
Division 7

2015 Annual Report

Water Supply

Snowpack in the San Juan and Dolores River Basins during the winter of 2014-2015 (2015 Water Year) once again followed the trend of the last several years with below average snowpack and earlier than normal snowpack runoff. A very wet May and June provided much needed water in the area to offset the lack of snow during the winter. The measured precipitation in May was approximately 350% of average. The wet spring caused flooding in many areas; Vallecito Reservoir released at record levels in order to prevent overtopping.

Generally, the Water Year 2015 (November 1, 2014 – October 31, 2015) was a better year than the 2014 year, due to the spring precipitation. Precipitation in September and October 2014 allowed reservoirs to start the fill process heading into the 2015 Water Year. The snowfall was extremely low and the winter was very warm causing some fields to green in February. An irrigation call on the La Plata River for irrigation was honored on February 13th due to the warm weather and grass turning green. This was earliest call for irrigation water that could be verified.

Surface Water Issues

Surface water administration was less challenging compared to most other years, due to the precipitation in May and June. The spring rains were effective in filling reservoirs prior to the irrigation season. Long Hollow Reservoir was placed into service this year and required additional administration on the La Plata River for exchange and Compact deliveries.

There were 92 administrative calls placed on 12 different stream systems in Division 7. From the total, 68 of the calls were on the La Plata River. The other stream systems were Chicken Creek, Coal Creek, Elbert Creek, Florida River, Fourmile Creek, Los Pinos River, Mancos River, Middle Fork of the Mancos River, Oil Well Creek, Spring Creek and the West Fork of the Mancos River. It is of note that McElmo Creek and Disappointment Creek did not go under administration this water year.

Vallecito Reservoir, with a capacity of 125,400 acre-feet, was required to make record releases in June due to a full reservoir and heavy rains. The multi-agency team coordinated releases through the outlet works, preventing water from running through the emergency spillway. There was minimal flooding damage downstream on the Pine River. The reservoir contained 88,134 acre-feet at the start of the water year. Vallecito Reservoir filled to a volume of 125,486 acre-feet on June 7, 2015 and later dropped to a low of 73,559 acre-feet on October 17, 2015. Ending the 2015 water year and heading into the 2016 water year, Vallecito contained 77,565 acre-feet. The maximum release from Vallecito Reservoir was 3000 cfs on June 12, 2015, an amount not seen in the downstream channel since the dam was constructed.

McPhee Reservoir, with a live capacity of 381,051 acre-feet, contained 185,577 acre-feet at the start of the water year. McPhee Reservoir dropped to a low of 180,849 acre-feet on December 16, 2014, and then filled to a volume of 338,825 acre-feet on June 29, 2015. Ending the 2015 water year and heading into the 2016 water year, McPhee Reservoir contained 242,810 acre-feet and was dropping.

Lemon Reservoir, with a live capacity of 39,790 acre-feet, contained 20,960 acre-feet at the start of the water year. Lemon Reservoir filled to a volume of 39,940 acre-feet on June 26, 2015 and later

dropped to a low of 17,680 acre-feet on September 29, 2015. Ending the 2015 water year and heading into the 2016 water year, Lemon contained 20,030 acre-feet. The maximum release from Lemon Reservoir was 1159 cfs on June 10, 2015.

The San Juan – Chama Project, which diverts water from Colorado into New Mexico, diverted 88,221 AF during the year, which was 102% of average since diversions started in 1971.

Long Hollow Reservoir, with a live capacity of 5,300 acre-feet filled to a volume of 446 acre-feet on March 22, 2015 and dropped to a low of 145 acre-feet at the end of the year. This was the first year Long Hollow made releases of storage water for delivery to the state line for Compact purposes and to irrigation ditches by exchange or direct delivery.

Ground Water Issues

There were 258 well permits issued in Division 7 in calendar year 2015. Of these, 145 were exempt well permits, 10 were non-exempt well permits, and 14 monitoring well permits processed in the Durango office. There were also 48 non-exempt well permits, 24 monitoring well permits and 33 Oil and Gas (Coal Bed Methane) well permits processed in the Denver office. There were no dewatering wells nor geothermal wells permitted this year.

There are currently over 3,900 coal bed methane (CBM) wells in Division 7, 90% of which lie within the Southern Ute Indian Reservation boundary. The Colorado Supreme Court upheld the question of authority to administer non-tributary groundwater within the Ute Reservation. Consultation with the Attorney General occurred in preparation for the anticipated work load in 2016 to address these wells associated applications for water rights and plans for augmentation.

Pagosa Verde completed three monitoring wells to collect thermal gradient data for a potential geothermal production well site. The monitoring wells were drilled to a depth of approximately 1400 feet.

