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COMMISSION REACHES AGREEMENT ON RIO GRANDE WATER ACCOUNTING PROCEDURE

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, has reached agreement on a water accounting procedure related to water transfers from Mexico.

“I am pleased that we were able to reach this agreement with Mexico,” said U.S. Commissioner Arturo Q. Duran. “This should make it easier to for the Commission to handle water transfers in the future.”

The agreement addresses water accounting procedures for transfers of water from Mexican ownership to U.S. ownership at Amistad and Falcon International Reservoirs on the Rio Grande in accordance with Minute No. 234, a 1969 Commission agreement that provides for these transfers when Mexico has a deficit in Rio Grande deliveries to the United States.

The new agreement, “Joint Report of the Principal Engineers Concerning the Adoption of a Criteria for the Calculation of Conveyance Losses Associated with Transfers to the United States of Mexican Waters Stored at Amistad and Falcon International Dams,” spells out how conveyance losses will be handled, taking into consideration the Mexican tributaries that are the source of the water, the distance the water must travel to the reservoirs, and the actual climatic conditions during the months preceding a reservoir transfer. In the past, the lack of established criteria for determining these conveyance losses has caused controversy since varying climatic conditions and other factors can greatly affect conveyance losses; for example, losses are much greater during hot dry periods.

In addition, the difficulty in reaching consensus on conveyance losses in the past has sometimes delayed water transfers by Mexico. Depending on the criteria applied, conveyance losses can range from 2% to well over 30%, sometimes reaching tens of thousands of acre-feet. Whether those volumes are credited to Mexico or the United States has complicated negotiations for previous water transfers.

Under the 1944 Water Treaty, Mexico is required to deliver to the United States an annual average of 350,000 acre-feet from six of its Rio Grande tributaries. Due to a deficit in deliveries from the tributaries, Mexico has transferred 807,060 acre-feet to U.S. ownership at the international reservoirs over the past four years, consistent with Minute No. 234. There are no agreements for additional reservoir transfers at this time.

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