• Colorado River Management Report

Summary

This Report provides a summary of the activities related to the Colorado River during December.

Detailed Report

Basin States Request Federal Funding for Colorado River Water Supply Study

In early February, representatives from the seven Colorado River Basin States submitted a letter to the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) expressing interest in developing and implementing a Colorado River Basin water supply study under the federal Basin Studies Program. The Program, which is part of the Department of Interior's Water for America Initiative, provides $4 million in federal funds to cost-share with state and local agencies to conduct water supply and demand studies in river basins in the West. The next step is that Reclamation will evaluate competitive submittals and recommend those to be funded.

The Basin States proposal is to further develop options that were considered in the States' Colorado River Augmentation Report, which was completed last year. The report listed several options for augmenting water supplies in the Colorado River Basin, and estimated the costs of each alternative. The most promising alternatives seem to be water desalination (most likely in Mexico), out-of-basin imports, weather modification, and tamarisk removal. If the Basin States' proposal is selected, Metropolitan, along with representatives from other agencies in the Basin, would partner with Reclamation to further study the effectiveness of such water supply options. The program funding would begin in late 2009.

Agencies Submit Letter to Reclamation Supporting Operation of the Yuma Desalting Plant

In late January, the three potential funding agencies for the Yuma Desalting Plant (Metropolitan, Southern Nevada Water Authority, and Central Arizona Water Conservation District) submitted a letter to Reclamation encouraging it to move forward with a one-year pilot operation of the Plant. Development of the pilot operation had slowed, as concerns were expressed from Mexico and environmental organizations. The three agencies encouraged Reclamation to work with Mexico to see if a proposal could be developed that would be supported by both countries. Options under discussion include the potential of pumping more groundwater in the United States and fallowing land in Mexico to provide additional water to the Cienega de Santa Clara, which currently receives agricultural drainage water not being desalted by the Plant.

Reclamation to Issue Policy for Moving Unused Water between States

In 2007, due to information obtained after the water year was over, Reclamation discovered that nearly 30,000 acre-feet of water that was allocated to the State of Arizona was not diverted in 2006. Had Arizona known that the water was available, the state could have diverted it, but under the rules governing accounting for the Colorado River, no credit can be giving for future diversions. However, in 2006, California had an overrun, and requested that the unused water offset its overrun. The states and Reclamation reached agreement to offset 2006 overruns Part of the agreement included a commitment to develop a policy to address such situations in the future. That policy, which is expected to be released in the near future, states that water identified after the end of the calendar year due to accounting errors can no longer be used to offset overruns in another state. Reclamation also committed to improve its accounting methodology to reduce the potential for such errors in the future.

Colorado Basin Heading for a Another Wet Year

Last year, the Colorado Basin had its wettest year in a decade, with a snowpack measuring 120% of average for the year. This year is trending toward another wet year on the Colorado River. Both December and January were above average snowfall in the Basin. As of February 1, the snowpack measures 111% of normal. Lake Powell is forecast to reach its highest level since 2002, and release the most water into Lake Mead in 10 years, more than 1 million acre-feet above the minimum release. This release is not enough to provide surplus water in 2010, but as both lakes rise, the likelihood of surplus increases.