



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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ADMINISTRATION

USGS/Nominee

On March 8, the White House announced the nomination of David Applegate as the Director of the U.S. Geological Service (USGS). He currently serves as the USGS Associate Director for Natural Hazards, and as an adjunct full professor in the University of Utah's Department of Geology and Geophysics. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland said: "Science is at the heart of Interior's mission, and the U.S. Geological Survey is essential to helping provide and strengthen the scientific integrity of our agency's work. For nearly two decades, David has helped advance the federal government's scientific understanding of climate change and America's geological features. As the confirmed Director, I am confident he will continue to empower the agency's scientific and technical experts to use the best available science to help address the most pressing challenges of our time."

ADMINISTRATION/WATER RESOURCES

Bureau of Reclamation/Colorado River Basin

On March 4, the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) announced Lake Powell was expected to temporarily decline below a 3,525-foot target elevation, given the abnormally dry winter. The target is part of the 2019 Drought Contingency Plan Agreements, specifically the Drought Response Operations Agreement. Elevation 3,490 feet is the minimum power pool elevation, the lowest point at which Glen Canyon Dam can generate hydropower. The target elevation provides a 35-foot buffer and allows time for response actions to help prevent Lake Powell from dropping below the minimum power pool.

A very dry January and February led to a drop in projected unregulated inflows into Lake Powell for Water Year 2022 by approximately 2.2 million acre-feet (and 2 to 3 feet below the 3,525-foot target in March). Lake Powell's elevation is expected to recover through the course of the spring runoff season, likely in May. Reclamation, the Upper Colorado River Commission, and the Upper Division States are preparing additional measures to implement later this year to help maintain the elevation above 3,525 feet.

"This year the Colorado River Basin has experienced extremely variable conditions with a record high snowpack one month, followed by weeks without snow," said Reclamation Acting Commissioner David Palumbo. "This variable hydrology and a warmer, drier west have drastically impacted our operations and we are faced with the urgent need to manage in the moment."

Under the Drought Response Operations Agreement, Reclamation, in consultation with the Upper Colorado River Commission, has implemented proactive drought response operations that together have helped protect Lake Powell's target elevation by: (1) sending an additional 161,000 acre-feet (af) of water from Blue Mesa and Flaming Gorge reservoirs downstream to Lake Powell; and (2) temporarily reducing monthly releases from Glen Canyon Dam in order to hold back 350,000 af for release later in the year. These proactive actions ensured that Lake Powell will avoid dropping significantly below 3,525 feet during the Spring of 2022.

"Reclamation is not planning to take further action to address this temporary dip below 3,525 feet because the spring runoff will resolve the deficit in the short term," said Upper Colorado Basin Regional Director Wayne Pullan. "However, our work is not done. Lake Powell is projected to drop below elevation 3,525 feet again later this year. Reclamation and the Upper Division States continue to collaborate with stakeholders and partners to develop and implement additional actions..."

"We appreciate the collaboration among Reclamation and the Upper Basin States at this critical time to develop the 2022 Drought Response Operations Agreement and Operations Plan. We are optimistic these actions will provide additional protection to critical elevations in Lake Powell," said Chuck Cullom, Executive Director of the Upper Colorado River Commission.

Reclamation is closely monitoring basin snowpack and runoff projections, while actively engaging with the Upper Division States, Tribes, and federal agencies such as the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Western Area Power Administration, water users, non-governmental organizations and key stakeholders to protect the elevation of Lake Powell. <https://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/##news-release/4117>

USBR/Klamath and Trinity River Basins

On March 9, Reclamation announced that \$2.4M is available for projects to improve fish and wildlife habitat in the Klamath and Trinity River Basins. Local, state, federal, and tribal governments, as well as special districts, non-profit organizations, and academic interests, are eligible to apply. For further information, see: <https://www.nfwf.org/programs/klamath-basin-restoration-program>.

