Colorado River Board of California

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

October 9, 2024

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT

As of October 7th, the water surface elevation of Lake Powell was 3,577.71 feet with nearly 9.11 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 39% of capacity. The water surface elevation of Lake Mead was 1,063.95 feet with 8.73 MAF of storage, or 33% of capacity. As of October 6th, the total System storage was 25.07 MAF, or 43% of capacity, which is about 133 kilo-acre feet (KAF) less than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of October 2nd, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 71% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 86% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 95% of capacity at Morrow Point; 76% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 66% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of October 1st, September observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.21 MAF (60% of normal) and the October inflow forecast is 0.29 MAF (64% of normal). The preliminary observed inflow into Lake Powell for WY-2024 is 7.98 MAF (83% of normal). The observed April through July 2024 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell was 5.33 MAF (83% of normal). The precipitation to date is 11% normal.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES

Yuma Area Projects Update

Reclamation hosted stakeholder webinars on September 10th and 12th to provide information on several efforts led by the Yuma Area Office.

Reclamation reported on its operation of the Minute 242 wellfield, a series of wells along the Arizona border with Mexico. Baseline operation of the 242 Wellfield typically yields approximately 55,000 AF/yr. This water is delivered to Mexico in satisfaction of the 1944 U.S./Mexico Water Treaty, reducing the amount of water released from Lake Mead for delivery to Mexico. Reclamation reported that it was conducting a pilot study in 2024 which would keep the wells operating more often, eliminating wear-and-tear on the wells from frequent shutdowns and restarts. Reclamation also reported that it was in the process of drilling additional wells which would produce an additional 25,000 AF/yr that could be delivered to Mexico. Upgrades to existing wells are also planned to begin in April 2025.

Reclamation reported on several projects aimed at reducing excess deliveries to Mexico. Approximately 20,000-30,000 AF of water is delivered to Mexico annually in excess of treaty deliveries; reducing excess flows would have the effect of saving water in Lake Mead. Reclamation reported that it had initiated a pilot study in August 2024 at Brock and Senator Wash reservoirs, aiming to slightly reduce the average storage levels at the reservoirs, so that there is more space available to capture water that would otherwise become excess flows to Mexico. It takes approximately three days for water to travel from Parker Dam, the last upstream storage facility, to Imperial Dam, during which time demand or weather may change water orders. Brock and Senator Wash Reservoirs are used to smooth out the difference between orders and diversions.

Reclamation is also undertaking an analysis of opportunities to build new regulatory storage facilities in the Yuma area. A value planning study was carried out to evaluate nine different options that would increase regulatory storage. Two preferred options were identified: raising Imperial Dam or building Paradise Cove Reservoir. The current storage capacity of Imperial Dam is approximately 1,100 AF; raising the dam's overflow weir by two feet would increase storage behind the dam by 5,000-10,000 AF. The Paradise Cove site is on BLM land adjacent to the river in Arizona, approximately five miles from the Northerly International Boundary (NIB). If constructed, the Paradise Cove reservoir would cover approximately 100 acres and provide 1,500-2,000 AF of new storage. Reclamation is embarking on an appraisal study design report for the two sites, which they estimate will be completed by May 2026.

Basin States Discussions

On September 24th, the Lower Basin States submitted a joint letter to Reclamation Commissioner Camille Touton requesting that Reclamation consult with the Lower Basin as Reclamation and the Upper Basin States pursue a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that would allow the Upper Basin to store water in Upper Basin reservoirs, including Lake Powell. Through the Upper Colorado River Commission (UCRC), the Upper Basin proposes to identify projects that reduce use or demand in the Upper Basin and provisionally account for these water savings in operationally neutral accounts in Upper Basin reservoirs. Projects funded by Inflation Reduction Act funding could be eligible for the program. In their letter, the Lower Basin states emphasized that Upper Basin "credit" for conserved water in Colorado River Storage Project reservoirs require significant consultation with the Lower Basin and noted that in the Lower Basin, conservation funded by Reclamation cannot be used to create Intentionally Created Surplus or to meet shortages.

Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum's (Forum) Work Group (Work Group) met virtually from September 17th–19th.

The Work Group received an update from Reclamation regarding operations at the Paradox Valley Unit (PVU). PVU continues to operate at two-thirds capacity, at a steady rate of 115 gpm

(similar to 2023), and is expected to remove 64,000 tons of salt in 2024 (higher than in 2023 due to the lack of shutdowns this year). Seismic activity in the region has diminished since substantial activity in March 2024. Longer term options continue to be reviewed. Scientific research in Paradox Valley has been advancing. USGS has recently released two scientific reports on Paradox Valley, a conceptual framework report and groundwater modeling report. USGS, Reclamation and the Work Group are planning to hold a meeting focused on the current science for Paradox Valley.

