

**MONTHLY REPORT TO THE
COLORADO RIVER BOARD OF CALIFORNIA**

December 14, 2022

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT

As of December 12th, the surface water elevation of Lake Powell was 3,526.97 feet with nearly 5.66 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 24% of capacity. The surface water elevation of Lake Mead was 1,043.56 feet with 7.23 MAF of storage, or 28% of capacity. As of December 4th, the total System storage was 19.12 MAF, or 33% of capacity, which is about 3.06 MAF less than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of December 7th, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 65% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 70% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 89% of capacity at Morrow Point and 34% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 52% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of December 1st, the November observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.35 MAF (83% of normal) and the December forecasted inflow is 0.28 MAF (87% of normal). The forecasted unregulated inflow into Lake Powell for Water Year (WY) 2023 is 7.70 MAF (80% of normal). The April through July 2023 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell is 5.04 MAF (79% of normal).

COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES

Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program Implementation

Paradox Valley Unit Salinity Control Project

Reclamation concluded the six-month injection test at the Paradox Valley Unit (PVU) on December 2nd, 2022. The surface injection pressure at shut in was approximately 4,110 psi and all conditions were normal. Reclamation will collect pressure falloff data for three weeks, then provide the data to a technical consultant for formal analysis of well and reservoir performance. During this period, Reclamation will evaluate the seismicity recorded during the test, focusing on

the aftershock region of the 2019 earthquake. Reclamation will also model different injection rates and shut down scenarios to determine the next operational parameters. After review of the aforementioned analyses, a decision will be made on operations concurrent with the seismic risk analysis process and until its conclusion. Previously PVU had not operated since March 2019 in response to a significant seismic event. When fully operational, the PVU removed about 100,000 tons of salt per year that would have otherwise entered the Colorado River. The Forum is tracking PVU activities closely and will advocate for restarting injection at PVU within the constraints of the existing infrastructure as soon as possible.

Program Personnel Changes

Reclamation's primary salinity coordinator, Aung Hla, announced his retirement effective November 30, 2022. This is a crucial position that oversees many aspects of the Salinity Control Program, including the Basinwide and Basin States program funding, and facilitates program implementation and coordination between federal agencies. The Forum expects to work closely with Reclamation in providing the states thoughts about desirable qualifications to fill this important position.

Status of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

In a letter dated December 7, 2022, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) provided a Biological Opinion in response to a request from Reclamation for Endangered Species Act coverage for two new actions by the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Program (LCR MSCP). The two actions are: (1) increasing the amount of reduction in flow coverage provided under the LCR MSCP in river Reach 2 (from Hoover Dam to Davis Dam) and river Reach 3 (from Davis Dam to Parker Dam) up to 1.574 MAF/year, from the current coverage of 845,000 and 860,000 acre-feet/year, respectively; and (2) implementing proposed conservation measures, including habitat creation, management, and protection, to minimize the potential effects to species associated with the requested increases in flow reductions. The Biological Opinion found that enhanced habitat protection and reduction in Colorado River flows, as proposed, are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Yuma Ridgway's rail, bonytail, razorback sucker, or the northern Mexican gartersnake and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for bonytail. The Biological Opinion satisfies both the Section 7 and Section 10 permit requirements for the LCR MSCP.

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

Department of Interior Notice of Intent to Prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

As reported in the November Monthly Report to the Board, On October 28, 2022, the Department of Interior published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to Prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the December 2007 Record of Decision Entitled Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The NOI includes proposed alternatives to revise the December 2007 Record of Decision associated with the Colorado River Interim Guidelines. Reclamation requests that the public submit comments concerning the scope of the analysis, potential alternatives, and identification of relevant information, and studies on or before December 20, 2022. Board staff continue working with the Board member agencies to develop a set of comments regarding preparation of the proposed SEIS.

