



Colorado River Board

Contacts: Gerald Zimmerman
Colorado River Board
(818) 543-4676

George Spencer
Colorado River Board
(818) 543-4676

July 17, 2002

For Immediate Release

Workshop to Focus on Southern California Water Supply

Los Angeles-The Colorado River Board of California has scheduled a workshop in Los Angeles July 24 that will examine how the current Colorado River Basin drought will impact southern California's water supply next year.

Distinguished water officials scheduled to attend include: California's Mary D. Nichols, Secretary for Resources, The Resources Agency; Bennett Raley, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, Department of the Interior; Pat Mulroy, General Manager, Southern Nevada Water Authority; Wayne Cook, Executive Director of the Upper Colorado River Commission.

The workshop will begin at 10:00 a.m. in the Board Room of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California at 700 North Alameda Street. It will focus on the severity of the current drought, next year's water supply outlook and the role that California's Colorado River Water Use Plan and water transfers will play.

Background

Drought and wildfires have plagued the western states comprising the watershed drained by the Colorado River. The Colorado River provides coastal and desert regions in Southern California with about 60% of the annual water supply needed to serve 17 million residents and to irrigate 900,000 acres of farmland (primarily the Imperial, Coachella, Palo Verde and Bard valleys).

Runoff in the Colorado River Basin is approaching the lowest level since record keeping began in 1896, with only 6.4 million acre feet of water expected to reach the Colorado River this year.

California's 2002 use of Colorado River water is expected to top 5.1 million acre feet. Total usage in the Colorado River Basin is expected to be about 15 million acre feet, including water delivered to Mexico in accordance with the 1944 Mexican Water Treaty.

The forecast of this year's April through July runoff into Lake Powell is 1.185 million acre feet, 16% of average. This amount would be the lowest runoff ever recorded, surpassing previous lows registered in 1934 and 1977.

Lakes Mead and Powell, capable of storing more than 50 million acre feet of water, are expected to be at about 61% of capacity (31 million acre feet) by the end of this year. With normal precipitation in 2003, Lake Mead's water surface elevation is expected to drop another 10 feet, a storage reduction of about 1.1 million acre feet. Lake Mead is the Lower Colorado River Basin reservoir that provides water for agricultural and municipal water users in California.

The ability of California water users to draw more than 4.4 million acre feet of water from the Colorado River in 2003 is dependent upon the water surface elevation of Lake Mead and on signing of the Quantification Settlement Agreement by California water agencies by December 31, 2002.

With the conditions expected on the Colorado River, the Quantification Settlement Agreement must be executed by the above deadline or California's 2003 Colorado River water use will be limited to 4.4 million acre feet. Because of the California priority system, that would mean that the Colorado River water supply to the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles and San Diego would be cut in half.

o0o

The Colorado River Board was created by the State Legislature to protect the interests and rights of the State of California, its agencies and citizens in the water and power resources of the Colorado River System and to confer with entities within California, the federal government, the Colorado River Basin states, and others regarding matters affecting the Colorado River and its use.