

May 2019



WestFAST News

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Chair – Kevin Werner, NOAA; Vice Chair – Patrick Lambert, USGS; Federal Liaison – Deborah Lawler

Interior and States Sign Historic Drought Agreements to Protect Colorado River

Reclamation 05/20/19. The Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation and representatives from all seven Colorado River Basin states gathered on May 20, 2019, and signed completed drought contingency plans for the Upper and Lower Colorado River basins. These completed plans are designed to reduce risks from ongoing drought and protect the single most important water resource in the western United States.

“This is an historic accomplishment for the Colorado River Basin. Adopting consensus-based drought contingency plans represents the best path toward safeguarding the single most important water resource in the western United States,” said Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman. “These agreements represent tremendous collaboration, coordination and compromise from each basin state, American Indian tribes, and even the nation of Mexico.”

In addition to the voluntary reductions and other measures to which the basin states agreed, Mexico has also agreed to participate in additional measures to protect the Colorado River Basin. Under a 2017 agreement, Minute 323 to the 1944 U.S. – Mexico Water Treaty, Mexico agreed to implement a Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan but only after the United States adopted the DCP.

The Colorado River, with its system of reservoirs and water conveyance infrastructure, supplies water for more than 40 million people and nearly 5.5 million acres of farmland across the western United States and Mexico. The reservoirs along the river have performed well—ensuring reliable and consistent water deliveries through even the driest years. But, after 20 years of drought, those reservoirs are showing increasing strain; Lake Powell and Lake Mead, the two largest reservoirs on the system and in the United States, are only 39% and 41% full respectively. And, while the basin experienced above-average snowpack in 2019, the total system storage across the basin began the water year at just 47% full.

“The urgency for action in the basin is real, and I applaud all of the parties across the seven states and Mexico for coming together and reaching agreement to protect the Colorado River,” said Burman. “I’m glad to finally say that ‘done’ is done.” See <https://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/newsrelease/detail.cfm?RecordID=66103>.

USGS Crews Measure Record Flooding in Oklahoma

USGS 05/24/19. U.S. Geological Survey field crews continue to measure record flooding in central and northeastern Oklahoma following severe storms.

USGS crews are measuring high flood flows and verifying streamgauge operations on the Arkansas, Cimarron, North Canadian and Washita rivers. Precipitation totals from Monday evening to

Thursday ranged from five to 11 inches and more is predicted. Currently, 32 USGS gages are above flood stage, six are above major flood stage and five peaks of record have been measured at long-term streamgages.

USGS crews will keep tracking the floodwaters with heavy rains forecast. This information is critical for resource managers and emergency responders to help protect life and property. The USGS coordinates efforts with the National Weather Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and many local and state partners.

There are about 210 USGS operated streamgages in Oklahoma that measure water levels, streamflow and rainfall. When flooding occurs, USGS crews make numerous discharge measurements to verify the data USGS provides to federal, tribal, state and local agencies, as well as to the public.

For more than 140 years, the USGS has monitored flow in selected streams and rivers across the United States. The information is routinely used for water supply and management, monitoring floods and droughts, bridge and road design, determination of flood risk and for many recreational activities.

See <https://www.usgs.gov/news/media-advisory-usgs-crews-measure-record-flooding-oklahoma>

Flooding Along the Arkansas River

NASA 05/26/19. The Southern and Central United States have been drenched by rainstorm after rainstorm in the spring of 2019, leading to widespread flooding. Across the continental United States, river gauges at 404 locations were above flood stage on May 29, with the vast majority along the Missouri, Mississippi, and Arkansas rivers and their tributaries.

The problem was most acute in late May along the Arkansas River. As of May 29, the National Weather Service reported flooding at 22 gauges along the river in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, not including nearby tributaries and lakes. Major flooding was observed at 13 of those gauges. News media and forecasters predicted flooding in every

major community along the river in the coming days. Every county in Oklahoma was in a state of emergency, and evacuations were ordered or recommended in several communities in Arkansas.

In addition to abundant rain water pouring into the rivers and streams, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has had to release water from the Keystone Lake reservoir into the Arkansas River. The lake is near capacity, so the Corps has been releasing water through floodgates at roughly the same rate that water has been flowing in from upstream. The levees nearby were built in the 1940s, so state and federal officials have been closely monitoring them.

Near Fort Smith, Arkansas, river water levels reached 40.26 feet (12.27 meters) on May 28, surpassing the record of 38.10 feet. A new record could be set when the Arkansas River crests again on May 30 or 31. The river has been 18 to 20 feet above flood stage since May 26, and water spilled over two levees southeast of the city.

