



● Colorado River Management Report

Summary

This Report provides a summary of the activities related to the Colorado River during January 2010

Detailed Report

Proposed Solar Energy Projects Seek Water Supply from Colorado River

Two proposed solar energy developments near the Colorado River in California have filed applications with the Colorado River Board to receive water from the Lower Colorado Water Supply Project (Project). The Project was developed to provide a water supply for small users along the Colorado River, including the city of Needles, that do not have a contract with The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to meet their full domestic water supply needs. The capacity of the Project is 10,000 acre-feet, and currently less than half of that water has been dedicated. Under an agreement with Needles, Metropolitan receives any water produced by the Project that has not currently been assigned, which has ranged from 2,000 to 7,000 acre-feet per year.

Several agencies within California have expressed concern with allowing solar development to use water from the Project. Based on the number of pending solar energy developments proposed for the region, the demand for water for these projects could easily exceed the capacity of the Project. Metropolitan staff is working with the Colorado River Board, Reclamation, and agencies from other states to develop a proposal that could allow solar energy development to move forward without adversely impacting existing water users along the Colorado River, including Metropolitan. Options under consideration include providing a mechanism for solar energy projects to fund water augmentation projects that are not currently in place, such as brackish water desalination along the Lower Colorado River.

Reclamation to Revise Proposed Unauthorized Water Use Rule

In 2008, Reclamation had issued a proposed rule to limit unauthorized water use along the Lower Colorado River. That rule included regulating groundwater that could be hydrologically connected to the Colorado River; in some cases, pumping groundwater 30 miles away from the River would have been considered pumping Colorado River. For a number of reasons, including the administrative challenges associated with implementing such a rule, Reclamation has determined that it will implement the rule in a phased approach, and focus initially on unauthorized use within the Colorado River floodplain. Rules governing groundwater pumping further away from the Colorado River would be developed at a later time. It is anticipated that a notice for the revised rulemaking process will be issued later this year.

Powerful Storm brings Significant Inflow to Lower Colorado River

During late January, the Lower Colorado River was hit with one of the most powerful storms in decades, bringing a tornado to Blythe and flooding to the Yuma area. Releases from Lake Mead were minimized, but much of the water flowing into the Colorado River from tributaries could not be captured and 41,000 acre-feet of water above the treaty amount was lost and flowed into Mexico. Events like this highlight the need for completion of the Drop 2 Regulating Reservoir, which is under construction and could have captured a significant portion of this water. Construction of the Reservoir is scheduled for completion this April. While water was lost to Mexico, it is estimated Lake Mead benefitted from the storms and is 1 ½ feet higher as a result. **Representatives from the U.S. and Mexico Analyze Water Operational Studies**

Following up on preliminary discussions that occurred in 2009, representatives from the United States and Mexico met in January to analyze the impacts of different water operational scenarios being proposed by the two countries. The process is evaluating various options for how shortages would be applied to Mexico, how Mexico could store water in Lake Mead, and how agencies in the U.S. could partner to develop conservation and desalination projects with Mexico and share the water conserved or created. Among the parameters being

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evaluated are how such proposals would impact shortages within the United States and water quality impacts to the Colorado River. Following the technical discussions between the two countries, a policy-level meeting of the principals from the Colorado River Basin States and key agencies within Mexico will be held in the next few months to narrow down the proposal and determine which aspects to move forward for further evaluation and discussion.

Work Begins on Colorado River Basin Study

In January, the Colorado River Basin States and Reclamation executed the funding agreement for the 2-year, \$2 million study to evaluate options to meet the long-term water supply needs of the Colorado River Basin. A kick-off meeting was held, and three sub-committees were formed: one to evaluate current and future water supplies, one to evaluate current and future water demands, and one to evaluate system reliability metrics. In the study, Metropolitan will highlight its current efforts to reduce water demands, both within its service area and along the Colorado River.