Compact Issues

La Plata River Compact Issues

A Compact call was made by New Mexico on March 17, 2015. Deliveries to New Mexico were successfully made through the main stem of the La Plata River through mid-June in order to fulfill Compact obligations. Dry summer conditions made deliveries difficult, at which point Cherry Creek was used to deliver water from the upper portion of the La Plata River to the lower portion in order to minimize stream losses. Releases from Long Hollow Reservoir were made from mid-August through mid-September to assist in meeting Compact deliveries.

Animas La-Plata Compact

No deliveries were made from Ridges Basin Reservoir to project beneficiaries. Ridges Basin Reservoir was filled via the Animas Pumping Plant to replace evaporative losses from the previous year.

The application to Make Absolute and for a Finding for a Reasonable Diligence for the Animas La-Plata Project (Case Number 2013CW3011) continued throughout the 2015 Water Year. The State Engineer's Office remains an opposer in the case due to the Statement of Opposition filed October 24th, 2013. Many of the Project beneficiaries, including entities in New Mexico, have also entered the case as opposers. Trial was set for November 2, 2015. By the end of Water Year 2015, the parties had negotiated terms of a decree and a stipulated settlement. The case remained open pending a ruling by the Division 7 Water Judge

Problems Solved

Chicken Creek, West Fork of Mancos, and Jackson Gulch Reservoir

Proper administration of the water rights in this area according to the priority system continues to improve as users are now more accustomed to keeping Mancos River water in the Mancos River rather than allowing Mancos River water to be diverted across to Chicken Creek. The spring rains allowed Jackson Gulch Reservoir to fill completely. The administration was much easier this year compared to prior years because the river remain off call for a large portion of the year due to the spring rains.

Community Involvement

Division 7 strived to be involved in the community in 2015. Division staff regularly attended meetings of the Southwestern Water Conservation District; Animas-La Plata Operation, Maintenance, and Replacement Association; La Plata County Water Advisory Commission; Animas-La Plata Water Conservancy District; La Plata Water Conservancy District; Dolores Water Conservancy District; Montezuma Valley Irrigation Company; Pagosa Area Water and Sanitation District; and other water user group meetings they were invited to attend.

The Water Resources Review Committee, an interim committee of the Colorado Legislative Council, held a meeting in Durango in July. The Division Engineer presented to the Committee on the administration of the La Plata River and the La Plata River Compact during a site visit to Long Hollow Reservoir. Staff from Division 7 attended the meeting.

The Upper Colorado River Commission, with members representing the United States, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, met in Durango in August. The Division Engineer presented to the Commission on the administration of the La Plata River and the La Plata River Compact during a site visit to Long Hollow Reservoir. Additional staff from Division 7 also attended the meeting.

The Division also made efforts to keep the public at large informed of water issues by participating in interviews for articles in the local newspapers and other venues, and work closely with local city and county governments on water issues. Water Commissioners regularly attended ditch company meetings held in their Districts. Additionally, Division 7 staff participated in the "Water Fair" used to educate hundreds of local schoolchildren on where their water comes from, what it is used for, and how it gets to their homes and farms.

The Colorado Water Officials Association (CWOA) annual meeting, organized by the Division 7 staff, was extremely successful. Over 125 people attended the conference held in Durango. Presentations were made by representatives from NOAA, University of Colorado, the Center for Snow and Avalanche Studies, Colorado Climate Center, La Plata County Sheriff, and Montezuma County Sheriff. Attendees included representatives from the State Engineer's Office, Colorado Water Conservation Board, well drillers, water conservancy districts, consulting engineerings, and the Southern Ute Indian and Ute Mountain Ute Tribes.

Highlights

Abandonment

There were no abandonment cases this year.

Important Court Cases

There were no court cases that went to trial this year in Division 7. The trial scheduled for 13CW3 (Martinez Dam) was vacated after successful negotiations between the applicant and Division 7 staff.

The combined trial scheduled for Case 13CW3011 and 13CW3034 (Animas La-Plata) had not been vacated at the end of the 2015 water year, however progress was made to settle the case in lieu of a trial. There was an increase in objections to other court cases on the Animas River due to the issues associated with the Animas La-Plata Project.

Case 13CW3 – PAWSD - Martinez Dam

Case 2013CW3, in the Interest of Pagosa Area Water and Sanitation District (PAWSD), was settled prior to the scheduled trial. In this case, PAWSD originally filed for diligence on Martinez Dam. The application was amended to include a claim to make 1120.49 acre-feet of the conditional water right absolute based on PAWSD's storage of water in the enlarged Stevens Reservoir, an alternate place of storage for the Martinez Dam water right as decreed in Case No. W-958-72. At issue for the State was the status of the enlarged Stevens Reservoir as a decreed structure and alternate place of storage under the applicant's Plan of Augmentation and reservoir accounting.

