

Colorado River Water Supply and 24-Month Study

Background

- » Each month, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation releases a 24-month study projecting water levels at the major Colorado River reservoirs over the next two years under the most probable conditions for system inflow and releases.
- » Under guidelines adopted in 2007, the projections in the August 24-month study govern the release from Lake Powell to Lake Mead for the coming year.
- » Based on the August 2013 24-month study, Reclamation will release only 7.48 million acre-feet from Lake Powell in water year 2014 (October 2013 through September 2014). That is 750,000 AF less than the typical annual release to Lake Mead and the lowest release since Lake Powell was filled in the 1980s.
- » The August 24-month study also projected that another 7.48 MAF release would follow in water year 2015, which would cause Lake Mead's elevation to fall below the 1,075-foot mark by the end of 2015, triggering a Lower Basin shortage declaration by the Secretary of the Interior for 2016.
- » These projections are highly dependent on precipitation and runoff in the basin, as was recently illustrated. Due to late summer storms, September inflow into Lake Powell was well above normal. As a result, the most recent October 24-month study now projects a 9 MAF release from Lake Powell in 2015, which would likely delay any Lower Basin shortage until at least 2017.

What This Means

- » If a Colorado River shortage is declared in 2016 or 2017, there would be no direct impact to the water supplies for cities, residential water users and Native American tribes.
- » The Central Arizona Project's deliveries would be reduced by 320,000 acre feet, which is roughly 20 percent of the CAP supply in recent years.
- » The reduction would impact lower priority CAP users, including underground storage by the Arizona Water Banking Authority and Central Arizona Groundwater Replenishment District, as well as non-Indian agriculture.

CAP's Role

- » Arizona has been planning and preparing for such a condition for decades and has led the nation in conservation efforts and long-term water management, including storing millions of acre-feet of water underground as a backup supply.
- » CAP and its partners are collaborating with the federal government and all Colorado River water users to seek creative management solutions in the short term and supply augmentation measures in the long term.

