

Colorado River Citizens Forum
Yuma, AZ
September 11, 2013
***Tentative Meeting Notes**

Board Members in attendance:

Elston Grubaugh, Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation District
Jim Cherry, Cherry Water Management
Roberta McDermott, US Natural Resources Conservation Service, Retired
Bruce Kuhn, Imperial Irrigation District
Tom Davis, Yuma County Water Users Association
Kevin Eatherly, City of Yuma and Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area
Bill Plummer, Water Resources Consulting
Chuck Cullom, Central Arizona Project

Board Member Absent:

Karl Eanockson
Mark McBroom

USIBWC Staff in attendance:

Anna Morales, Yuma Office
Diane Hinkle, Yuma Office

MXIBWC Staff in attendance:

Alenzue Angulo, Mexicali Office

22 Members of the public in attendance

Welcome and Introductions

Anna Morales, Co-Chair, welcomed the attendees and asked the Board to introduce themselves.

Restoration Efforts along the Lower Colorado River in Yuma, Arizona – John MacDonald, Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

On the lower Colorado River, Betty's Kitchen, part of the Mittry Lake Wildlife Area, burned in 2011 (Laguna fire). It is being rehabilitated with the emphasis of wildlife and recreation as secondary. For the Paradise Cove East/Transient Area, the emphasis is on wildlife and recreational activity as secondary. For the Paradise Cove Mitigation Area, there is cooperation with local agencies on the Border Patrol mitigation project with an emphasis on wildlife habitat with recreation as a secondary priority.

The Laguna Fire occurred May 2011, destroying 756 acres including 567 acres of BLM lands. They have been rehabilitating the area since 2011.

Betty's Kitchen accomplishments to date include:

- Removal of hazardous trees and weeds
- Filling of dry channels to remove safety hazards
- Replacement and major maintenance of facilities, such as benches and ramadas.

Next Steps are that in October 2013, there will be seeding of native plants (desert sunflower and sand verbena) on 15 acres followed by sprinkler irrigation. In the winter of 2014, 850 mesquite trees will be planted by volunteers. Then in spring 2014 new benches and tables will be set up in addition to resurfacing the walking trail.

Other Restoration within Mittry Landscape includes cutting down invasive species to make way for future planting. The 2012-2013 efforts included planting and seeding of native trees and plants on 13 acres. They also created 30 acres of new planting areas by removing saltcedar and invasive species. Over 100 volunteers are involved in planting cottonwood and willow trees with a 76% success rate on the cottonwood and willow plantings. Results thus far are very encouraging. The area provides yellow billed cuckoo nesting habitat and habitat for deer, quail, dove, raccoon, bobcat, coyote, and neo-tropical migratory birds. Next steps include ongoing irrigation, weed control to prevent saltcedar re-establishment. In November 2013, there will be seeding of native wildflowers on 10 acres. Then in February 2014, 20 acres will be planted with approximately 20,000 trees (cottonwood, willow, and mesquite).

Mittry Moist Soil Units.

Since 2008, 43 acres have been cultivated in Bermuda Grass. In the beginning salinity averaged 137 – 162 Ms/cm, which was very high. Current salinity averages 26 - 40 Ms/cm so they are putting in cottonwood and willow to see if they will survive. Annual treatments include prescribed burning, cutting and removal of grass stems that hold salts, application of Sulfuric Acid (N-Phuric 15/49; & 32-0-0), and flood irrigation. In Winter 2014, 10 acres will be planted in trees.

Paradise Cove East/Transient Area. At the west end of West Wetlands Park, all invasive species are being cut down and large amounts of trash removed. BLM is currently working with the Bureau of Reclamation Yuma Area Office to complete foundation earthwork for successful flood irrigation throughout the site and public parking and to open the silted-in boat ramp located within Paradise Cove. They are currently working with Arizona State Forestry Division to conduct mechanical and chemical treatment of saltcedar and other invasive species, establish firebreaks to protect the private lands to the East and tribal lands to the West, maintain line-of-sight for law enforcement and fire personnel, and continue cleanup of illegal dumping. BLM was funded \$18,000 by the Arizona Game and Fish Department Heritage Grant program to establish a walking trail with interpretive signage throughout the site.

