



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

December 13, 2023

**COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT**

As of December 11<sup>th</sup>, the water surface elevation of Lake Powell was 3,570.58 feet with nearly 8.56 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 37% of capacity. The water surface elevation of Lake Mead was 1,065.93 feet with 8.88 MAF of storage, or 34% of capacity. As of December 10<sup>th</sup>, the total System storage was 24.86 MAF, or 43% of capacity, which is about 5.74 MAF more than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of December 3<sup>rd</sup>, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 72% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 88% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 91% of capacity at Morrow Point and 71% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 67% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of December 1<sup>st</sup>, November observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.38 MAF (91% of normal) and the December inflow forecast is 0.32 MAF (98% of normal). The forecasted inflow into Lake Powell for WY-2024 is 7.62 MAF (79% of normal). The forecasted April through July 2024 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell was 4.8 MAF (75% of normal). The precipitation to date is 88% of normal.

**COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES**

Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program Implementation

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum) and the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Advisory Council (Advisory Council) both met October 24-25, in Santa Fe, NM.

Section 303 of the Clean Water Act requires that water quality standards are reviewed every three years. The Forum reviewed standards and an implementation plan for salinity standards in the Colorado River recommended by the Forum's Work Group and approved the report prepared

by the Work Group. The report is now available to the water quality agencies of the seven basin states for inclusion in their state water quality standards.

Reclamation provided an update to the Forum regarding Paradox Valley Unit (PVU) operations. The current injection test resumed on June 22 and is ongoing. Reclamation continues to track seismic activity in the area. The greatest magnitude earthquake thus far in 2023 measured 1.7 on the Richter scale.

Reclamation reported to the Forum on the results of a recent Request for Information (ROI) from parties capable of managing and disposing of brine from the existing pipeline. Reclamation received multiple responses to the ROI and is continuing to collect additional information to guide future operations at PVU.

Aaron Mead of the Metropolitan Water District will serve as the new chair of the Forum.

The next meetings of the Forum and Advisory Council have tentatively been scheduled for the week of June 3, 2024.

#### Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

Reclamation is developing a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to the 2016 Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan (LTEMP) for Glen Canyon Dam, in order to analyze additional flow options that could disadvantage smallmouth bass. As part of the SEIS, Reclamation is also considering revisions to the sediment accounting periods and High Flow Experiment (HFE) implementation windows based on the latest scientific information, including experience to-date conducting HFEs at Glen Canyon Dam. The public comment period for the scoping process closed on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Reclamation has released a [Scoping Summary Report](#) that includes a summary of the scoping comments and a summary of the key themes and resource issues identified during scoping. Reclamation is planning to issue the final SEIS and Record of Decision by June 2024.

The Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program's (GCDAMP) Technical Work Group (TWG) met October 7 and 8 in Phoenix, AZ. The TWG voted unanimously to reconvene the Socioeconomic Ad Hoc Group (SEAHG). The SEAHG is charged with working with the Grand Canyon Monitoring and Research Center to recommend a work plan project that might help achieve the LTEMP hydropower and energy resource goal to "maintain or increase Glen Canyon Dam (GCD) electric energy generation, load following capability, and ramp rate capability, and

minimize emissions and costs to the greatest extent practicable, consistent with improvement and long-term sustainability of downstream resources.”

The TWG received a preliminary report on impacts for the spring high flow experiment. Substantial sediment deposition occurred at most sites from Upper Marble Canyon to Diamond Creek during the experiment. The magnitude of sandbar building was comparable to previous HFEs. High dam releases during the summer caused substantial erosion; however, some sediment deposited during the HFE remains.

The TWG received an update from the National Park Service regarding the chemical treatment that was performed in the slough located 12 miles above Lees Ferry from August 26 to 28. The chemical treatment was a rapid response action targeted to address invasive fish in the slough. Carp, green sunfish, bluegill, smallmouth bass, flannelmouth sucker, rainbow trout, and brown trout were identified in the slough during the chemical treatment.

