



● Colorado River Management Report

Summary

This Report provides a summary of activities related to management of Metropolitan's Colorado River resources during May 2010.

Detailed Report

Interior, States Discuss Mexico Water Management Proposal

On May 25, the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Anne Castle, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Commissioner Mike Conner, and representatives from the Colorado River Basin States (Basin States) met to discuss options to advance a binational water management proposal with Mexico. The Basin States' representatives made it clear that any agreement with Mexico must include shortage criteria if they are to endorse it, however, the Basin States did not agree as to what criteria to base the shortage amounts on. Under the treaty between the United States and Mexico, Mexico is to share shortages in the same proportion that consumptive use is reduced in the United States due to extraordinary drought conditions. The method to determine that amount presents many challenges, and the Basin States do not yet have a consensus position on that determination. The Basin States will meet on June 10, 2010 to attempt to reach agreement on recommended shortage criteria for governing deliveries to Mexico.

At the meeting, Reclamation described the impacts of the April 4, 2010 earthquake to Mexico, with damage associated with the water infrastructure approaching \$750 million. Due to the significant impacts to its water delivery system, Mexico is unable to use its full 1.5 million acre-foot treaty allocation for irrigation this year. Mexico has rescheduled delivery of this water to the fall of 2010 and has been discussing options with Reclamation for managing its water over the next couple of years. The Options being discussed are (1) allow Mexico to store water in Lake Mead for future delivery, and (2) allow Mexico to sell water to contractors in the United States to help fund infrastructure repair. Metropolitan staff have said that they support the options being discussed, and would be interested in exploring options to purchase water from Mexico, provided that the water could be stored in Lake Mead for future delivery. In order for either of these options to move forward, an agreement would need to be reached in the next three months. A meeting with Mexico has been scheduled for June 24, 2010 to move the proposal forward.

Yuma Desalting Plant Starts, Operates Smoothly

On May 3, the Yuma Desalting Plant began operation smoothly, easing concerns that the long-term dormancy of the plant might have operational issues as it first starts up. The plant effluent is about 31 cfs, which is blended with 16 cfs of untreated water, and the blended amount is pumped to the Colorado River for delivery to Mexico. That water allows Reclamation to reduce its deliveries from Lake Mead, and the project funders accrue Intentionally Created Surplus storage credits in the Reservoir. Over 2,000 acre-feet of water were conserved during May; of which 80 percent of that total accumulates in Metropolitan's Lake Mead storage account. It is anticipated that about 30,000 acre-feet of water will be conserved during the one-year pilot operation of the Yuma Desalting Plant.

As part of the agreement to fund operation of the Yuma Desalting Plant, the project funders (Central Arizona Project, Southern Nevada Water Authority, and Metropolitan) are funding a program to monitor the changes to the Santa Clara Wetlands in Mexico resulting from the pilot operation. Over the last several months, baseline data has been collected and now that the plant is operating the potential changes in water quality and habitat density are being measured. A final report will be provided following completion of the pilot operation.

Reclamation Study Shows Increased Likelihood of Shortages

The National Weather Service’s final runoff forecast for the Upper Colorado River Basin was 69 percent of average, making 2010 the driest year in the last six years. As a result, Lake Powell is anticipated to lose about a half-million acre-feet of storage this water year (the water year is October 2009 – September 2010). With a reduction in Lake Powell storage, Lake Mead is also expected to decline significantly, and reach an elevation of 1,084 feet by the end of this water year: only 9 feet above the level where Reclamation would issue its first-ever shortage on the Lower Colorado River. If Lake Mead drops below 1,075 feet, a shortage would be declared, and Metropolitan’s access too much of its water stored in Lake Mead could be restricted. An updated study by Reclamation forecasts a 1 in 5 chance of shortage in 2012, increasing to about 1 in 3 by 2015. The Basin States are concerned by the study and have agreed to consult with Reclamation in advance of a shortage declaration to evaluate options to mitigate the impacts of any shortages.

The table below shows the actual and projected storage levels for Lake Mead and Lake Powell from 2000 to 2010. Note that the surplus and shortage triggers apply to the level of Lake Mead only.

