

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

**January 15, 2020**

## ADMINISTRATION

### 2020 Board Meeting Calendar

Attached is an updated proposed 2020 Colorado River Board meeting schedule. In response to Board member comments, staff have explored options to align the proposed 2020 traveling Board meetings or symposia with regional meetings such as ACWA. Although no workable opportunities to align the Board schedule with these meetings were identified, the calendar has been updated to reflect a change in the November meeting date to avoid a conflict with the Veteran's Day holiday and an adjustment to the December meeting date to align with the annual CRWUA conference. Please provide suggestions or conflicts with the updated proposed Board schedule by January 31<sup>st</sup>, so that a final schedule can be prepared for consideration and adoption by the Board at its February meeting.

## COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER REPORT

As of January 13, 2020, the water level at Lake Powell was 3,607.42 feet with 12.47 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 51% of capacity. The water level at Lake Mead was 1,092.12 feet with 11.04 MAF of storage, or 42% of capacity. As of January 12<sup>th</sup>, the total system storage was 31.26 MAF, or 52% of capacity, which is 4.3 MAF more than the system storage at this same time last year.

As of January 7<sup>th</sup>, the Upper Colorado River basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, ranged from 58% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 88% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 92% of capacity at Morrow Point and 70% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoirs in Colorado; and 78% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of January 6<sup>th</sup>, the unregulated forecasted inflow into Lake Powell for Water Year 2020 is 8.94 MAF (83% of normal). The forecasted April to July runoff into Lake Powell for Water Year 2020 is 5.9 MAF (82% of normal). The December observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.35 MAF (97% of normal), and the January Lake Powell inflow forecast is 0.32 MAF (89% of normal). The WY-2020 precipitation to date is 90% of normal and the current basin snowpack is 115% of normal.

## Water Use in 2019

As recently reported in the news, California's consumptive use of Colorado River water in calendar year 2019 was the lowest since 1950. There were similar reductions in consumptive use within Arizona and Nevada. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's January 2, 2020, Water Accounting Actual Use Report shows the total 2019 Lower Basin consumptive use was estimated to be 6.6 MAF, including 3.84 MAF by California, 2.46 MAF by Arizona, and 0.23 MAF by Nevada. In addition, the regulatory release from Hoover Dam in calendar year 2019 was 8.52 MAF, or 91% of the long-term average of 9.36 MAF for the period 2007-2018. Along with the benefits of an above average water year, this highlights how California and the rest of the Lower Basin states are able to continue to achieve significant conservation benefits as envisioned by the 2007 Interim Guidelines and 2019 Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan.

## Main Outlet Drain Extension (MODE)

Reclamation reported that it had concluded maintenance work on the Main Outlet Drain Extension (MODE) that carries saline agricultural drainage flows from the Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District and Yuma area to the Cienega de Santa Clara wetland. Maintenance work was started on September 5, 2019, and concluded on January 6, 2020. During this time, saline flows were instead routed to the Colorado River channel just below Morelos Dam in the Limitrophe. Members of the Minute 323 environmental work group are working to analyze the hydrologic and biological responses to these changes in flow at the Limitrophe and Cienega.

## Annual Operating Plan for Colorado River Reservoirs-2020

On December 11, 2019, the Secretary of the Interior, David Bernhardt, approved the Annual Operating Plan (AOP) for Colorado River System Reservoirs for 2020. The 2020 AOP projects the WY-2020 release from Lake Powell to be 8.23 MAF, but the release could be 13.49 MAF or greater if hydrologic or operational conditions change significantly. Operation of Lake Mead in 2020 will be governed in accordance with the Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS) Condition as well as the Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan Agreement (LB DCP Agreement). In accordance with Sections III.B.1.a and III.B.2.a of Exhibit 1 to the LB DCP Agreement, DCP contributions will be required by Arizona and Nevada for Calendar Year-2020. However, since Lake Mead's actual January 1, 2020, elevation was higher than the 1,090 feet DCP trigger and above the projection of the January 1, 2020, elevation in the August 2019 24-Month Study, any DCP ICS creation will remain as the type of ICS originally created pursuant to the 2007 Interim Guidelines.

