

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

January 11, 2023

**COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT**

As of January 9<sup>th</sup>, the surface water elevation of Lake Powell was 3,524.62 feet with nearly 5.52 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 24% of capacity. The surface water elevation of Lake Mead was 1,045.11 feet with 7.33 MAF of storage, or 28% of capacity. As of January 8<sup>th</sup>, the total System storage was 19.07 MAF, or 33% of capacity, which is about 2.94 MAF less than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 58% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 69% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 88% of capacity at Morrow Point and 35% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 52% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of January 5<sup>th</sup>, the December observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.28 MAF (88% of normal) and the January forecasted inflow is 0.28 MAF (83% of normal). The forecasted unregulated inflow into Lake Powell for Water Year (WY) 2023 is 9.50 MAF (99% of normal). The April through July 2023 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell is 6.70 MAF (105% of normal).

Colorado Basin River Forecast Center Webinar

On January 9<sup>th</sup>, the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) held a webinar to review the current water supply conditions and forecast. CBRFC provided a brief review of the Southwest's monsoon season (June to September 2022), noting that Arizona's State Climatologist reported that the June to September precipitation ranked 9<sup>th</sup> wettest on record.

CBRFC provided a precipitation summary for the first three months (October through December) of Water Year 2023 (WY-2023). The southern and eastern regions of the Colorado River Basin experienced above average precipitation conditions during the first half of October. A storm during the last week of October brought snow across higher elevations of the Upper Colorado

River and Great Basins. Storm activity in November brought precipitation benefiting the areas of western Utah, and southwest Wyoming. During November, snowpack conditions improved across the northern Colorado River Basin but declined across the southern portion of the Basin due to brief periods of snowmelt in low to mid-elevation areas. In December, a majority of the Basin experienced above average precipitation due to multiple storm systems. CBRFC noted that there were only a “handful of days” during December that were without precipitation. In addition, there were several SNOTEL stations across the Wasatch Range in Utah and Sierra Madre/Park Ranges in northwest Colorado that ranked above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile and also ranked among the fifth wettest on record. Overall, precipitation conditions for WY-2023 to date are near normal to slightly above normal.

Modeled soil moisture conditions are near to below normal across several areas across the Upper Basin that contribute significantly to spring runoff, while variable conditions exist across the Lower Colorado River Basin. Compared to last year, soil moisture conditions in southwest Arizona have shown improvement.

Figure 1 shows that as of January 8<sup>th</sup>, SNOTEL stations are reporting near to above normal across the Colorado River Basin. In addition, snow water equivalent (SWE) conditions in the Upper and Lower Colorado River Basin most significant runoff regions, range from 107% to 188% of median in the Upper Basin and 92% to 228% of median in the Lower Basin Colorado River Basin.

