



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

August 14, 2024

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT

As of August 5th, the water surface elevation of Lake Powell was 3,583.86 feet with nearly 9.61 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 41% of capacity. The water surface elevation of Lake Mead was 1,061.37 feet with 8. MAF of storage, or 33% of capacity. As of August 4th, the total System storage was 25.85 MAF, or 44% of capacity, which is about 18 AF more than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of August 1st, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 85% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 88% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 95% of capacity at Morrow Point and 74% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 71% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of August 1st, July observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.65 MAF (67% of normal) and the August inflow forecast is 0.21 MAF (56% of normal). The forecasted inflow into Lake Powell for WY-2024 is 7.79 MAF (81% of normal). The forecasted April through July 2024 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell was 5.1 MAF (80% of normal). The precipitation to date is 98% of normal.

2025 Colorado River Annual Operating Plan

On July 25th, Reclamation hosted the second consultation meeting for the development of the 2025 Annual Operating Plan (AOP) for the Colorado River System via webinar to provide an overview of Upper and Lower Basin hydrology and operations as well as review and accept comments for the second Draft AOP. Section 602(b) of 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 January 1st elevations in the following year are utilized in determining the operations tiers for the coordinated operation of Lakes Powell and Mead.

Based on the May and July 2024 24-Month Study inflow scenarios, the July most probable projected operational tier for Lake Powell in Water Year 2025 (WY-2025) is the Mid-Elevation Release Tier, with the most probable release of 7.48 MAF from Glen Canyon Dam.

It was determined that the most probable operational tier for Lake Mead is the Level 1 Shortage Condition. However, as referenced above, it is the August 2024 24-Month Study that will determine the official operating tiers for both Lakes Powell and Mead, and this will be updated and documented in the final version of 2025 AOP. Finally, the draft 2025 AOP projects a delivery of 1.45 MAF, pursuant to the 1944 Water Treaty, but this delivery amount may be adjusted for water savings contributions in accordance with Minutes No. 323 and No. 330.

The current draft of the proposed 2025 AOP can be viewed online at:
https://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/rsvrs/ops/aop/AOP25_draft.pdf.

The third consultation is scheduled for September 11, 2024 at 12:00 pm PDT / 1:00 pm MDT.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES

Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

Reclamation signed a Record of Decision (ROD) for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the 2016 Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (LTEMP SEIS) on July 3rd. The LTEMP SEIS modifies two aspects of the LTEMP: (1) incorporation of experimental flows to disrupt the spawning of smallmouth bass (smallmouth bass flows) and (2) updates to the protocol for high-flow experiments (HFEs) that adjust sediment accounting periods and implementation windows.

Smallmouth bass flows are intended to protect endangered humpback chub in Glen and Grand Canyons. The LTEMP SEIS analyzed five flow smallmouth bass flow alternatives and identified the “cool mix flow alternative” as the preferred alternative, which consists of releasing water from the hydropower penstocks as well as the river outlet works. The river outlet works are approximately 100 feet below the penstocks and can release cooler water downstream. Power is not generated by water released through the river outlet works.

Reclamation began implementing smallmouth bass flows on July 9th after temperatures downstream of Glen Canyon Dam reached temperatures sufficiently high to facilitate smallmouth bass spawning and thus triggering the experimental flow. Reclamation’s press release regarding the smallmouth bass flows is available online at: <https://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/news-release/4903>.

The Technical Work Group (TWG) of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (GCDAMP) met July 9 – 10 in Flagstaff, Arizona.

The TWG elected Mr. Seth Shanahan of the Southern Nevada Water Authority as chair and Ms. Michelle Garrison of the Colorado Water Conservation Board as vice-chair. CRB staff thank Mr. Shanahan and Ms. Garrison for their continued service to the GCDAMP.

The TWG received an update on the implementation of smallmouth bass flows. Implementation of the flow includes daily fluctuations intended to balance the needs of the Western Area Power Administration with the protection of an endangered species. Fluctuations in flow are designed to ensure river temperatures do not fluctuate by greater than 4 degrees in a single day.

The TWG considered whether or not to recommend a draft triennial work plan developed by the U.S. Geological Survey’s Grand Canyon Monitoring and Research Center (GCMRC) and Reclamation for FY 2025 – 2027 to the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG). The AMWG is tasked with recommending a triennial work plan to the Secretary of the Interior to facilitate the activities of the GCDAMP which are carried out by GCMRC and Reclamation. The TWG membership determined that additional time was needed to better address tribal concerns, ensure sufficient fish monitoring for Endangered Species Act compliance and evaluation of smallmouth bass flows, and to allocate resources within a budget that is anticipated to remain flat. The TWG agreed to hold a virtual meeting prior to the upcoming August AMWG meeting to finalize a triennial workplan recommendation.

