

Executive Summary of Critical Issues
Topic – Regulatory Storage – Drop 2

Last Updated
July 13, 2007

CAP Position

Providing additional regulatory storage has been a major push by California interests that has been strongly supported by CAP, other Arizona entities, and Nevada. Such a feature could greatly improve operational efficiency.

Issue Summary

Each year, about 6 million acre-feet of Colorado River water is regulated at Imperial Diversion Dam, just north of Yuma, Arizona, for irrigation and other uses in California, Arizona and Mexico. That water must be released from storage in Lake Mead, nearly 300 miles to the north. It takes about five days for water released from Lake Mead to reach Imperial Dam. By the time the water arrives at Imperial Dam, the water users that scheduled it may be unable to take it because of weather changes or other factors. Unless there is a way to store the (now) unneeded water, it will flow downstream to Mexico. And because delivery of that water was not scheduled by Mexico, it does not count against the 1944 Treaty obligation. In short, the Colorado River system loses that water.

Since the current drought began in 2000, more than 900,000 acre-feet of water were lost through over-deliveries to Mexico. That is in addition to more than 600,000 acre-feet of water bypassed to Mexico because the Yuma Desalting Plant was not operating.

Some of the water that cannot be used at Imperial Dam may be stored in Senator Wash Reservoir, a pump-storage facility about two miles upstream from Imperial Dam that was constructed specifically to manage fluctuating flows at the lower end of the Colorado River. But for more than 30 years Senator Wash Dam has had structural problems that have limited the storage space that can be used to temporarily store water ordered in excess of user needs. Reclamation made some repairs to Senator Wash Dam in 2004 that increased its storage capacity from 7,000 af to 11,000 af, about one-half of its designed capacity.

The basin states, working with Reclamation, have proposed the construction of an additional regulating reservoir along the All American

Canal in southern California (Drop 2 reservoir). The proposed 8,000 acre-foot reservoir would roughly double current regulatory storage capacity on the lower Colorado River. Improved regulatory storage above the Mexican border could save 50,000 to 300,000 acre-feet of Colorado River water each year, but Reclamation does not have the funding for construction. The basin states' proposal recommends a process to allow Nevada to fund construction and get a return for their investment by receiving a specific amount of additional water. The remainder of the saved water accrues to the system.

Status as of July 13, 2007

The Southern Nevada Water Authority has agreed to contribute funds to assist in the construction of Drop 2 regulatory storage. In return, SNWA would receive "System Efficiency ICS" credits that would allow Nevada to use a portion of the water saved by constructing Drop 2 storage. The specific terms of that arrangement are being negotiated by the Basin States.

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