Paradise Cove West: (Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Mitigation) Starts at the outlet then west to Cocopah land. The Border Patrol cut down vegetation on the border and agreed to an offsite mitigation project. The project emphasis is on wildlife habitat and will have a pedestrian trail along the Colorado River. They are working on final drawings for the project with CBP. The Border Patrol committed for 10 years on this project for successful species survival.

Q: Any relation with the Bureau of Reclamation's Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP)?

A: No, but the high standards of the program are being used and they are incorporating successful practices used under MSCP.

Q: What type of irrigation systems are you using?

A: Depends on where. At Mittry Lake we use sprinklers; Paradise Cove we use flood irrigation.

Q: Who has these water rights?

A: Bureau of Land Management has water rights.

Q: There was a presentation in early 2012 about the Mittry program and discussion of increased circulation of water in the area to increase inflow to the lake because of high salinity. Don't see anything in today's presentation on this.

A: Erica Stewart, BLM, responded: They are testing fish and water quality. A proposal was received from USGS to do water quality testing on all of Mittry Lake. They requested funding last year but did not get enough but are hopeful there will be full funding next fiscal year. Once there is baseline data, then they will work with

the irrigation district and the MSCP regarding a gate that feeds into Mittry Lake for fresh water. Baseline data is needed first from the study to see how beneficial that would be.

Q: (question for Erica Stewart, BLM) – In 2008 Hidden Shores to Imperial Dam, volunteers planted trees. How are they doing?

A: Not as good as hoped. Planted 15,000 trees; 9,000 mesquite and the rest were pole planting. Trees were planted at the end of January then January they had a freeze for 3 days and lost almost all the mesquite. The pole planting had a 90% success rate.

Colorado River Basin, State of the System – Daniel Bunk, Hydrologist, Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region.

In the Colorado River Basin, 16.5 million acre-feet (maf) of water is allocated annually, 7.5 maf each to Upper and Lower Basins plus 1.5 maf to Mexico. There is currently 13 to 14.5 maf of consumptive use on average annually. Operations and water deliveries are governed by the “Law of the River.” The original interstate compact divided the water between the two basins and the 1944 Treaty allotted water to Mexico. There are also recent documents such as the 2007 interim guidelines. Lake Powell is a large reservoir in the upper basin that holds 24 maf. Lake Mead is the storage for the lower basin, which holds 26 maf. International Boundary and Water Commission Minute No. 319, signed in November 2012, allows Mexico to share in surplus, shortage, and store water at Lake Mead for various purposes.

The system has 60 maf of storage. There is 14.9 maf average annual inflow in upper basin over the past 100 years and 1.3 maf average annual inflow in lower basin. Inflows are highly variable year to year

As of September 10, 2013, Lake Powell is 44% full with 10.8 maf in storage. Lake Mead is 47% full with 12.3 maf in storage. Total system storage is 50% full, 29.8 maf. Last year at this time it was 58% full.

The system has been experiencing drought. The upper basin supplies 90% of the water source in the basin. 75% comes from snow melt in the Rocky Mountains. Of the last 14 years, 11 have been below average. 2000-2013 was the driest 14-year period of historical record.

Tree ring reconstructions show more severe droughts have occurred over the past 1200 years. It is not unusual to have a few years of above-average inflow during longer-term droughts. 2013 will be the 3rd driest year in record since 1964. At the end of the 2013 water year, system storage is projected to be 49% full. Storage basin-wide has declined significantly since 1999 when it was 95% full.

Annual Operating Plan (AOP). The AOP is a report conducted every year for the current year’s operations and the upcoming year’s projected operations. The draft 2014 AOP is available on the Reclamation website. Lake Powell's normal release is 8.23 maf. However, because of the projected elevation at Lake Powell on January 1, 2014, the 2014 release will be just 7.48 maf, the first time this low release has ever happened. Lake Mead will still be at the normal operating tier but it will have 750,000 acre-feet less inflow.

The end of water year 2014 projections based on a 7.48 maf release from Lake Powell have 3 different scenarios for Lake Mead – maximum probable (wet scenario), most probable and minimum probable (dry scenario). In accordance with the interim guidelines adopted in 2007, when Lake Mead elevation gets below 1075 feet, the lower basin states go into a shortage condition. Some users, under the 2007 Interim Guidelines, would have their water orders reduced. The worst case scenario would be by 2015 there would be a 1 to 2% chance of shortage with a higher percent chance of shortage in 2016. Shortages will depend on hydrology for 2014.