In accordance with Article 15 of the 1944 United-States-Mexico Water Treaty and Minutes No. 242 and 322 to the 1944 Treaty, a volume of 1.5 MAF of water will be available to be

scheduled for delivery to Mexico during CY-2020. It is important to note that the volume of water delivered will be adjusted for water savings contributions required by Minute No. 323 to the 1944 Treaty. In addition, under Minute No. 323 to the 1944 Treaty, Mexico may create or take delivery of water from Mexico's Water Reserve. A copy of the final approved 2020 AOP can be accessed at Reclamation's Lower Colorado Region webpage at the following link.

<https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/aop/AOP20.pdf>.

## COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM REPORTS

### Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program and Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan EIS

The Technical Work Group of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (GCDAMP) met on January 13-16, 2020, for a meeting in conjunction with the Annual Reporting meeting, which summarizes the previous year's research and the status of resources. The group will have initiated discussions on the Fiscal Year 2021-2023 Triennial Budget and Work Plan, which will be the major task of the GCDAMP throughout 2020.

### Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) will hold its annual Colorado River Terrestrial and Riparian meeting January 28-30 in Laughlin, Nevada. This meeting provides researchers an opportunity to share the latest monitoring and research information with stakeholders and researchers across the Basin.

### Status of the Colorado River Salinity Control Program

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Reclamation published the draft Paradox Valley Unit (PVU) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a 60-day public comment period, which ends on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. PVU is one of the original salinity control projects authorized under Title II of the 1974 Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act (P.L. 93-320, as amended). The PVU is comprised of a series of brine collection wells and a deep injection disposal well that has prevented approximately 100,000 tons of salt each year from entering the waters of the Colorado River until its closure in March 2019 due to seismic activity.

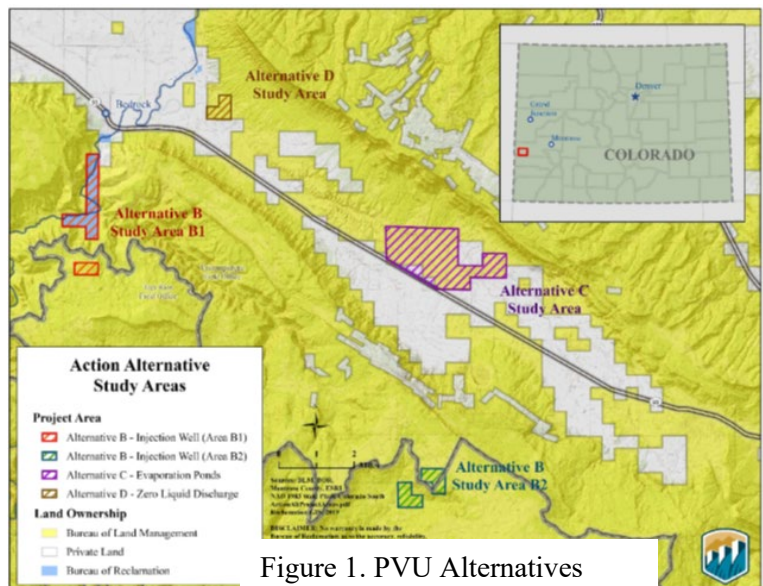


Figure 1. PVU Alternatives

Reclamation has identified four PVU replacement alternatives in the EIS including: A) No Action, B) New Injection Well, C) Evaporation Ponds, and D) Zero Liquid Discharge at locations shown in Figure 1.

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum) has met several times during December and January to discuss consensus-based recommendations for a preferred Paradox Valley project alternative. One potential barrier in selecting a preferred alternative for the PVU is a concern expressed by the Forum about the viability of long-term funding for the Salinity Control Program as a whole, and if the Program can afford the increased costs of additional salinity control projects. The Forum is discussing a draft letter to Reclamation highlighting the funding issue and expressing an interest to resolve it prior to implementing a preferred alternative. Board staff are working with the Basin States and California's agencies to coordinate comments on the draft EIS by the February 4th deadline. The Final EIS is scheduled for release in May 2020, with a Record of Decision in June 2020.