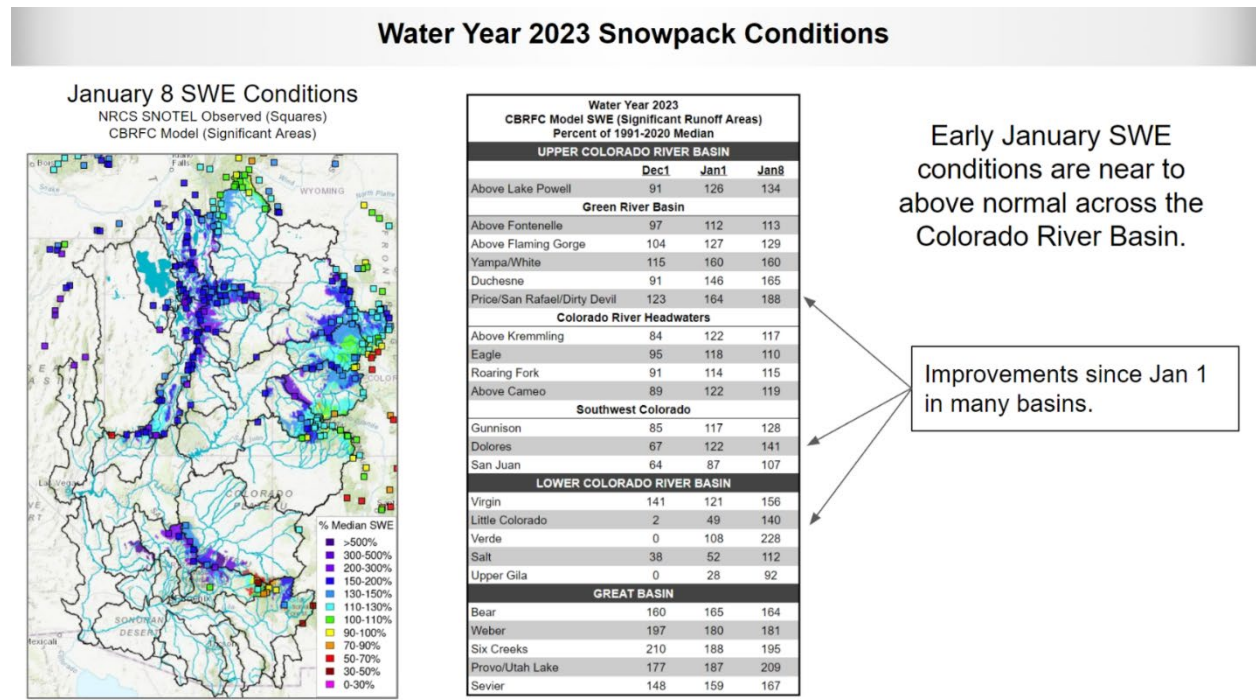


Figure 1- Early January Colorado River Basin SWE conditions

The January 1<sup>st</sup> water supply forecasts for April to July runoff volumes for the Upper Colorado River Basin range from 85%-105% and 95% - 175% in the Lower Colorado.

Over the next few days, a few storms are forecasted to impact the Colorado River Basin. The current storm impacting California is expected to move to Utah, Colorado, and northern Arizona through the middle of the week bringing up to 0.5 inches of precipitation to lower elevations and 1" of snow to higher elevations. The Climate Prediction Center's 8-14 Precipitation Outlook predicts elevated odds of precipitation and near to below average temperatures in the Colorado River Basin.

The next CBRFC Water Supply Forecast webinar is scheduled for Tuesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>. Register for the future webinars at the following link:

<https://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/news/wswebinar.html>.

## **COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES**

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation closed the public comment period for the 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 Board and several of the Board member agencies provided comments to Reclamation. Following discussions at the Colorado River Water Users Association in December held in Las Vegas, Nevada, the Seven Basin States Principals, and technical staff continue to meet in an attempt to develop a Seven States consensus-based framework alternative to provide to Reclamation for inclusion in the SEIS. The States continue to meet with the expectation of developing a consensus alternative by the end of January.

## **GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES**

### Washington, D.C. Report

#### *FY23 Appropriations*

Congress finally wrapped up the FY23 appropriations process by passing an omnibus spending bill on December 23<sup>rd</sup>. The bill will fund the federal government through September 30, 2023, and includes several relevant legislative proposals, including:

- \$50 million to implement the Colorado River DCP

- \$38 million for drought response under the WaterSMART Program
- \$65 million for WaterSMART grants
- \$12 million for WIIN Act Desalination and Water Purification projects
- \$17 million for desalination and water purification research
- \$134 million for WIIN Act storage projects
- \$60 million for Title XVI projects
- \$33 million for CALFED and legislative language extending the CALFED authorization
- \$20 million for Salinity Control Title I
- \$6 million for Salinity Control Title II
- \$80 million for Sites Reservoir

Some notable report language:

- \$50,000,000 shall be for implementing the Drought Contingency Plan in the Lower Colorado River Basin to create or conserve recurring Colorado River water that contributes to supplies in Lake Mead and other Colorado River water reservoirs in the Lower Colorado River Basin or projects to improve the long-term efficiency of operations in the Lower Colorado River Basin
- Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program - Reclamation is directed to provide to the Committees not later than 30 days after enactment of this Act a briefing on the plan to implement this program.
- Drought Contingency Plans - Reclamation is encouraged to provide sufficient funding for activities that support drought contingency plans to conserve water and reduce risks from ongoing drought for the Upper and Lower Colorado River basins.
- Lake Powell - Reclamation is encouraged to work closely with relevant stakeholders as the current severe drought situation develops.
- Salton Sea Restoration - Reclamation is encouraged to partner with federal, state, and local agencies and coordinate use of all existing authorities and funding sources to support the State of California's Salton Sea Management Program and reduce the likelihood of severe health and environmental impacts and to include appropriate funding for these efforts in future budget submissions.

The following bills were also included in the omnibus:

Salton Sea Projects Improvement Act (S. 2693/H.R. 3877) – this bill authorizes \$10 million for Salton Sea restoration projects. The bill originally authorized \$250 million for the same purpose but the authorization was reduced to ease the bill’s path through Congress. This was done with approval from Reclamation since there is significant funding available for the same purpose from the Inflation Reduction Act.

Colorado River System Conservation Pilot Program (SCPP) (S. 4579/H.R. 9173) – this bill extends Reclamation’s authorization to participate in SCPP for 2 years. The program provides payments to Upper Basin water users for voluntary reductions in consumptive use. The Upper Colorado

River Commission has recently restarted the program and will use funding from the Inflation Reduction Act. This bill gives Reclamation explicit authority to participate.

*Water Resources Development Act (WRDA)*

The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) was added on to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and was signed into law on December 23<sup>rd</sup>. The bill authorizes the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to carry out flood control, improve waterways, and conduct ecosystem restoration work. Notably, the legislation requires the Corps to evaluate the benefits of using natural infrastructure approaches, such as restoring source watersheds, to enhance the resilience of Western water supplies and infrastructure.

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