Reclamation launches Post-2026 Integrated Technical Education Workgroup

On December 7th, 2022, Reclamation held the inaugural meeting of the “Post-2026 Integrated Technical Education Workgroup”. Technical staff from the Board and several of California’s water agencies are participating in the work group. Reclamation’s goal with the work group is to assist interested partners from across the Basin in gaining a better understanding of the technical tools and approaches that Reclamation anticipates using in the Post-2026 Process to develop the next set of operating guidelines. Reclamation will offer education about the models, data, and concepts used frequently in its studies, and share information specifically about the technical framework that will support the Post-2026 Process.

The meeting on the 7th included participation from Tribes, States, water agencies, non-governmental organizations, other federal agencies, and Mexico whose input will be critical to the successful development of new long-term operating guidelines. During this first meeting, Reclamation summarized the technical approaches used in previous Colorado River Basin studies, including the 2007 Interim Guidelines, 2012 Basin Study, Minutes 319 and 323, The 2018 Ten Tribes Basin Study, and the 2019 Drought Contingency Plans. Particular attention was paid to the assumptions of current and future water supply and demands, and how the studies characterized vulnerability and risk. Reclamation also introduced the concept of Robust Decision Making that will play a large role in the technical analysis for the Post-2026 activities. Steps in the proposed analysis will consider many different possible assumptions of future water supply and

water demand to evaluate tradeoffs, test the robustness of management strategies, and characterize vulnerabilities.

Washington, D.C. Report

Legislation

California water agencies and NGOs submitted a letter to Congressional leadership advocating for the inclusion of the *Salton Sea Projects Improvements Act (S. 2693)* and the *Colorado River Basin Conservation Act (S. 4579)*. These two bills were paired together during a markup in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee earlier this year. Earlier this month, Senator Hickenlooper introduced a stand-alone version of his bill, S. 4579.

Senator Padilla's *Salton Sea Improvements Act (S. 2693)* would expand Reclamation's authority to participate in large-scale restoration projects, even if they do not have a research focus. Projects could improve air and water quality, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and improve public health in and around the Salton Sea.

Senator Hickenlooper's *Colorado River Basin Conservation Act (S. 4579)* would authorize the Upper Basin System Conservation Pilot Program (SCPP), which is a successful program whereby water users are paid to reduce water use. As a result, the conserved water is available to benefit the system by staying in the river longer and helping improve tributary flows, watershed health, and depleted storage supplies at Lake Powell or other facilities. The bill had a hearing in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on December 1st.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee is currently running a "hotline" on both of these bills, with a hope of being able to pass them through unanimous consent by the end of the year. Even if the Senate is successful in doing so, the path forward in the House seems to be a dead end as House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Westerman has been very clear in his opposition to moving any more natural resources bills in this session of the Congress.

Bipartisan Western Senators Call on Vilsack to Address Drought

On December 7th, a bipartisan group of 15 senators from California, Arizona, Washington, Nevada, New Mexico and Oregon wrote a [letter](#) calling on Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to divert appropriate resources to the drought crisis. Led by Senators Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) and Mitt Romney (R-Utah), the group "urges the USDA to give parity to the needs of our States as Western growers and communities face these dire conditions."

This includes using existing authorities to support projects and practices for Western farmers and ranchers to conserve water, improve their water infrastructure and efficiency, protect highly erodible lands plagued by drought, restore western range lands ability to retain water by

reconnecting floodplains to incised streams, and offer technical assistance for growers in drought-stricken regions. The senators are also requesting briefings from USDA and other key government groups “to discuss their steps to assist farmers and ranchers in our states facing severe drought.”

Tribal Waters

In conjunction with a White House summit, the EPA [proposed strengthening](#) Clean Water Act water quality standards for rivers and lakes in order to preserve the ability of Indian tribes to fish, gather, and use their lands in ceremonies.

Tribal members often eat more fish than the general public and are more vulnerable to pollutants that accumulate in fish tissue. In recent years, the EPA has ordered states to revise their pollution limits to protect tribal uses.

Great Basin Saline Lakes

The Senate [passed a bill](#) that would authorize a U.S. Geological Survey program over 5 years to assess saline lakes in the Great Basin and their role as habitat for migratory birds.