CONGRESS/WATER RESOURCES

Klamath River

On March 8, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife held a virtual oversight hearing titled Klamath River Basin Conditions and Opportunities. Witnesses included: Steve Guertin, Fish and Wildlife Service; David Palumbo, Bureau of Reclamation; Amy Cordalis, Yurok Tribe and Ridges to Riffles Conservation Fund; Joe Davis, Hoopa Valley Tribe; Robert Super, Karuk Tribe; Tricia Hill, Klamath Water Users Association; and Geri Byrne, Modoc County, California.

Guertin testified on the Department of the Interior's response to the ongoing drought crisis in the Klamath Basin, including efforts to maintain and restore species, and the \$162M in funding through the Investments in Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA) "to engage with Tribes and stakeholders in one of the largest wetland restoration projects in the nation, secure water for the Klamath Refuges, and ensure the persistence of endangered Lost River and shortnose suckers for future generations." He noted that 2021 was one of the worst water years on record for the Klamath Basin, between major wildfires and water shortages. He said drought is not new, but the scale and intensity are unparalleled, and this "may be the baseline for future hydrologic conditions." Every community, stakeholder, and species has been affected. Collaboration between federal agencies, states, tribes, irrigators, legislators and local communities is important for long-term solutions.

Cordalis emphasized the need for dam removal, habitat restoration, and quantification of water rights. She noted that fish and rivers need water to function ecologically. "There will be no equity, peace, or sustainability in the Basin until all the water rights in the Basin are quantified. Currently, the Yurok Tribe's water rights are the largest unquantified water right in the Basin and no water goes down the River in the Tribe's name. This is a glaring inequity provided the Tribe's rights are the most senior in the Basin and that the lack of water for instream flows in the Klamath Basin has been a major factor in the decline of Klamath River salmon. The Tribe's water rights include water necessary to fulfill the purposes of the Yurok Reservation. That purpose

necessarily includes water for fish and ecological flows. Satisfying the Yurok water rights will secure a more ecologically beneficial instream flow regime for overall ecosystem health, not just a single species like what is provided under the ESA. This will improve fish production and survival and improve the overall health of the River. Fulfilling the homeland purposes of the Yurok Reservation is paramount to the overall restoration of the Klamath Basin."

Davis testified regarding the Hoopa Tribe's concerns over the Trinity River management, treaty rights and responsibilities that have been ignored, congressional statutes that have been ignored, and the loss of fish that has devastated the tribe. He said: "The Law of the Trinity River provides a framework of authority for opportunity in the basin. Key statutes, regulations, administrative decisions and judicial opinions are in place. Faithful compliance with them and respect for Hoopa sovereignty will carry us a long way to the future we all seek in the Klamath basin."

Super testified regarding the dam removal schedule for later in 2022, noting that the dams "provide no irrigation deliveries, no drinking water, and no flood control benefits," and that the removal of the dams is not funded by the federal government. But he said that dam removal alone is not enough to restore the river and fish habitat, and welcomed the IIJA funds, urging the federal agencies to make sub-basin restoration a priority.

Hill and Byrne testified about the consequences of the Bureau of Reclamation's decision in 2021 to allocate zero water for wildlife refuges and Klamath River Project agriculture. They noted that the decision was intended to protect fish, but it did so at the expense of other species, dried up hundreds of domestic wells, and created health problems in the form of dust.

MEETINGS

Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations

The 8th Annual Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO) workshop has been tentatively rescheduled for August 2-4, as a hybrid event located at the Scripps Seaside Forum in La Jolla, California. The workshop notice said: "FIRO is being developed and tested as a collaborative effort in the Russian River Basin (Lake Mendocino), the Santa Ana River Basin (Prado Dam), and the Yuba-Feather River Basins that engages experts and stakeholders in civil engineering, hydrology, meteorology, biology, economics and climate from several federal, state and local, universities and others. There is significant interest and support for developing FIRO at other appropriate locations in the Western U.S. and elsewhere." The workshop is by invitation only, but an invitation may be requested. See https://cw3e.ucsd.edu/firo_workshop_2022/.