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Water agencies across West partner to conserve Colorado River water, augment Lake Mead level through agricultural fallowing

Seizing every opportunity to use Colorado River resources as efficiently and effectively as possible and to help slow Lake Mead’s declining levels, water agencies across the Southwest are partnering with the federal government to fund a short-term agricultural land fallowing program in California that will conserve water on a large scale.

The partnership among the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, Central Arizona Project, Southern Nevada Water Authority, and Palo Verde Irrigation District is expected to conserve up to 180,000 acre-feet of water over the next three years, amounting to about a 3-foot increase in Lake Mead’s water level.

“Reclamation welcomes this collaborative effort to conserve water in Lake Mead,” said Bureau of Reclamation Lower Colorado Basin Regional Director Jacklynn Gould. “Working with our partners, we can reduce the risk of the reservoir declining to critical levels.”

Under an agreement finalized last week, Reclamation will fund half of the program’s total costs of about \$38 million, while Metropolitan, CAP and Southern Nevada will share the remaining costs equally, each providing about \$6.3 million.

With runoff in the Colorado River Basin dismally low this year, Lake Mead’s level has dropped significantly. Reclamation declared the first-ever tier one shortage on the river last week, triggering cutbacks to Arizona and Nevada to slow the reservoir’s decline.

Through the program, participating farmers in Palo Verde Irrigation District will be paid to fallow a portion of their land over the next three years. The conserved water will be added to Lake Mead, becoming what is known as system water – water that benefits all Colorado River water users.

“Palo Verde Irrigation District agriculture enjoys the highest priority for Colorado River water in California, yet we are devoted to collaborating with our partners along the River. We are all connected

by the Colorado River, and making it more sustainable is in the long-term best interest of all of us,” said Bart Fisher, PVID board trustee.

The conserved water could help keep Lake Mead levels high enough to stave off a tier two shortage declaration in 2023 and the potential for additional contributions required under the Drought Contingency Plan. It will also help preserve green hydroelectric production capacity at Hoover Dam.

“This is just the beginning. We’re working to develop other innovative ideas to keep as much water as possible in Lake Mead. Working as one with our fellow water agencies and with our partners in ag, we can find solutions that benefit us all and that make the river more sustainable,” Metropolitan General Manager Adel Hagekhalil said.

“Building new tools to address the shared risks we all face in the Colorado River requires deepening existing partnerships as well as creating new ones. This unique interstate partnership will generate new resiliency in the Lower Colorado River and is a model for our future endeavors,” CAP General Manager Ted Cooke said.

“To successfully manage these shortage conditions over the next few years, every sector of the Colorado River community within the Basin will need to step up and take strong action to conserve and preserve this resource,” said John Entsminger, General Manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority. “This is a good example of the kind of action that can be taken in partnership with the agricultural sectors to conserve water and help protect Lake Mead.”

The program is made possible through Metropolitan’s existing land fallowing program with [PVID](#). Typically, the conserved water is made available to Metropolitan and Metropolitan can determine annually how much land it calls for to be fallowed, based on its water supply needs. Because Metropolitan has significant amounts of water stored in Lake Mead – more than 1 million acre-feet – it has flexibility on how it uses the fallowing program for the next few years, opening the door for this system conservation agreement.

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About the Bureau of Reclamation

The Bureau of Reclamation is a federal agency under the U.S. Department of the Interior and is the nation's largest wholesale water supplier and second largest producer of hydroelectric power. Our facilities also provide substantial flood control, recreation opportunities, and environmental benefits. Visit our website at <https://www.usbr.gov> and follow us on Twitter @USBR; Facebook @bureau.of.reclamation; LinkedIn @Bureau of Reclamation; Instagram @bureau_of_reclamation; and YouTube @reclamation.

About the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a state-established cooperative that, along with its 26 cities and retail suppliers, provide water for 19 million people in six counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies, and helps its members to develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.

About Central Arizona Project

Central Arizona Project (CAP) is Arizona's single largest resource for renewable water supplies. CAP is designed to bring roughly 1.5 million acre-feet of water from the Colorado River to Central and Southern Arizona every year. More than 80% of the state's population, live in Maricopa, Pima and Pinal counties, where CAP water is delivered. It is a 336-mile long system of aqueducts, tunnels, pumping plants and pipelines. www.CentralArizonaProject.com.

About Southern Nevada Water Authority

The SNWA is a wholesale water provider that manages water conservation, water quality and water resource issues in a sustainable, adaptive and responsible manner for Southern Nevada. The regional entity that consists of seven water and wastewater agencies that collectively serve more than 2.2 million residents through reliable, cost-effective systems. Visit

snwa.com for more information.