Q: Could you please elaborate on shortage operations for some users?

A: Arizona, Nevada and Mexico will go into shortage strategies (shortage conservation strategies). Arizona would be short 320,000 af; Nevada 13,000 af and Mexico 50,000 af.

Q: What about California?

A: California would not be shorted because of a provision in the guideline.

Q: Do you know the current probability of shortage?

A: 59% in 2016 after running the Colorado River Simulation System. Need to have better hydrology in 2014 to not have shortage in 2016.

From 1914 to 2010 historical annual Colorado River basin supply use shows many years of more annual water use than water supply available. The Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study assessed future water supply and demand imbalances over the next 50 years and developed and evaluated opportunities for resolving imbalances. The study was conducted by the Bureau of Reclamation and Basin States in 2010 through 2012. The final study report is available on the Reclamation website.

Q: (From Elston Grubaugh to Chuck Cullom of Central Arizona Project [CAP]): What has CAP done to prepare for a shortage for 2016? How is it going to be handled?

A: Cullom: Because of current uses by non-CAP priority users, CAP will take the full 320,000 acre-foot shortage if it occurs in 2016. The impact will be to reduce what is referred to as “excess water users”; those are users that do not hold a current long-term contract for CAP water. So there would be reduced deliveries for storage in the Arizona Water Bank, underground storage and replenishment by CAP Groundwater Replenishment District. Agriculture customers who hold excess water contracts will lose 250,000 acre-feet. That is the operational outcome of shortage. As far as preparing for shortage, we are storing water underground to protect long-term customers such as the city. The reason we have excess water is because it's water above the long-term contract and CAP long-term contractors not utilizing their full allotments. Also, unused water is usually available from higher priority contracts.

Q: Are you taking steps or planning to tell people to reduce water use such as reduce lawn watering or other conservation programs?

A: Yes. A drought plan would be triggered once CAP declares drought.

Q: During monsoon season, a lot of water came down the river and releases are made 3 days ahead of delivery at Parker Dam. When extra water came down it went into Imperial, Senator Wash, Brock and Laguna Reservoirs. Quite a bit of excess went down south to Mexico. Minute 319 requires another 100,000 acre-feet to be delivered below Morelos Dam. Why were gates not opened at Morelos Dam when excess water was available? Why can't this excess count against the 100,000 acre-feet?

A: (Chuck Cullom, CAP replied) The 100,000 acre-feet is environmental pulse flow, which is included within Mexico's annual water allotment of 1.5 maf; it's not additional water. The timing and schedule for delivery of environmental pulse flow has not been finalized. Reclamation is evaluating the opportunity to optimize the delivery to Mexico consistent with Minute 319 and the Treaty without reducing Lake Mead. The purpose of the

flow identified in Minute 319 is an environment experiment that is being done in Mexico; the timing and schedule has to be consistent with potential cottonwood planting.

Suggested Future Agenda Items

1. Would like report/presentation on how much water is stored in reservoirs and how much is excess to Mexico. Reclamation can work on analysis and provide information. – Hong DeCorse, Reclamation. Because Brock Reservoir was off line during the monsoon, could upstream users have pumped additional water? Could you please research and provide information as well?
2. Update year-end water numbers and projections for snowpack and where we stand – good time would be in March meeting. December 2013 is too early for that projection.
3. Historic view of excess deliveries to Mexico, include Brock reservoir online.
4. Update on Basin Study activities from the Agricultural Conservation and Transfers Workgroup.
5. CAP's proposal of Wellton Mohawk return flow channel above Imperial Dam
6. Progress report on Laguna MSCP project below Imperial Dam

If there are other issues/projects you would like to hear, please email the Yuma IBWC office at anna.morales@ibwc.gov or sally.spener@ibwc.gov

Next meeting scheduled for December 18, 2013 from 4-6pm in Imperial County

*Meeting notes are tentative and summarized in draft the contents and discussion of Citizens Forum Meetings. While these notes are intended to provide a general overview of Citizens Forum Meetings, they may not necessarily be accurate or complete, and may not be representative of USIBWC policy or positions.