## **GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES**

### Desert Energy Projects

The Record of Decision (ROD) for the Desert Quartzite Solar Photovoltaic Project, Riverside County, California has been posted (refer to the link below). The project owner, Desert Quartzite, LLC, applied for a Right of Way from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to construct, operate, maintain, and ultimately decommission a 450-megawatt solar photovoltaic facility on approximately 2,800 acres near the City of Blythe in Riverside County. Board staff submitted comment letters on April 10, 2015, and November 8, 2018, during the NEPA/CEQA compliance process requesting that the EIS/EIR address and analyze any proposed water uses as well as any potential impact to Colorado River water resources associated with construction, operations, and maintenance activities for the project. The ROD specifies that the project owner must develop a Colorado River Water Supply Plan to prevent, replace, or mitigate project impacts that may result in consumption of any water from within or below the Colorado River Accounting Surface to ensure that Colorado River water supplies are not consumed without a valid entitlement. Board staff will continue to monitor the status of this project. The ROD can be found on the BLM website at: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage&currentPageId=99128>

### Lake Powell Pipeline

On January 10, 2020, Board staff submitted a scoping comments letter to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for the proposed EIS for the Lake Powell Pipeline Project (LPP) proposed by the Utah Board of Water Resources (UBWR). The proposed LPP is a 140-mile, 69-inch-diameter water delivery pipeline that begins at Lake Powell, located in the Upper Basin of the Colorado

River, and ends at Sand Hollow Reservoir near St. George, Utah, located in the Lower Basin of the Colorado River. The UBWR proposes building the LPP in order to convey additional water supplies to Washington and Kane Counties in Utah to meet future water demands, diversify the regional water supply portfolio, and for water supply reliability enhancement. The Board's comment letter highlighted the need for the EIS to contain an analysis and determination of water supply availability and legal justification for the proposed project. Board staff believe that Congressional authorization will be required to implement the LPP. A copy of the Board's letter has been attached for your information.

## Washington, D.C. Updates

### *Appropriations Update*

On December 20<sup>th</sup>, President Trump signed two appropriations bills that consolidated the twelve spending bills which collectively provide federal funds through the remainder of fiscal year 2020. Reclamation received \$1.5 billion for projects and facilities and of that amount, \$69 million is for the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund, and \$5 million for the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund. Additional highlights include:

- Drought Response and Comprehensive Drought Plans - \$4 million (\$1.1 million above budget request);
- Title XVI - \$63.6 million (\$60.6 million above budget request); and
- Water conservation activities for areas experiencing extended drought - \$20 million (These water conservation activities include well construction and irrigation related structural or other measures, programs and projects that result in conservation of other surface water or groundwater, or improve water system efficiency, resiliency, reliability, delivery, and conveyance.)

### *Nominations*

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, the Senate confirmed the nomination of Ms. Aurelia Skipwith to serve as the new Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There are still pending nominations needing confirmation including Ms. Katharine MacGregor to be Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior.

### *Water Legislation*

It is anticipated that during this year both House and Senate western water bills as well as a Water and Related Development Act bill will move forward. In addition, it is expected that a

draft comprehensive water bill from Chairman Huffman will be released at some point early this year. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee may decide to move S.1932, the Gardner-Feinstein western water bill, with provisions related to Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act storage projects.

#### Draft California 2020 Water Resilience Portfolio Released for Public Comment

On January 3, 2020, The California Natural Resources Agency, California Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Food and Agriculture released a public draft of the California 2020 Water Resilience Portfolio. The draft report outlines more than 100 integrated actionable recommendations in four broad areas to help regions build water resilience as resources become available, while at the same time providing state leadership to improve infrastructure and protect natural ecosystems. The draft report was developed to fulfill Governor Gavin Newsom's April 29, 2019, executive order calling for a portfolio of actions to ensure the state's long-term water resilience and ecosystem health. Written feedback is invited through February 7, 2020, via email to [input@waterresilience.ca.gov](mailto:input@waterresilience.ca.gov). A final version of the Water Resilience Portfolio will be released in early 2020. A copy of the draft Water Resilience Portfolio is available at the link below.

<http://waterresilience.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/California-Water-Resilience-Portfolio-2019-Final2.pdf>

Attachments:

Proposed final Board meeting schedule for 2020

January 2020 Water Report

Lake Powell Pipeline project EIS scoping comments letter

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January 15, 2020