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## **U. S Bureau of Reclamation Releases Study Projecting Water Levels in the Colorado River System**

**(Santa Fe, New Mexico)** – Yesterday the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation released its August 24 Monthly Study, which projects water levels in the Colorado River System, including Lakes Powell and Mead, through July 2023. As we continue a 20-year trend of drought on the Colorado, the hydrology remains bleak in the entire Colorado River Basin. Since 2000, New Mexico, like the other Upper Basin States, has been experiencing shortages in water supply. For this reason, the Department of the Interior and the seven Colorado River Basin States are escalating implementation of the Drought Contingency Plans (DCPs) that were signed in 2019.

In the Lower Basin States of Arizona, California and Nevada, the Secretary of the Interior, as the River Master, is declaring the first ever Shortage Condition in 2022. This will particularly affect the States of Arizona and Nevada, as they will have to take additional actions as part of the Lower Basin DCP, and reduce their water uses further than they already have.

In response to the drought situation, the Upper Basin States of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, and the Bureau of Reclamation are implementing the Drought Response Operations Agreement (DROA), which is part of the Upper Basin DCP. In July 2021, Reclamation and the States developed and initiated a drought response plan in accordance with the imminent need provision of the DROA. According to the current plan, Reclamation is releasing an additional 181,000 acre-feet of water from the Upper Basin reservoirs of Flaming Gorge, Aspinall and Navajo between July and December 2021. The purpose of these releases is to help protect the water level elevation at Lake Powell so that obligations under a century-old agreement are satisfied, while the power plant at Lake Powell can keep generating electricity for citizens across the Southwest, including New Mexico.

The next step for Reclamation and the Upper Division States is to develop a DROA plan for 2022. That planning work will be conducted between August and December 2021. Such a plan will include consideration of operational changes at Lake Powell first, consistent with the terms

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of DROA, as well as recovery for the 2021 DROA releases and recovery of any water that may be released under a 2022 DROA Plan. The 2022 DROA plan will also consider the potential futility, transit losses, and accounting, of any additional releases. Reclamation and the Upper Division States will conduct outreach with interested stakeholders about the 2022 DROA Plan before it is finalized, and will consider any suggested modifications.

John R. D’Antonio, New Mexico State Engineer and Governor Lujan Grisham’s appointed representative on the Colorado River said: “New Mexicans benefit from the power generated at Lake Powell and from its direct revenues. While it is disappointing that the hydrology in this basin is deteriorating, the States have been preparing for this very difficult time over a number of years. New Mexico officials are working diligently and collaboratively with the other States, the Department of the Interior and our partners in the Republic of Mexico to implement the adaptive management actions contemplated under the DCPs to boost the water levels in Powell and Mead, while protecting New Mexico’s water uses for New Mexicans, including, our Native American Tribes, Pueblos and Nations.”

*The Office of the State Engineer is charged with the administering the state’s water resources. The State Engineer has power over the supervision, measurement, appropriation, and distribution of all surface and groundwater in New Mexico, including streams and rivers that cross state boundaries. The State Engineer is also Secretary of the Interstate Stream Commission.*

*The nine-member Interstate Stream Commission is charged with separate duties including protecting New Mexico’s right to water under eight interstate stream compacts, ensuring the state complies with each of those compacts as well as investigating, conserving and protecting the waters of the State, in addition to water planning.*

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