Governor's May-Revise proposed budget includes the following:

- Governor's Budget for the Colorado River Board of California is \$2,308,000 compared to the FY-2018/2019 budgeted amount of \$2,222,000.

The final FY-2019/2020 budget for the Board will be presented for Board approval and adoption at its June 12<sup>th</sup> regularly scheduled meeting.

**COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT**

As of June 10<sup>th</sup>, the water level at Lake Powell was 3,590.27 feet with 10.85 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 45% of capacity. The water level at Lake Mead was 1,085.71 feet with 10.49 MAF of storage, or 40% of capacity. As of June 9<sup>th</sup>, the total system storage was 29.15 MAF, or 49% of capacity, which is about 1.5 MAF less than the system storage at this same time last year.

As of June 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Upper Colorado River basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, ranged from 61% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 90% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 92% of capacity at Morrow Point and 53% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoirs in Colorado; and 76% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of June 4<sup>th</sup>, the unregulated forecasted inflow in Lake Powell for Water Year 2019 is 13.49 MAF (125% of normal). The forecasted April to July 2019 runoff into Lake Powell is projected to be 10.30 MAF (144% of normal). The May 2019 observed Lake Powell inflow was 2.51 MAF (107% of normal), and the June Lake Powell inflow forecast is 4.40 MAF (165% of normal). The WY-2019 precipitation to date is 125% of normal. The current basin snowpack is 765% of normal.

In summary, it is interesting to note that this Water-Year has been quite remarkable in that the forecast in January 2019 was for an expected runoff of about 7.0 MAF, and that the expected runoff forecast in June may well exceed 13.5 MAF. Also, the intervening side-inflows below Glen Canyon Dam typically average about 800,000 acre-feet annually, and this year the side-inflows are expected to be approximately 1.1 MAF. Finally, because of the below normal spring temperatures and increased precipitation across much of the Basin, not only has the Upper Basin snowmelt been slowed, but in the Lower Basin the releases from Lake Mead to meet downstream demands are expected to be 500,000 acre-feet less than average releases at this time of year.

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

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) hosted its third weekly hydrologic outlook briefing during the May to early-June runoff period via webinar. These briefings provide an update of evolving hydrologic conditions during the runoff period. During the last half of May, the Upper Colorado Basin experienced persistent low-pressure troughs resulting in unseasonably cool temperatures and widespread wet precipitation conditions. Consequently, these conditions led to record median snow water equivalent values for this time of the year in several areas of the San Juan, Gunnison and Central Utah watershed basins.

There is less snowmelt than anticipated but snowmelt is expected to increase over the next week as temperatures rise, resulting in increased stream flow. As of June 6<sup>th</sup>, there are no rivers at or forecasted to reach critical flood thresholds. Currently, several rivers are in the ‘action stage’, which may result in increased monitoring. The fourth and final weekly hydrologic outlook briefing is scheduled for June 11<sup>th</sup>.

#### Accounting and Water Use Report for Calendar Year 2019

On May 20, 2019, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) released the final “Calendar Year 2017 Colorado River Accounting and Water Use Report for Arizona, California, and Nevada,” in accordance with Article V of the 2006 Consolidated Decree in *Arizona v. California*. The Decree requires documentation of releases of water through regulatory structures controlled by the United States, diversions, consumptive uses, and return flows to the mainstream that would be available for delivery to downstream users in the U.S., or to satisfy water deliveries

to Mexico pursuant to the 1944 Water Treaty with Mexico. The final report can be accessed and viewed online at: <https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/4200Rpts/DecreeRpt/2018/2018.pdf>. It is worth noting that the CY-2018 Accounting Report also conforms with the updated Extraordinary Conservation Intentionally Created Surplus (EC ICS) amounts for entities in each of the Lower Basin States as reflected in Appendix 1 of the Lower Basin DCP Operations document.

### 2020 Colorado River Annual Operating Plan, First Consultation

The first consultation meeting for the 2020 Annual Operating Plan (AOP) was held on June 4<sup>th</sup> at the McCarran Airport in Las Vegas, Nevada, and was also available via webinar to provide an overview of the draft AOP and to accept comments from stakeholders. The 1968 Colorado River Basin Project Act (P.L. 90-537) requires that the Secretary of the Department of the Interior prepare a report documenting the actual operations for the previous water year and the projected operations for the upcoming water year. Based on the operating criteria established within the 2007 Interim Guidelines, the August 24-Month Study Report projections for the following year sets the operational tiers for the coordinated operations of Lakes Powell and Mead. Additionally, the first draft of the 2020 AOP now takes into account the implementation of the Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan as well as the Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan pursuant to Section IV of Minute No. 323.

