



● Colorado River Management Report

Summary

This Report provides a summary of the activities relating to management of Metropolitan's Colorado River Resources during October 2011.

Detailed Report

Imperial Irrigation District and San Diego County Water Authority File Joint Petition to Modify State Water Resources Control Board Order

On October 11, Imperial Irrigation District (IID) and San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) filed a joint petition with the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to modify the conditions of the state's water order approving the IID-SDCWA water transfer. The 2002 water order requires the delivery of mitigation water to the Salton Sea in increasing amounts through 2017; beginning in 2018, no mitigation water will be required. The concept behind the SWRCB order was for the IID-SDCWA transfer to have no material impact to the Salton Sea for 15 years, thereby providing time for California to develop and implement a restoration plan for the Salton Sea. In the eight years since the Quantification Settlement Agreement was signed and the water transfer implemented, California has completed an Environmental Impact Report for restoration of the Salton Sea, but has done little to advance any long-term restoration plan.

The modifications to the 2002 water order being sought by IID and SDCWA include eliminating the requirement to deliver mitigation water to the Salton Sea from 2014-2017, unless the state Legislature has adopted a restoration project for the Salton Sea by that time. In exchange for terminating mitigation water four years early, air quality and habitat mitigation would begin sooner with a diminishing Salton Sea. The modifications sought also include the ability to transfer some or all of the conserved water currently scheduled for delivery to the Salton Sea to SDCWA or Metropolitan. In response to IID's board resolution stating its intent to amend the IID-SDCWA transfer requirements, Metropolitan and the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) both sent letters to IID supporting the evaluation of alternative ways to mitigate the impacts of the IID-SDCWA transfer other than the current requirement to deliver water to the Salton Sea through 2017. Metropolitan's support was contingent on IID's agreement not to use non-conserved water sources for future deliveries to the Salton Sea and to pay back to the Colorado River System the non-conserved water that was delivered to the Salton Sea in 2010.

Colorado River Salinity Control Forum Reviews Successes, Current Challenges

On October 25 and 26, the Colorado River Salinity Control Forum (Forum) hosted its 85th meeting, and program successes and challenges were discussed. The Forum, which includes a representative from Metropolitan, approved the 2011 Review of Water Quality Standards for Salinity of the Colorado River System. The report highlights that despite a dry decade on the Colorado River and lowered reservoir storage, today the salinity of the Colorado River is significantly lower than it was when the Forum was formed in the early 1970s. Last year, the salinity in Lake Havasu averaged 623 parts per million (ppm): much lower than the 747 ppm criteria established in 1970. One of the reasons for the lower salinity levels is the completion of implementing salinity control projects in the Grand Valley of Colorado, where Grand Junction is located. A ceremony is planned within the next year to commemorate lining of ditches and use of sprinkler systems to reduce flood irrigation in the region, which contributes to salinity in the Colorado River.

Board Report (Colorado River Management Report)

The biggest challenge faced by the Forum is the uncertain future of the Paradox Valley project, the single biggest salinity control project ever undertaken. Currently, about 100,000 tons of salt are controlled each year by capturing hyper-saline groundwater and injected it 3 miles below the ground surface. Increasing groundwater pressure, however, is making it uncertain as to whether the well can continue through the mid 2020s, as was originally planned. Under the direction of the Forum, Reclamation is preparing a report evaluating various options for capturing the saline groundwater in the future, including looking into constructing evaporation ponds or drilling a new well. The report is expected to be available in 2012.