



● **Colorado River Management Report**

Summary

This report provides a summary of the activities related to management of Metropolitan's Colorado River resources during February 2011.

Detailed Report

Yuma Desalting Plant Nears Completion of Successful Pilot Operation

The Yuma Desalting Plant is entering its final month of operation, following a successful one-year pilot run of the plant that had been essentially dormant for 20 years. The 10-month pilot operation, which began in May of 2010, will conserve a total of about 30,000 acre-feet of water in Lake Mead. The needed funds for the pilot operation were provided by Southern Nevada Water Authority, Central Arizona Project, and Metropolitan. The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) also provided funding for getting the plant ready for operation. The costs for the pilot operation have turned out to be much lower than the original estimates; Reclamation's current estimate of costs to operate the plant to date and conserve water in Lake Mead is \$311 per acre-foot.

As Reclamation begins to prepare to turn off the desalting plant, the pilot operation funders have been in discussions regarding where to go from here. As part of the pilot operation, the project partners also funded a research project to evaluate alternative methods to operate the plant more effectively, and an environmental monitoring program to evaluate potential changes to the neighboring wetlands resulting from plant operation. All of these efforts will be considered by the partners before deciding the next steps for the Yuma Desalting Plant. In the meantime, the plant will return to ready-reserve status.

Two Million Tons of Uranium Mill Tailings Removed from Moab with Recovery Act Funds

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided \$108 million to supplement funding to remove uranium mill tailings away from the Colorado River near Moab, Utah. The tailings are remains from processing uranium ore for national defense programs, and the Basin States have been concerned about the potential impacts to the Colorado River. The tailings are being moved via railroad to Crescent Junction, Utah, where they are being buried. The additional funding more than doubled the rate of tailing removal, and on February 24 reached a milestone of moving 2 million tons of tailings above the base amount. To date, about 77 percent of the funds have been used, and it is anticipated another half million tons will be moved with the remaining funds. It has been estimated that the removal process may be completed by the year 2025, contingent upon sufficient federal funding.

Representatives from U.S. and Mexico Meet to Further Binational Water Management Discussions

During February, the United States and Mexico sections of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), along with Reclamation, met to resume discussions to develop a binational water management proposal. In late 2010, the IBWC adopted Minute 318 to the U.S-Mexico Water Treaty, which allows Mexico to store water in U.S. reservoirs through 2013 and recover the water beginning in 2014. Mexico had been seeking storage to allow for time to repair infrastructure damage caused by the April 2010 Baja California earthquake without losing water. With the short-term agreement complete, both countries are ready to resume discussions on a long-term, and more comprehensive proposal.

The discussions in February focused on evaluating the negotiated process that was put in place in 2010, and discussing how to move forward. The parties agreed that the goal is to complete negotiations and adopt a new Treaty minute by the end of 2011. Issues that will need to be addressed include: agreement on voluntary shortages to Mexico, both trigger mechanisms and quantities, and providing flexibility to the salinity requirements as Mexico stores and recovers water. Such flexibility is needed to ensure that the United States does not have to provide additional blending water when deliveries are reduced. Metropolitan staff will keep the Board informed of developments as negotiations continue.