



COLORADO

**Colorado Water
Conservation Board**

Department of Natural Resources

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TO: Colorado Water Conservation Board Members

FROM: Brent Newman, Interstate, Federal, & Water Information Section
Carlee Brown, Chief, Interstate, Federal, & Water Information Section

DATE: July 19, 2017

AGENDA ITEM: 11. Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum: 2017 Review

Background

The Clean Water Act requires the Colorado River Basin States to conduct a review of water quality standards relating to the salinity of the Colorado River every three years.¹ At its June 7-9, 2017 meeting, the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum) presented a draft of the report titled *2017 Review: Water Quality Standards for Salinity, Colorado River System (2017 Review)*. The triennial Review serves not only to evaluate water quality standards for salinity in the Colorado River, but also provides background on salinity issues in the Colorado River Basin and establishes a Plan of Implementation to keep salinity concentration within the defined water quality standards. The Plan of Implementation has put measures into place which reduce the salt load of the Colorado River by 1.33 million tons annually. The water quality of the river is approximately 90-100 mg/L better than it would have been without program implementation, and economic damages have been reduced by several hundred million dollars.²

These standards require salinity concentrations to remain at or below 1972 levels, as measured at three locations along the river: below Hoover Dam (723 mg/L), below Parker Dam (747 mg/L), and at Imperial Dam (879 mg/L). The Plan of Implementation details the actions taken by the Basin states and the federal partners to maintain the water quality standards.

The *2017 Review* also lists state-specific information regarding salinity control. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment reported that while waters in Colorado's portion of the Basin are generally of good quality, Colorado has 279 water quality impaired stream segments, including provisional listings. Colorado has a high amount of naturally-occurring salt and agricultural activity, both of which contribute to salt loading.

¹ Pub. L. 92-500 §303(c).

² Barnett, Don. *Memorandum 2014-47, the Genesis of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program* [Memorandum]. Bountiful, UT: Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program.



The Forum will solicit public comment on the *2017 Review* through September, 2017. If all public comments are able to be addressed, the Forum will approve the final version of the 2017 Review at its October meeting in Sacramento.

CWCB staff will make the public draft of the *2017 Review* available on the CWCB website and in the *Confluence* newsletter when it is released. CWCB staff will also provide guidelines for providing public comment.

At the Board meeting, CWCB staff will provide an overview of the geologic and man-made causes of salt loading in the Colorado River. Additionally, staff will describe the federal and state partnerships established to deal with this issue. Staff will highlight sections of the *2017 Review* for the Board, and describe the public comment process to be undertaken this summer.

Staff recommendation

This is an informational item only. No formal Board action is required.