The TWG received an update from the National Park Service regarding potential modifications to the slough that would make it less hospitable for nonnative fish. The National Park Service’s Glen Canyon National Recreation Area has not yet decided on a pathway for modification of the slough. The slough is recognized as a hotspot for breeding of warmwater invasive fish, including smallmouth bass. The potential establishment of smallmouth bass below Glen Canyon Dam presents a high risk to humpback chub, a federally listed threatened species. Potential modification of the slough is intended to restore flow through the site. Increased flow would reduce temperatures and increase velocities, likely disrupting fish spawning. This potential action is a key component of a strategy to deter invasive fish establishment below Glen Canyon Dam and in the Grand Canyon.

The TWG received a report on monitoring of invasive fish species. Increasing numbers of invasive fish species are being found in Glen Canyon and Grand Canyon. Smallmouth bass have been identified further down river from Glen Canyon Dam than during previous monitoring trips.

The GCDAMP will hold its Annual Reporting Meeting on January 23 and 24, followed by a meeting of the TWG on January 25.

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

The Steering Committee of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) met in Las Vegas, NV on October 18.

Reclamation reported to the LCR MSCP Steering Committee and Permittees that Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation has been requested to be initiated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide coverage for 1) increasing the amount of reduction in flow coverage provided under the LCR MSCP in Reaches 2 through 5 (from Hoover Dam to Imperial Dam) in the range of 2.083 to 2.5 million acre-feet per year (MAFY), from the current coverage of 1.574 MAFY and 2) implementing proposed conservation measures, including minimization measures, additional monitoring and research, and habitat creation as an integral part of the proposed action to fully offset the potential effects on species and their habitats associated with the requested increases in flow reductions.

The Steering Committee is considering holding a meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 13, 2023. The LCR MSCP Financial Work Group is scheduled to hold a virtual meeting on February 22, 2024.

## **GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES**

### *Status of Basin States Activities*

The revised draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for “Near-Term Colorado River Operations” was released in October. The forty-five day review and comment period closed on December 11, 2023. A comment response letter was prepared by the three Lower Basin states and submitted to Reclamation on December 11<sup>th</sup>. The Lower Basin States letter agrees with the revised draft SEIS conclusion that the No Action Alternative and the Lower Division States’ Proposal, referred to as the “Proposed Alternative”, provides a reasonable range of alternatives to reduce the risk of reaching critical elevations at Lakes Powell and Mead. The letter also requested that elements of Action Alternatives 1 and 2, included in the earlier version of the draft SEIS, should not be included in the preferred alternative that would be identified in the Final SEIS and subsequent Record of Decision. The revised draft SEIS Proposed Alternative is comprised of the Lower Basin States Interim Period Plan submitted to Reclamation in May 2023, and was intended to fully supplant both of those earlier Action Alternatives. The Upper Basin states, through the Upper Colorado River Commission, submitted a separate letter, in which they expressed concern about the sufficiency and enforceability of the Lower Basin’s reductions. A copy of the Lower Basin States and Upper Basin States comment response letter has been included in the hand-out materials.

The Basin States and Lower Basin States have continued to hold a series of technical meetings associated with development of various elements that could be included in the post-2026

operating guidelines. Technical representatives of the seven Basin states, Lower Basin states, and within California continue to meet and evaluate modeling data that aid in the development of operational scenarios that can help inform future decision-making. The seven Basin states remain committed to continue collaboration towards the development of a consensus-based approach for post-2026 operations that can be analyzed by Reclamation in its post-2026 Draft EIS in late-2024.

*Reclamation's Post-2026 Operations Exploration Web Tool Training and Public Release*

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, Reclamation released the Post-2026 Operations Exploration Web Tool to the public. Reclamation, in collaboration with the University of Colorado and Virga Labs, created the Web Tool, which allows users to generate and explore Post-2026 operational strategies for Lakes Powell and Mead and then analyze the performance, robustness and vulnerability of selected strategies across various metrics.

The Web Tool will be used to evaluate alternatives during the Post-2026 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. On November 8<sup>th</sup> and November 14<sup>th</sup>, CRB Staff members participated in in-person and virtual trainings sessions for the Web Tool.

The Web Tool, is available online at: <https://www.crbpost2026dmdmdu.org/>.

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