



● 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 December 2020.

Purpose

Informational

Attachments

Links to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Review of the Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortage and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead, main report and appendix may be found at: Main Report: https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/documents/7.D.Review_FinalReport_12-18-2020.pdf
Appendix A: https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/documents/7.D.Review_FinalAppendixA_12-18-2020.pdf.

Detailed Report

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Review of the 2007 Interim Guidelines

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) issued its Review of the Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead, also called the 7.D. Review because the review was completed pursuant to a provision in the Interim Guidelines Section XI.G.7.D., stating that “[b]eginning no later than December, 31, 2020, the Secretary (of the Interior) shall initiate a formal review for purposes of evaluating the effectiveness of these Guidelines.” The 7.D. Review documents Reclamation’s operational experience and makes a retrospective evaluation of the effectiveness of those operations in meeting the themes established in the Interim Guidelines. This report is intended to be one source of information that can be used to support future discussions regarding development of operational rules that are anticipated to be developed before the Interim Guidelines expire on December 31, 2025.

Reclamation developed the 7.D. Review with input from public meetings held in March and October and through consultations with the Colorado River Basin States and Tribes. For purposes of evaluating the effectiveness of river operations under the Interim Guidelines, the report identified the purposes and “common themes” of the Guidelines that include the timing, frequency, and volume of water deliveries and the mechanisms for storage and delivery of water supplies in Lake Mead established for Intentionally Created Surplus. The Review also described the complementary activities adopted since the Interim Guidelines began, including the Drought Contingency Plans, various Minutes to the Treaty with Mexico, the System Conservation Agreement, the Memorandum of Understanding for Basin Pilot Drought Response, and various other Reclamation efforts. In this review, Reclamation concluded that the Interim Guidelines were largely effective in encouraging conservation, planning for shortages, implementing closer coordinated operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead, gaining valuable operating experience, and for continuing to have the federal government “facilitate-but not dictate-informed decision-making in the Basin and to encourage parties to address future controversies on the Colorado River through consultation and negotiation...before resorting to litigation.”

Seven Colorado River Basin States Letter Announcing Consultation Regarding 2007 Interim Guidelines

On December 17, the seven Colorado River Basin States (Basin States) sent a letter to the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) and Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. The letter announces that the Basin States are initiating preliminary discussions with each other to develop future recommendations to the Secretary regarding operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead after the Guidelines expire, as agreed to in the Basin States’ Agreement Concerning Colorado River Management and Operations, which memorialized the Basin States’

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consensus recommendation to the Secretary regarding river management and operations during the Interim period. In this letter, the Basin States acknowledged the importance of waters users, Tribes, Mexico, and non-governmental organizations in effective river management and noted their intent to expand engagement with these groups, as these discussions progress. The Basin States also asked that Reclamation provide support to a Basin States technical workgroup being established to begin evaluating modeling considerations needed to support discussions regarding future management of river operations.

Reclamation Issues Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Paradox Valley Salt Control

To reduce Colorado River salinity levels, Reclamation constructed a brine injection well in Paradox Valley in western Colorado, preventing 110,000 tons of salt annually from reaching the Colorado River. Following an earthquake in March 2019, Reclamation ceased operation of the well, and the capture of the salt has stopped. Reclamation has been evaluating alternate salt control options in the Paradox Valley, as the existing well seems to be near the end of its useful life. In December 2019, Reclamation released a Draft EIS that considered four replacement alternatives for the existing well: No Action, a new injection well at a new location, evaporation ponds, and a salt removal technology resulting in zero liquid discharge. The Colorado River Salinity Control Forum (the Forum), consisting of representatives for the seven Colorado River Basin States, sent comments to Reclamation advocating for the evaporation ponds alternative, and that Reclamation remain open to the continued operation of the existing well at reduced injection rates, at least until the evaporation ponds are constructed. Additionally, Metropolitan provided its own comments, which echoed the Forum's recommendation.

On December 11, 2020 Reclamation released its Final EIS for the project, with the No Action alternative listed as the preferred alternative. Reclamation did not support any of the action alternatives due to their local impacts in the Paradox Valley. In response to the Final EIS, the Forum is preparing comments that will be submitted by the January 11, 2021 comment deadline. The Forum anticipates that its comments will request that Reclamation not issue a Record of Decision for the Final EIS and continue to work with the Forum to implement salinity control projects. Metropolitan will also be preparing and submitting comments. Staff will provide an update at the January Water Planning and Stewardship Committee meeting.