The continental United States recently finished its soggiest 12 months in 124 years of modern recordkeeping. There have been many reasons for the wet weather, but the 2018-19 record fits with observed long-term increases in overall precipitation and in heavy rainfall events. In the Fourth National Climate Assessment released in 2018 by the U.S. Global Change Research Program, scientists reported: “The frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation events are projected to continue to increase over the 21st century. Mesoscale convective systems (organized clusters of thunderstorms) in the central United States are expected to continue to increase in number and intensity in the future.” See

<https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/145108/flooding-along-the-arkansas-river>.

The WESTERN STATES FEDERAL AGENCY SUPPORT TEAM (WestFAST) is a collaboration between 12 Federal agencies with water management responsibilities in the West, including: BLM, DOD, EPA, FWS, NASA, NOAA, NPS, NRCS, Reclamation, USACE, USFS, and USGS. WestFAST was established to support the Western States Water Council and the Western Governors’ Association in coordinating Federal efforts regarding water issues.

EPA Seeks Public Input on Draft Study of Oil and Gas Extraction Wastewater Management

EPA 05/15/19. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is seeking public input on a draft study that takes a holistic look at how the agency, states, tribes and others view the current state of regulation and management of wastewater from the oil and gas industry and provides insight into how this wastewater might be returned to beneficial use in the water cycle.

“EPA’s draft study leverages the expertise of states, industry, and others in determining the opportunities and challenges surrounding the beneficial reuse of wastewater from the oil and gas sector,” said EPA Office of Water Assistant Administrator David Ross. “EPA looks forward to continued public engagement regarding practical, environmentally-sound approaches to encouraging greater reuse and more holistic management of this water.”

“In an arid state like Utah, no potential source of water can be ignored,” said Utah Department of Environmental Quality Executive Director Alan Matheson. “We appreciate the valuable information EPA has compiled in this study and commit to work with EPA, states, and stakeholders to address the water quantity and quality challenges associated with produced water.”

“Wyoming has long recognized the importance of beneficial reuse of produced water from the oil and gas sector through implementation of sound practices that are protective of water quality standards,” said Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WY DEQ) Director Todd Parfitt. “In particular, beneficial reuse of produced water provides significant benefit to wildlife, agriculture, and riparian habitat. WY DEQ looks forward to working with EPA and states in assessing and evaluating options for all produced water management opportunities.”

In May 2018, EPA announced the initiation of a *Study of Oil and Gas Extraction Wastewater Management*. The agency conducted a robust outreach effort to gather input from state, tribal, industrial, academic, environmental, public health and other entities for the study. This included meeting with individual entities, accepting written input through a public docket on regulations.gov, and hosting a national public meeting in October 2018 to report on what EPA had learned to date and to provide stakeholders an additional opportunity to provide input.

The draft *Study of Oil and Gas Extraction Wastewater Management* was developed using the feedback the agency received from these engagements and comments submitted to the public docket.

Many entities expressed support for increasing opportunities for discharge of oil and gas extraction wastewater to surface waters—especially where these wastewaters could address critical water resource needs. Some entities expressed concern that discharges to surface waters may, at least at this time, potentially impact the environment.

EPA will accept input on the draft study until July 1, 2019. Interested parties may email their input to oil-and-gas-study@epa.gov. After consideration of the feedback received, the agency will finalize the study in summer 2019. EPA will determine at that time what, if any, future agency actions are appropriate to encourage the beneficial reuse of oil and gas extraction wastewater under the Clean Water Act; this could include regulatory and/or non-regulatory approaches.

For more information on the draft study, visit EPA’s website at: www.epa.gov/eg/study-oil-and-gas-extraction-wastewater-management.

See <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-seeks-public-input-draft-study-oil-and-gas-extraction-wastewater-management>

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NRCS Announces Changes to Strengthen Technical Input in Conservation Programs

NRCS 05/06/19. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is expanding the membership of its State Technical Committees and making other changes that strengthen technical input in conservation programs. The 2018 Farm Bill made several changes to NRCS programs, including enabling representatives from the State Cooperative Extension Service and land grant universities to serve on the state committee that assists NRCS in guiding locally led conservation.

“NRCS is committed to efficiently and effectively implementing the Farm Bill and delivering on our promise to America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners,” NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr said. “The rule we're issuing today is a step toward strengthening and streamlining the services and programs that help conserve our nation's natural resources on working lands.”

Today, NRCS published an interim final rule in the Federal Register to make the existing regulations consistent with the changes made by the 2018 Farm Bill, including the change related to State Technical Committees. NRCS is accepting comments on this rule through July 5, 2019.