Based on the May 2019 24-Month Study Report and the most probable inflow scenario, the projected operational tier for Water Year-2020 continues to the Upper Elevation Balance Tier with the most probable release of 9.0 MAF from Lake Powell. It was determined that the most probable operational tier for Lake Mead is the Normal or ICS Surplus Condition. However, it is the August 2019 24-Month Study Report that will determine and set the official operating tiers for Lakes Powell and Mead and these determinations will be updated and documented in the final version of the 2020 AOP.

The second and the final 2020 AOP consultation meetings will be held on Thursday, July 25<sup>th</sup>, and Thursday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, respectively, at McCarran Airport in Las Vegas, Nevada, and will also be available via webinar.

## **COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM REPORTS**

### Status of Colorado River Basin Drought Contingency Planning Efforts and Implementation of Minute No. 323

On May 20<sup>th</sup> representatives of the seven Colorado River Basin states, water agencies, Tribes, and Reclamation and Department of the Interior officials all met at Hoover Dam to formally

execute the Colorado River Basin Drought Contingency Plans (DCPs). California agencies that executed the agreements included Coachella Valley Water District, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, the City of Needles, and the Palo Verde Irrigation District.

A small group of U.S. representatives from the states, agencies, and Reclamation and the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) continues to work with counterpart agencies in Mexico to finalize the USIBWC/CILA Joint Engineer's Report regarding implementation of the Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan (BWSCP) described in Section IV of Minute No. 323. This binational small group has been charged with ensuring that the operational and water accounting aspects of both the BWSCP and the Lower Basin DCP conform and can be consistently applied, and that the Joint Engineer's Report is completed prior to the issuance of the August 2019 24-Month Study Report. It is currently expected that the Joint Engineer's Report will be completed and adopted by both the U.S. and Mexican Sections of the IBWC in July 2019.

#### Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

The Work Group, Forum and the Advisory Council met on June 3-6 in Denver, Colorado. This meeting marked the 100<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Forum. The very first meeting of the Forum was held on November 8-9, 1973, and also took place in Denver, Colorado. During the Forum meeting, Mr. William Hasencamp, manager of Colorado River Resources for The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, was elected as the new Forum Chair, while Ms. Rebecca Mitchell, executive director of the Colorado Water Conservation Board, was elected as the Vice Chair.

During the meetings, Reclamation provided an update on the Paradox Valley Unit (PVU) alternatives environmental impact study (EIS) schedule and the March 4<sup>th</sup> seismic event. Reclamation continues to work on completing the EIS alternatives analyses and coordinating with BLM and DOI solicitors on the EIS content and review process. The schedule for the EIS remains the same, with the Administrative Draft EIS to be available to the cooperating agencies for a 30-day comment period in August or September. The Draft EIS should become available for a 45-day public comment in November to December of this year. The Final EIS is scheduled for release in May of 2020, with a Record of Decision in June of 2020.

The Paradox Valley Unit injection well remains shut down since March 4<sup>th</sup> when a Magnitude 4.5 earthquake occurred near the injection well facility. Reclamation reported that 1,760 aftershocks have been recorded through May, exceeding the total number of earthquakes in previous eight years. Over the next three months, Reclamation will complete a detailed review of the earthquake and evaluate potential scenarios for future injection operations with Reclamation management and the Forum prior to restarting the facility.

Reclamation reported that a 2019/2020 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) was released on May 31<sup>st</sup> at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), requesting applications for salinity control projects in the Upper Colorado Basin. Reclamation will hold two workshops in June to help applicants understand FOA requirements. The FOA will close in September. Projects will be selected in November and agreements executed by June of next year. Reclamation has updated its FOA evaluation criteria to include Department of Interior goals that give projects additional points for creating a conservation stewardship, restoring trust with local communities, and/or modernizing infrastructure. For the 2019/2020 FOA, there is a concern that there will not be pass-off projects going to the Upper Basin states due to DOI requirements. The Forum will work with Reclamation on resolving this issue.

As you may recall, Reclamation has been concerned with the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund's revenue shortfall to meet required cost-share dollars. The Forum has asked the Program Funding Committee to meet soon and continue to develop options for addressing the revenue shortfall issue.

The Work Group continues to work on the 2020 Triennial Review (Review). Reclamation provided an update on their modeling efforts for the Review. Looking at salinity concentrations from 1971 to 2017, Reclamation sees downward trends at all three numeric criteria compliance points on the river and expects the trend to continue over the next year. Reclamation continues to work on modeling three scenarios to be considered in the Review. The scenarios are: (1) effects of continuing current salinity control of 1.42 million tons per year through 2040; (2) increasing salinity control to 1.68 million tons per year through 2040; and (3) implementing 2.42 million tons of salinity control per year through 2040.

Reclamation is also working to incorporate implementation of the DCPs in the Colorado River Simulation System (CRSS) salinity modeling runs. Reclamation has performed runs based on stress test hydrology over the 1988-2017 period, which is thought to provide a better representation of salinity impacts over the last 30 years. Updated modeling results will be provided at the Fall Forum meeting.

