

STATE OF COLORADO

Colorado Water Conservation Board Department of Natural Resources

1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, Colorado 80203
Phone: (303) 866-3441
Fax: (303) 866-4474
www.cwcb.state.co.us



TO:	Colorado Water Conservation Board Members	John W. Hickenlooper Governor
FROM:	Ted Kowalski, Chief, Interstate, Federal & Water Information Section	Mike King DNR Executive Director
DATE:	September 13, 2013	James Eklund CWCB Director
SUBJECT:	Agenda Item 6a, September 24-25, 2013 Board Meeting Interstate, Federal & Water Information Section – Colorado River Issues Current Colorado River Conditions	

Background

As of September 12, 2013, Lake Powell sits at elevation 3990, which equates to approximately 10.75 million acre-feet (maf), or 44% of capacity. Lake Mead is at elevation 1106, which equates to approximately 12.31 million acre-feet (maf), or 48% of capacity. When considering the other storage amounts within the Colorado River basin, the system storage is approximately 50% full (or 50% empty—depending on your outlook on life!). Under the 2007 Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead (Interim Guidelines), because the August 2013 “24 month study” by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) projected the January 1, 2014 elevation of Lake Powell to be below elevation 1075 with an 8.23 maf release, the Interim Guidelines call for an annual release of 7.48 maf from Lake Powell to Lake Mead, for Water Year 2014 (October 1, 2013-September 30, 2014). This is known as the Mid-Elevation Release Tier of the Interim Guidelines, and release of 7.48 maf is appropriate under this tier, in part, because this release will not cause Lake Mead to drop below elevation 1075. This will be the first time that a 7.48 maf annual release will occur out of Lake Powell since the 1960s.

This unprecedented event is due in large part to the reduced hydrology in recent years. In response to this action by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Larry Walkoviak, the Upper Colorado River Basin Regional Director for the Bureau stated: “This is the worst 14-year drought period in the last one hundred years.” Despite the record precipitation that the basin received in 2011, 2012 and 2013 were two of the four lowest years of inflow in recorded history. (2002 and 1977 received less inflow, but the one-two punch of the back to back dry years of 2012-2013 is being reflected in the current reservoir levels and the current operations).

Moreover, and perhaps even more remarkable, the current BOR projections for next year’s water operations indicate that under the “minimum probable” and the “most probable” forecasts for water year 2015, Lake Powell would again release 7.48 maf. Under the “maximum probable”

projection, the system would be in the Upper Elevation Balancing Tier, and a release of 11.86 maf is projected. A release of 7.48 maf in Water Year 2015 would have the likely effect of causing Lake Mead to fall closer to elevation 1075. Elevation 1075 at Lake Mead is an important elevation because Nevada and Arizona take declared shortages under the Interim Guidelines when Lake Mead is projected to be at or below elevation 1075.

The Staff will continue to monitor the situation, and consult with the Board appropriately, as the hydrologic future unfolds.

Staff Recommendation

This item is informational and there is no Board action required.