



- Colorado River Management Report

Summary

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

Detailed Report

Metropolitan Submits Plan to Store up to 100,000 Acre-feet in Lake Mead

With a reduction in agricultural water demand in 2009, in mid-September Metropolitan submitted a revised water order to Reclamation which included storing up to 100,000 acre-feet of Intentionally Created Surplus credits in Lake Mead in 2009. Metropolitan's original water order included recovering up to 60,000 acre-feet of water stored in Lake Mead, but with implementation of the expanded Palo Verde Irrigation District land fallowing program and a drop in water demands within Imperial Irrigation District and Coachella Valley Water District, it now appears that Metropolitan may be able to store ICS water in Lake Mead this year. The water that would be stored this year would be based on water conserved from the Metropolitan-funded PVID fallowing program. It won't be known for certain how much water Metropolitan will store in Lake Mead until the end of the year, but any water stored would be available for diversion by Metropolitan next year, less a 5 percent reduction to provide benefits to the Colorado River System as a whole, per the Colorado River operating guidelines.

Basin States, Reclamation Refine Binational Water Management Proposal

In September, representatives from the Colorado River Basin States and the Bureau of Reclamation refined a proposal that would allow Mexico to better manage its water resources to prepare for possible future shortages. United States and Mexico officials have been meeting for several months to try and come to an agreement on how and when Mexico would take shortages, which would avoid the conflict of interpreting the U.S.-Mexico Treaty which requires shortages to Mexico during extraordinary drought conditions in the U.S. The proposal also allows Mexico to store water in Lake Mead in the near term that could be used later to help manage any shortage that would occur. The two countries have also been meeting to develop a framework whereby U.S. entities could partner with Mexico and fund conservation or desalination programs in Mexico and share the benefits of the water created.

The U.S. parties will present the refined proposal to Mexico at a meeting in Mexicali on October 14. If an agreement is reached, the International Boundary and Water Commission would prepare a minute to the U.S.-Mexico Treaty that would include the shortage provisions and framework for binational projects. If adopted, the proposal would be in effect through 2026, which is consistent with the implementation period of the 2007 Colorado River Guidelines.

Metropolitan's interest in the process is to develop a framework whereby binational water supply programs could be effectively implemented with adequate assurances that it will receive the water supply generated from any program it undertakes. Metropolitan is currently co-funding a study to determine the feasibility of constructing a seawater desalination plant in Baja California and is also interested in exploring agricultural conservation programs in the Mexicali Valley. Metropolitan's goal would be to ensure the framework approved by the two countries would allow such programs to move forward, if they turn out to be a cost-effective way of obtaining additional water supplies.

Some of the unresolved issues include providing environmental water to the Colorado River Delta. Mexico has expressed interest in enhancing the environmental quality of the Delta region, but so far no water is being provided to that area. The U.S. representatives have made no commitments but are willing to explore options to provide environmental flows to Mexico by actions such as funding land fallowing programs within Mexico. Discussions will continue at the October binational meeting.

Board Report (Colorado River Management Report)

Metropolitan Executes Yuma Desalting Plant Funding Agreement

Following Board approval in September, in early October Metropolitan, along with Southern Nevada Water Authority, Central Arizona Water Conservation District, and Reclamation are expected to execute an agreement to fund a one-year pilot operation of the Yuma Desalting Plant. On September 30, Reclamation concluded the environmental compliance component of the project, issuing a Finding of No Significant Impact associated with operation of the desalting plant. The first payment made by the project funders will go towards getting the plant ready for operation, which will take about five months to complete. The plant would be scheduled to begin operation in early spring of 2010 and Metropolitan would be able to receive additional supplies at that time.

As part of an International Boundary and Water Commission agreement between the United States and Mexico, the U.S. has agreed to deliver 10,000 acre-feet of non-storable water to the Cienega de Santa Clara wetlands in Mexico. With execution of the funding agreement, Reclamation will begin to divert unregulated water to the wetlands as it shows up at the international boundary. Once the Drop 2 project is completed, which is anticipated for early next year, the amount of non-storage water within the U.S. will drop significantly, so the 10,000 acre-feet needs to be delivered in the next several months.