The Work Group received an update from Reclamation regarding the changes to the salinity model in CRSS v6 compared to CRSS v5. The changes resulted in an approximately 50% reduction in salt loading projected by the model. Above and including just below Lake Mead, CRSS v5 over-estimated salinity. CRSS v6 now simulates salinity more accurately, with reduced salinity loading and concentration. Agricultural diversions in the Upper Basin are lower in CRSS v6, which results in reduced salt loading from agricultural users and higher Colorado River flow generally, leading to much lower and historically more accurate salt loading and concentration below Lake Mead and somewhat reduced loadings and concentrations further downstream in the Lower Basin. When coupled with the Salinity Economic Impact Model (SEIM), reductions in projected salt loading and concentration result in similarly reduced projected future economic damages from salinity, from $447M by 2040 with CRSS v5 down to $363M by 2040 with CRSS v6, assuming no additional salinity controls.

The Work Group received an update on efforts to resolve ongoing funding challenges through the proposed Salinity Control Fix Act. The Forum Executive Director reported that Forum staff have faced challenges including the proposed legislation in the current legislative agenda but are actively working with partners in Washington to advance the legislation. The 2025 Farm Bill, a previously promising vehicle for the Act, appears increasingly unlikely to pass in the current session.

The Advisory Council is in the beginning stages of developing ideas for future scientific research proposals under the U.S. Geological Survey's Scientific Investigations Reports (SIR) program. Those with ideas are encouraged to share them with Work Group representatives for consideration.

The Work Group will meet virtually on October 8th–9th, 2024.

The Salinity Control Forum and Advisory Council will hold in-person meetings on October 22nd–23rd, 2024, in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

The National Park Service has released an Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating a potential action to channelize the River Mile -12 slough within the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. The potential action is being considered in order to reduce water temperature and increase water velocity to help eliminate smallmouth bass reproduction, which has been

documented in this part of the river. Comments can be submitted online at: https://parkplanning.nps.gov/glcasloughea through October 14.

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

Salton Sea

A groundbreaking for the Species Conservation Habitat Expansion Project will be held on October 15th. The Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) Project is the first large-scale project of the state's 10-year plan. It will create a network of ponds and wetlands that help to reduce dust emissions that impact air quality by inundating exposed lakebeds. The project will also provide important fish and bird habitat. All major construction for the initial 4,110-acre project has been completed. Recent federal funding granted to the Salton Sea Management Program to accelerate restoration at the Sea is supporting expansion of the project footprint by an initial 750 acres.

The Salton Sea Summit will be held October 18–19 at the University of California Riverside's (UCR) Palm Desert Campus. The summit is sponsored by the UCR Salton Sea Task Force. Details and registration are available on the web at: https://www.saltonseasummit.org/.

Washington, D.C. Report

Water Legislation

Congress adjourned early after passing a continuing resolution (CR). This led the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to cancel a markup that included several water bills. These bills are expected to be considered as part of a year-end legislative package if one comes together. Bills of note include:

- S. 5012/H.R. 9515, to establish an interest-bearing account for the non-Federal contributions to the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (Padilla/Butler and Calvert/Napolitano); and,

- S. 4576, to amend the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015, to reauthorize the Colorado River System conservation pilot program (Hickenlooper/Barrasso).

Indian Affairs Water Rights Hearing

On September 25th, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held a hearing on several bills related to Native American water rights and resource management, including the Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 2024 (H.R. 8940/S. 4633). Senators Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) introduced the bill with the goal of ending a long-running

dispute in Arizona and securing water rights for the Navajo Nation, the Hopi Tribe and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe. The bill also creates a reservation for the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, aiming to end decades of litigation.

Testimonies from tribal leaders, such as Navajo President Buu Nygren and Hopi Chairman Timothy Nuvangyaoma, highlighted the need for secure water resources and infrastructure, including a $5 billion fund for water delivery systems. Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior (DOI), Bryan Newland, expressed the agency's support of the bill with technical assistance from DOI. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) expressed concerns over the $5 billion price tag and submitted a letter for the record from the water commissioners of Wyoming and Utah opposing the bill. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) expressed the need to collaborate with stakeholders across the Colorado River Basin and she submitted a letter for the record from the Southern Nevada Water Authority who also supports the legislation. Sen. Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) submitted a letter for the record from the State of New Mexico in support for the bill's goals, but also highlighted the challenges of leveraging infrastructure in New Mexico to complete the water settlement in Arizona.

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