



International Boundary and Water Commission United States and Mexico

For immediate release
August 16, 2021

COLORADO RIVER DROUGHT TRIGGERS WATER DELIVERY REDUCTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO IN 2022

Colorado River water allocations to users in the United States and Mexico will be reduced in 2022 for the first time since the signing of the 1944 Water Treaty. Reservoir elevation projections by the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation for the Colorado River Basin reservoirs indicate the reductions will go into effect next year following the worst 22-year long drought on record, with Lake Mead (Hoover Dam) at its lowest level since it was initially filling in the late 1930s.

The reduction in the allocations will be in accordance with Minute 323, an agreement signed in 2017 by the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC).

The international agreements adopted in Minute 323 recognize that both countries will reduce the use of their annual allotment of Colorado River waters when the January 1 Lake Mead elevation is projected to be at or below 1,075 feet. This is in addition to water savings starting at elevation 1,090 feet or below that will be recoverable when reservoir conditions improve. Today, Reclamation released the August 2021 24-Month Study, which determines the distribution of volumes under low elevation reservoir conditions for 2022, projecting Lake Mead's January 1, 2022 elevation to be 1065.85 feet or 34% full, a level that triggers both reductions and recoverable savings for both countries.

In 2022, Mexico's allotment will be reduced by 50,000 acre-feet (62 million cubic meters [mcm]) and, in addition, Mexico will contribute 30,000 acre-feet (37 mcm) of recoverable water savings under the Minute's Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan (BWSCP). Lower Basin users in the United States will see a reduction of 333,000 acre-feet (411 mcm) and recoverable water savings of 200,000 acre-feet (247 mcm) under domestic policies, known as the 2007 Interim Guidelines and the 2019 Lower Basin

Drought Contingency Plan (DCP). Through these combined binational efforts, Colorado River water deliveries will be decreased by a total of 613,000 acre-feet (757 mcm) in 2022, representing 6.8% of the total normal allotment to Lower Basin users in the United States and Mexico. Through other conservation actions and programs, there will be additional water savings in the United States in 2022 and users in both countries are exploring other opportunities to save or conserve more water.

The agreements reached for reduced allocations and recoverable savings reflect U.S.-Mexico cooperation on the Colorado River since 2007 led by the IBWC in collaboration with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Mexico's National Water Commission, U.S. and Mexico Colorado River Basin States, and other institutions in both countries. These agreements reflect a shared commitment of the Governments and their partners in both countries to work proactively to address the potential for unprecedented reductions on the Colorado River as a result of hydrologic conditions, meeting system demands, and increased temperatures in the basin.

"The International Boundary and Water Commission and our partners have been working on drought management strategies for years now. We have a plan in place to help us through this drought in a way that's fair to both countries," said Acting U.S. Commissioner Daniel Avila.

Mexican Commissioner Humberto Marengo said, "The agreements that have been established by the IBWC allow us to proactively address the water shortage conditions in the Colorado River Basin, by having certainty for the actions that should be taken to address this problem." He added, "All these efforts have been made in a framework of equity and in compliance with the provisions of the 1944 Water Treaty."

"The conservation actions taken between our two countries are critical to preserving our water supplies," said Bureau of Reclamation Lower Colorado Basin Regional Director Jacklynn Gould. "We applaud the work and partnership that went into developing Minute 323. The health and well-being of the Colorado River Basin depends on it."

Director General of the Baja California Peninsula Basin Organization of Mexico's National Water Commission (CONAGUA), Engineer Miguel Angel Rodriguez Todd, said, "It is a challenge to face these shortage scenarios, given that water demands are approaching their limit, therefore communication and working together among Colorado River users in Baja California and Sonora

becomes essential, with actions directed toward planning and balance among allotments to optimize use of the available water.”

The State of Arizona will see the biggest impact, with a reduction of 320,000 acre-feet (395 mcm) and savings of 192,000 acre-feet (237 mcm).

The Director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources, Tom Buschatzke, said, “Arizona is conserving additional volumes of water in Lake Mead over and above those reductions and savings. Those actions combined with other actions in the United States and Mexico are critical to collaboratively managing the impacts to the Colorado River from this extended drought.”

In Baja California, the Secretary of Water Management, Sanitation, and Protection (SEPROA) for the state, Salomon Faz Apodaca, said, “Based on the results of the analyses presented jointly by the federal governments of Mexico and the United States of America, it is evident that the prevention strategies to improve efficient water use in the public urban and agricultural sectors are becoming more relevant in order to prevent and mitigate the effects of the Colorado River basin drought.”

For information:

Lori Kuczanski
(915) 494-6027
Lori.Kuczanski@ibwc.gov

Sally Spener
(915) 832-4175
Sally.Spener@ibwc.gov