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Arizona Moving Forward On Lower Basin Drought Contingency Planning Discussions

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In a joint statement in May, our agencies, the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) and Central Arizona Water Conservation District (CAWCD) announced that we are committed to bringing the Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan (LBDCP) to closure in Arizona by addressing a broad range of issues that respect the concerns of all stakeholders across the state.

The discussions between ADWR and CAWCD were only the first step and today, we hosted a public briefing describing the reliability of and risks to Arizona's Colorado River supply and the proposed LBDCP, which was developed to address those risks. Colorado River managers were invited to learn about the LBDCP and its importance within Arizona.

We were joined by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman. The Bureau of Reclamation discussed how the risks to the Colorado River have increased from what was expected when the Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages were established in 2007.



In fact, the risks of Lake Mead falling below critically low reservoir elevations have tripled in the past decade, increasing the risks of potentially draconian reductions to Arizona's Colorado River supply. The tools provided in those guidelines now are insufficient to address the current risks to the system.

In recognition of these increasing risks, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Mexico have worked together in recent years to voluntarily contribute water to Lake Mead. These efforts include system conservation programs and storage programs, and have served to stave off shortages in the Lower Basin from 2015 through 2018, and very likely in 2019.

We recognize that even these efforts may not be sufficient to reduce the risks posed by a drier future on the Colorado River.

More needs to be done.



Drought Contingency Planning

In today's briefing, we outlined a framework of additional measures to reduce risks in the Colorado River system, called the Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan (LBDCP).

The LBDCP is a plan developed by Arizona, California and Nevada and the United States. It has several major components, including:

- Additional contributions to Lake Mead from Arizona and Nevada, along with new contributions from California and the United States.

- Incentives for additional storage in Lake Mead by creating flexibility for water users to store water and take delivery of storage even during lower reservoir conditions.

- A commitment by parties in the Lower Basin to protect elevation 1020 feet in Lake Mead, implemented through consultation to determine what additional measures would be necessary to protect that elevation.

Implementation of the Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan will trigger additional contributions from Mexico through the Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan as detailed in the Minute 323 agreement, adopted in 2017.

Projections by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation show that the LBDCP, along with contributions from Mexico and actions by the Upper Basin States, would reduce the risks of falling below critical elevations in Lake Mead.

The LBDCP achieves this reduction of risks by requiring additional incremental water-delivery reductions by Arizona water users. These reductions will impact Arizona's junior Colorado River priority holders, mainly CAP water users. The LBDCP has the potential to impact all CAP priority pools, but the most significant impacts are likely to be to the CAP NIA priority pool.

Arizona Next Steps

This briefing was the beginning of a series of public discussions involving many Colorado River water users, elected officials, and other key stakeholders in Arizona. We recognize that the LBDCP and its impacts are complex issues, and there will be more questions than those addressed today. Therefore, we have scheduled a meeting on July 10 at the Heard Museum to answer questions, as well as to provide additional details about the LBDCP.

Today's briefing closed with the announcement that an Arizona Steering Committee will be formed to discuss and recommend how to adopt and implement the LBDCP in a way that is acceptable to Arizona water users. While the delegates to the Steering Committee will be by invitation jointly provided by ADWR and CAWCD, the meetings and discussions will be open, and the public is invited to participate. The Steering Committee is tentatively scheduled to conduct its first public meeting on July 26th. Additional details will be provided at our websites

www.azwater.gov

and

www.cap-az.com/AZDCP

We recognize that more must be done to protect Arizona's Colorado River users from the uncertainty and risks of critically low elevations in Lake Mead. We are committed to working with Arizona water users and other stakeholders to adopt and implement the LBDCP in a way that is acceptable to Arizona water users.


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