On a related note, the Advisory Council approved funding to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to estimate historical time-varying salinity loads from irrigated agricultural lands in the Upper Colorado River Basin. Current tools like CRSS use long-term average salinity loading from geologic sources and irrigated agricultural lands. This effort will help improve agricultural salinity loading characterization in the CRSS model.

The USGS continues to work with the Washington County Water Conservancy District to evaluate the feasibility of developing a salinity control project on the Upper Virgin River at Pah Tempe Springs (La Verkin Springs) in Utah. As part of the feasibility study effort, USGS is utilizing an existing Reclamation well location, in lieu of drilling new wells, to further evaluate

and characterize the hydrological and hydrothermal aquifer properties at Pah Tempe Springs. More information is expected at the next Work Group meeting.

The Salinity Control Forum's Technical Work Group is scheduled to meet again on August 26-28 in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Fall Forum meeting is scheduled to be held on October 28-30 somewhere in Arizona.

### Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

The Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Work Group (AWG) met via webinar on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. The group discussed the proposed FY-2020 budget, which was adjusted slightly due to the recent switch in program funding from Colorado River Storage Project power revenues to federal appropriations. The most significant immediate effect of this change is the inability to withdraw or add funds to the program's existing contingency funds for native fish management and experimental action monitoring and research activities.

Program researchers provided the AMWG with an overview of a recently conducted analysis of the effects of high flow experiments (HFEs), which have been conducted regularly at Glen Canyon Dam since 2012. The abundance and distribution of native fish populations have increased significantly in the time period from 2010-2018, and the stretch of the river between Lakes Powell and Mead is now dominated by native species. However, scientists don't believe this change is attributable to the implementation of HFEs. Similarly, a comparison of nonnative brown trout recruitment and migration with HFE events found no clear link between the two. High recruitment of rainbow trout, a nonnative with recreational value, has been linked to spring HFEs, but spring flows have been conducted only twice. As additional HFEs are conducted, the relationship between various resources and HFE implementation can be further refined.

The Technical Work Group (TWG) will meet June 11-12 in Phoenix, Arizona, and the AMWG will next meet in Flagstaff, Arizona on August 21-22.

## **GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES**

### *Fontanelle Dam Riprap Expansion Project Update*

Reclamation and the State of Wyoming have determined that an expansion project at Fontanelle Dam will be postponed until the reservoir is drawn down in the future by drought. Fontanelle Dam, located on the Upper Green River upstream of Flaming Gorge Dam, has an overall capacity of 345,000 acre-feet. However, the reservoir can only be partly emptied due to a lack of riprap armoring on the lower reaches of the dam's upstream face, making 80,000 acre-feet of its capacity inaccessible. In 2017 and 2018, Wyoming's Congressional leaders and State

officials had worked to secure funding and direction to expand riprap protection and allow for full utilization of the reservoir's storage in response to drought and to make new water available for contract to Wyoming water users. However, expanding the riprap while the reservoir is full would be too difficult and costly, and officials noted that draining it just for the project would hurt fish and irrigators.

## Washington, D.C. Updates

### **Appropriations Update**

The House is set to move the first minibus appropriations package, which includes the energy and water development appropriations bill, on the floor the week of June 10<sup>th</sup>. The Rules Committee will meet early that week to determine which amendments will be offered. The Senate is expected to follow suit in late June or July, but first they need to mark up their appropriations bill. The Senate is still working on top line budget numbers and those negotiations are ongoing. They need those numbers to set their appropriation levels.

Finally, this week, the House Appropriations Committee has advanced a \$24.3 billion agriculture spending bill, readying the measure for a floor vote later this month.

### **Reclamation Project Title Transfer**

Reclamation recently made changes to its process and requirements for title transfer, which are intended to streamline procedures and establish mechanisms that provide for a less onerous process than what has historically been the norm. These changes fall into two categories:

- Reclamation's development of a Categorical Exclusion for certain title transfers; and
- Changes to the title transfer process as a result of Public Law 116-9, which was enacted into law at the end of the last Congress.

Districts that are interested in pursuing a title transfer should submit a written request to the appropriate Reclamation area office and should identify the specific facilities that are the subject of the proposed transfer. Reclamation will determine whether the proposed transfer can advance using a Categorical Exclusion or through the streamlined process developed in Public Law 116-9.

### **Disaster Funding**

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, the House passed the \$19 billion disaster aid bill which the Senate had already passed. President Trump signed the bill on June 6<sup>th</sup>. The money will go to specific Federal agencies

for disaster related projects, including aid to Puerto Rico and several states battered by hurricanes, flooding, fires and earthquakes in recent months and years.