THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Report

Office of the General Manager

- **Colorado River Management Report**

Summary

This report provides a summary of activities related to management of Metropolitan's Colorado River resources for the month of February 2020.

Purpose

Informational

Detailed Report

Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program – Paradox Valley Unit Environmental Impact Statement

The public comment period for the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) issued by U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) for the Paradox Valley Unit ended in February. This DEIS describes the alternatives to replace the Paradox Valley Unit (Unit), a deep aquifer brine injection well that has been used to remove approximately 100,000 tons of salt each year from the Colorado River in the Upper Basin. Ongoing seismic activity in the vicinity of the Unit led Reclamation to temporarily discontinue use of the Unit because the brine injection from the well is believed to be the cause of the seismic activity. The DEIS identified alternatives including a new injection well at a new location, evaporation ponds, and "Zero Liquid Discharge" (a proprietary technology that removes salt from saline water).

Metropolitan participated in development of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum's (Forum) comment letter, which supports selecting the evaporation pond alternative as the preferred alternative in the forthcoming DEIS, with appropriate mitigation to wildlife impacts. The Forum's letter also noted that it is imperative that Reclamation work closely with the Basin States through design, implementation, and operation of this selected alternative, including review of appropriate sizing of the evaporation pond facilities. Metropolitan also provided comments through the Lower Colorado River Water Quality Partnership's letter which supports the Forum's selection of the evaporation pond alternative.

Representatives of the seven Colorado River Basin States (Basin States or States) also submitted a comment letter describing the importance of and their support for the Salinity Control Program (Program), but also noted the ongoing inability of the States to maintain solvency of the States' cost-share portion of the Program. The solvency issue is the result of higher federal appropriations that lead to higher cost-share obligations for the States, combined with lower hydropower revenues which are the source of funds for the States to meet cost-share obligations. This combination of higher federal appropriations and lower hydropower revenue has resulted in a growing accrual deficit of $13,000,000, an amount that may increase this year. The Basin States' letter notes that the cost estimate for the DEIS action alternatives range from $99,000,000 to $132,000,000, which would require a cost-share match from the States that would exacerbate the existing solvency problem. The Basin States note that it is their intent to work cooperatively over the next several years to implement changes to address the long-term financial stability of the Program. However, because solutions may require federal legislation and making administrative changes to operations of the Program, resolving the solvency problem may take several years.

Metropolitan hosts Coachella and Desert during Inaugural Coordinating Meeting

Per the terms of the new exchange agreements that were signed among Metropolitan, Coachella Valley Water District (Coachella), and Desert Water Agency (Desert), a Coordinating Committee was established to improve operational coordination among the agencies and share information that the other agencies could benefit from. Metropolitan hosted the initial meeting at Mills Water Treatment Plant in late February. During the meeting, the agencies discussed the current status of the State Water Project and Colorado River hydrology and operations, and discussed opportunities for agencies to acquire additional water if it becomes available. The Coordinating Committee will meet on a quarterly basis, unless an unforeseen circumstance requires additional meetings.