



● Colorado River Management Report

Summary

This report provides a summary of the activities related to management of Metropolitan's Colorado River resources during December 2010.

Detailed Report

United States and Mexico Reach Agreement to Defer Water Deliveries

Following many months of negotiations among representatives from the United States, Mexico, and the Colorado River Basin States, on December 20, an agreement was reached whereby Mexico may defer taking a portion of its 1.5 million acre-feet annual Colorado River apportionment through 2013 and recover the water beginning in 2014. The deferred deliveries will be stored in the Colorado River Basin reservoirs until recovered. The agreement provides Mexico time to repair its infrastructure that was damaged by the April 4, 2010 earthquake, without losing water. In total, Mexico may store up to 260,000 acre-feet in the United States through 2013, and any water stored would be subject to evaporation losses. The maximum amount of water that can be returned to Mexico in any one year is 200,000 acre-feet, which is within the delivery parameters of the 1944 Treaty with Mexico. Additionally the return of this water is restricted during years when a shortage is declared in the United States, unless a supplemental agreement is reached.

The agreement is the first step in the negotiation process with Mexico, and the governments of both countries will continue meeting to try to reach a more comprehensive agreement in 2011. Among the issues still to be decided is how Mexico will share in any shortage declaration on the Colorado River, and how binational water management projects (e.g., U.S. agencies funding desalination projects in Mexico) will be implemented. Metropolitan staff has been engaged in the negotiations and will continue to participate in 2011.

QSA Parties Execute Tolling Agreement over Salton Sea Delivery Dispute

On December 15, the Quantification Settlement Agreement parties (Imperial Irrigation District, Coachella Valley Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, and Metropolitan) signed an agreement to set aside, until June 1, 2011, any legal challenges associated with the delivery of 41,000 acre-feet of non-conserved water to the Salton Sea. The agreement provides time for the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to attempt to facilitate a settlement among the parties before a formal decision is made. Reclamation has scheduled meetings in January and February to further discuss the issues. Until a final decision is made, the delivery of non-conserved water to the Salton Sea will not impact Metropolitan's water supply from the Colorado River. Metropolitan will have stored about 88,000 acre feet of water in Lake Mead in 2010 under the Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS) program. Of that total, 41,000 acre-feet has been provided to Metropolitan on a conditional basis, pending a final decision by Reclamation.

Staff from Metropolitan and Bard Water District Discuss Potential Fallowing Program

On December 16, staff from Metropolitan met with staff and board members from Bard Water District to explore interest in developing a pilot fallowing program in 2011. The previous month, the Bard board had expressed interest in developing a fallowing program and directed staff to meet with Metropolitan to explore options. Under the proposal being discussed, Metropolitan would enter into a one-year agreement with individual farmers in the Bard Water District to fallow their land for up to six months. If staffs reach concurrence on fallowing terms, the draft agreement would be brought to Metropolitan's Board for consideration in February or March 2011.

SNWA Leaves 57,000 AF of Unused Water in Lake Mead

Concerned about the low water levels in Lake Mead, in December the Southern Nevada Water Authority SNWA decided to leave 57,000 acre-feet of Nevada's 300,000 acre-foot apportionment in Lake Mead to help raise the level of the reservoir. SNWA had been considering storing the water with the state of Arizona or with

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Metropolitan under interstate banking agreements, but decided instead to return the water to the system as unused water and receive no storage credit. SNWA is concerned not only about the potential for shortages in the next few years, but also the ability for Nevada to pump its full allotment of Colorado River water if the level in Lake Mead falls below SNWA intakes. The agency is building a new intake that will reach deeper in the Lake, but that intake is still several years from being operational. In addition to SNWA's action, Metropolitan added over 100,000 acre-feet of water to Lake Mead this year, with 88,000 acre-feet coming from the ICS program and another 15,000 acre-feet from funding the Yuma Desalting Plant. Unlike Nevada, however, Metropolitan may recover the water it stored in Lake Mead.

Water Year 2011 Off to a Wet Start

December 2010 brought heavy snowfall to the Colorado Basin, and as of January 1, 2011, the snowpack was nearly 150 percent of average for this time of year. This marks the highest January 1 snowpack level in more than a decade, and significantly increases the likelihood of additional releases being made from Lake Powell next summer, known as "equalization releases". On April 1, 2011, Reclamation will determine if such additional releases will be made, which would increase the level of Lake Mead by more than 21 feet this year. Lake Mead has already risen more than 4 feet during December alone, thanks to heavy rainfall along the Virgin River, which is a tributary to Lake Mead. Normally flowing around 200 cfs this time of year, on December 22 the Virgin River peaked at over 50,000 cfs.