The TWG received a report on invasive non-native fish captures below Glen Canyon Dam. As of July 10th, 76 smallmouth bass had been captured below Glen Canyon Dam. Of the 76 smallmouth bass, 21% were captured during routine interagency monitoring and 79% had been captured during targeted removal efforts. The furthest distance below Glen Canyon Dam which a smallmouth bass had been captured is river mile 6.9. No age zero smallmouth bass had so far been captured in 2024. In addition to smallmouth bass, researchers are keeping a particular eye on other non-natives in the river, including green sunfish and walleye.

The TWG received a report on the status of the rainbow trout fishery. Catch rates remain low and are below the objective for the fishery of 1.0 fish/hour (catch per unit effort) set by the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Spring 2024 growth and condition data suggest a rebound is possible. Ongoing efforts are occurring to assess potential causes of the decline and inform future management decisions.

The TWG received public comments from representatives of the fishing community expressing concern as to the status of the rainbow trout fishery.

The TWG held two virtual meetings, July 31st and August 8th to continue the consideration of the triennial workplan. During the August 8th meeting, the TWG approved a resolution recommending the triennial workplan to the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG).

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) fully executed an agreement to purchase the Gabrych property. LCR MSCP funds were transferred on August 1st. The agreement closes on August 21st.

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

Washington, D.C. Report

Federal Funding Announcements

Earlier this week, the Department of the Interior (DOI) announced \$105 million in new grants that will help enhance drought resilience in the West as part of the WaterSMART water conservation and efficiency program. Several California water agencies received money as part of this announcement.

Reclamation announced Phase II of its Upper Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program, known as “Bucket 2 Environmental Drought Mitigation” which will utilize part of the remaining \$450 million from the Inflation Reduction Act to fund projects that provide “general environmental benefits or ecosystem/habitat restoration benefits that address issues directly caused by drought.”

The Department of Agriculture announced \$400 million for farm water conservation efforts in the West after several western senators sent a letter requesting drought funding earlier this year. Eighteen irrigation districts, including IID, may receive funding to work with farmers to reduce water use and maintain agricultural production.

Legislation

Last month, members of the Arizona delegation introduced legislation (H.R. 8940 and S. 4633) to settle water rights claims of the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, and San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe in Arizona. Known as “The Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act,” Congressman Juan Ciscomani (R-AZ) and Senators Kelly and Sinema are looking to move their legislation this Congress. The House held a hearing on Rep. Ciscomani’s bill last month.

The Senate passed the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) last month, which authorizes feasibility studies for 62 Army Corps projects, including flood risk management in California. The House passed its own version of WRDA a few weeks ago.

Energy and Water Appropriations

Earlier this month, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed the Energy and Water appropriations bill which would fund Reclamation at a little more than \$1.8 billion, which amounts to a six percent increase above the current funding level. The bill includes \$50 million for DCP implementation, which is significantly more than the President’s budget request. It also includes a one-year authorization extension for the Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basins recovery programs.

Report language:

Colorado River Basin—Despite improving hydrology, the Colorado River basin reservoirs remain low after multiple years of drought, which poses a severe risk for Tribes, farmers, ranchers, cities, wildlife, and the local economies that rely on these water resources. Reclamation is encouraged to provide funding in future budget requests for activities that support water conservation, improve watershed scale planning, upgrade water infrastructure, protect land from erosion, and create long-term resiliency on changing landscapes.

Lower Colorado River—Reclamation has worked to address excess flows of Colorado River water to Mexico, but there still remains excess flows beyond the Treaty requirements. Persistent drought and projected long-term water demands have heightened this concern. To help address future impacts on the Lower Colorado River Basin, the Committee directs Reclamation to explore methods for further reducing excess flows to Mexico and shall report to the Committee by no later than February 2025.

Army Corps report language:

Finally, the Committee recommends \$1,000,000 for the Corps to establish a pilot program to remove invasive plant species in riparian areas that contribute to drought conditions in the Lower Colorado River Basin, the Rio Grande River Basin, the Texas Gulf Coast Basin, and the Arkansas-White-Red Basin, per section 8305 of WRDA 2022.

We don’t expect the appropriations process to be finalized before the election. The House and Senate are on recess until September 9th and we can assume that there will be a continuing resolution to keep the government operating until an agreement is reached.