Other Miscellaneous Changes in Notice

The 2018 Farm Bill makes some important improvements to strengthen NRCS's programs, including:

- Waiving the requirement for certain duplicative or unnecessary watershed plans under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program, which authorizes NRCS to install watershed improvement measures to reduce flooding and advance conservation and proper utilization of land;
- Expanding the purposes of the Healthy Forests Reserve Program to add: protection of at-risk species in conserving forest land, permanent easements as an enrollment option for Tribal lands, and land identified

as being in the greatest need to improve the well-being of a species;

- Authorizing that certification of technical service providers be through a qualified non-federal entity; and
- Requiring that \$3 million of the funds to implement the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program be used to encourage public access for hunting and other recreational activities on wetlands enrolled in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

See

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/releases/?cid=NRCSERPD1457814>

Upcoming Meetings

WSWC Summer (190th) Meetings

Leavenworth, WA

Icicle Village Resort

July 16-18, 2019

See: <http://www.westernstateswater.org/upcoming-meetings/>

WSWC Fall (191st) Meetings

Breckenridge, CO

Beaver Run Resort & Conference Center

October 16-18, 2019

See <http://www.westernstateswater.org/upcoming-meetings/>

Upcoming Workshops & Symposiums

WSWC/NASA Technology Transfer for Water Management in the Western United States.

Irvine, CA

Embassy Suites by Hilton – Irvine Orange County Airport

August 7-9

See: <http://www.westernstateswater.org/wswc-nasa-technology-transfer-for-water-management-in-the-western-united-states/>

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Symposium on the Settlement of Indian Reserved Water Rights Claims.

Funner, CA

Harrah's Resort Southern California

August 13-15, 2019

See: <http://www.westernstateswater.org/narf-registration-page/>

Water Information Management Systems (WIMS) Workshop

Fort Collins, CO

Hilton Fort Collins,

Sept. 16-19, 2019

See <http://www.westernstateswater.org/2019-wims/>

Federal News

05/08: [State, Federal Agencies Align for Historic Partnership to Reduce Wildfire Risk and Improve Forests, Water and Habitat](#)

05/08: [U.S. EPA Announces Availability of \\$291.7 Million in New Funding to Improve Water Infrastructure in the Pacific Southwest and Pacific Islands](#)

05/09: [EPA Announces Availability of \\$2.6 Billion in New Funding to Improve Water Infrastructure Across the United States - Idaho](#)

05/09: [EPA Announces Availability of \\$2.6 Billion in New Funding to Improve Water Infrastructure Across the United States - Alaska](#)

05/09: [EPA Announces Availability of \\$2.6 Billion in New Funding to Improve Water Infrastructure Across the United States - Washington](#)

05/09: [Bureau of Reclamation makes up to \\$3 million available for 2019 Water Marketing Strategy Grants funding opportunity](#)

05/09: [EPA Announces Availability of \\$2.6 Billion in New Funding to Improve Water Infrastructure Across the United States - Oregon](#)

05/09: [EPA Announces Availability of \\$2.6 Billion in New Funding to Improve Water Infrastructure Across the United States: Millions Available for Nebraska Infrastructure](#)

05/10: [Landsat Collection 2 Summary and Sample 2 Metadata Now Available](#)

05/10: [Portland Harbor Superfund agreement aims to drive new cleanup plans throughout the Lower Willamette River](#)

05/13: [Groundwater Levels are Rebounding in Albuquerque](#)

05/14: [Drought Coverage for the U.S. Hits Twenty Year Low](#)

05/16: [USDA Seeks Project Proposals to Protect and Restore Critical Wetlands](#)

05/16: [Improving Fire Risk Management with Drought Early Warning Information in California and Nevada](#)

05.15: [NIDIS Partners with the University of Colorado to Enhance Tribal Engagement and Understand Drought Impacts on Outdoor Recreation](#)

05/16: [Trump Administration Officials Meet to Accelerate Progress on Reducing Excess Nutrients in the Nation's Waters](#)

05/17: [Interior to host signing ceremony and media availability for Colorado River Drought Contingency Plans](#)

05/20: [Manke Lumber Stormwater Settlement with EPA Will Reduce Water Pollution, Enhance Salmon Habitat](#)

05/20: [Dillon BLM Crews to Conduct East Pioneer, Madison Watershed Assessments](#)

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05/22: [USDA Forest Service and State of Utah Sign Shared Stewardship Agreement](#)

05/23: [U.S. EPA Awards up to \\$9.24 Million in Beach Water Quality Monitoring Grants](#)

05/23: [EPA Seeks Comment on Proposed Options for Regulating Perchlorate in Drinking Water](#)

05/23: [EPA Awards Texas and Louisiana Grants to Monitor Water Quality at Coastal Beaches](#)

05/23: [U.S. EPA approves Navajo Nation and Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation authority to develop water quality standards](#)

05/24: [Exploring the Grand Canyon – 150 Years Later](#)

05/28: [Reclamation awards 2019 water conservation program grants](#)

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