Following the stipulation between PAWSD and the State, a second amended application was submitted by the applicant in May requesting that the enlarged capacity of Stevens Reservoir be incorporated into the larger integrated municipal system, as an alternate point of diversion and place of storage for all other storage structures and rights under the PAWSD Augmentation Plan in Case W-958-72. The decree has since been filed and approved by the Division 7 Water Judge, concluding this case.

Case 13CW3011 and Case 13CW3034 – Animas La Plata Project

Case 13CW3011 and Case 13CW3034, In the Interest of Southwestern Water Conservation District, required a substantial amount of time by the staff of Division 7. These cases relate to the water rights associated with the Animas – La Plata Project and Service Area Water Rights. The Division Engineer has been part of extensive negotiations, expert meetings, and depositions.

At the end of Water Year 2015, the Colorado Attorney General was completing a stipulation between the Applicant and the State and Division Engineers. It is anticipated that settlement of this case will occur in 2016 without going to trial.



Animas-La Plata Project point of diversion and Pumping Plant



Ridges Basin Dam and Lake Nighthorse, located near Durango, CO

Durango Boating Park

The City of Durango completed the construction of the Durango Boating Park at Santa Rita Park. The structures can be used for competitive boating events and will allow a call to be placed for a recreational in channel diversion.



Construction of the City of Durango White Water Park (Recreational In-Channel Diversion)



City of Durango White Water Park in use during 2015 Animas River Days

Long Hollow Reservoir

Long Hollow Reservoir (Bobby K. Taylor Reservoir), with a capacity of 5,300 acre-feet was completed in October 2014. Long Hollow Reservoir captured water for the first time and stored a total of 450 acre-feet. 300 acre-feet was assigned for Compact deliveries and 150 acre-feet was assigned to the La Plata Water Conservancy District to provide supplemental irrigation by exchange, water banking, direct delivery or augmentation. The majority of the water was stored during the non-compact period. Even with the abundant spring rains, there was only a very short period when the reservoir was in priority to store during the compact period.

Releases from the Compact pool started in mid-August and continued through early September. Releases were made when the river was still “live” from Long Hollow to the state line and attempts to deliver water for Compact purposes from the upper river to the lower river were futile.

Water from the District pool was exchanged from Long Hollow Reservoir to five upstream ditches. An additional ditch downstream from Long Hollow Reservoir received storage water directly.

Long Hollow Reservoir was successfully managed during the non-compact period pursuant to the *Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Long Hollow Reservoir Operations to Benefit the Native Fishery in the La Plata River*. This Memorandum of Understanding is an agreement executed by the La Plata Water Conservancy District, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Colorado Division of Water Resources and the Colorado Division of Wildlife to coordinate releases from Long Hollow into the La Plata River to support the fishery.



Recently completed Long Hollow Dam and Reservoir (2015)

Gold King Mine

On August 5, 2015, a team working on behalf of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency triggered a discharge from the Gold King Mine. Discharge from the Mine was estimated at 3 million gallons. Municipalities that draw water from the Animas River were notified and encouraged to cease pumping from the Animas River. The Colorado Division of Water Resources office was notified of the spill in the afternoon of August 5th by La Plata County Emergency Management.

The Mine discharge reached the first irrigation ditches in the Animas Valley early on August 6. Due to the efforts of the La Plata County Emergency Management and Colorado Division of Water Resources the majority of the ditches had been warned and advised to close their headgates. Due to the unknown contaminants in the discharged water, the La Plata County Sheriff closed the Animas River to recreation. The spill reached the City of Durango on the evening of August 6th.

The City of Durango uses approximately 4 million gallons of water on summer days, primarily sourced from the Florida River, but supplemented by Animas River water. The City of Durango encouraged residents to conserve water and the irrigation of city parks was curtailed. Durango can divert approximately 5 million gallons of water per day from the Florida River to the City Reservoir for municipal use. At the time of the spill there was a temporary storage restriction at the Durango City Reservoir due to work being done on the reservoir. The restriction was temporarily lifted to allow full storage in the Reservoir.

Following the spill, the Division 7 office worked closely with La Plata County Emergency Management and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to minimize the impacts of the spill on the water users.



Figure 1: Gold King Mine portal prior to discharge (August 5, 2015 – 10:51 AM)



Figure 2: Gold King Mine portal during discharge (August 5, 2015 - 10:56 AM)



Figure 3: Confluence of Animas River and San Juan River (August 8, 2015)



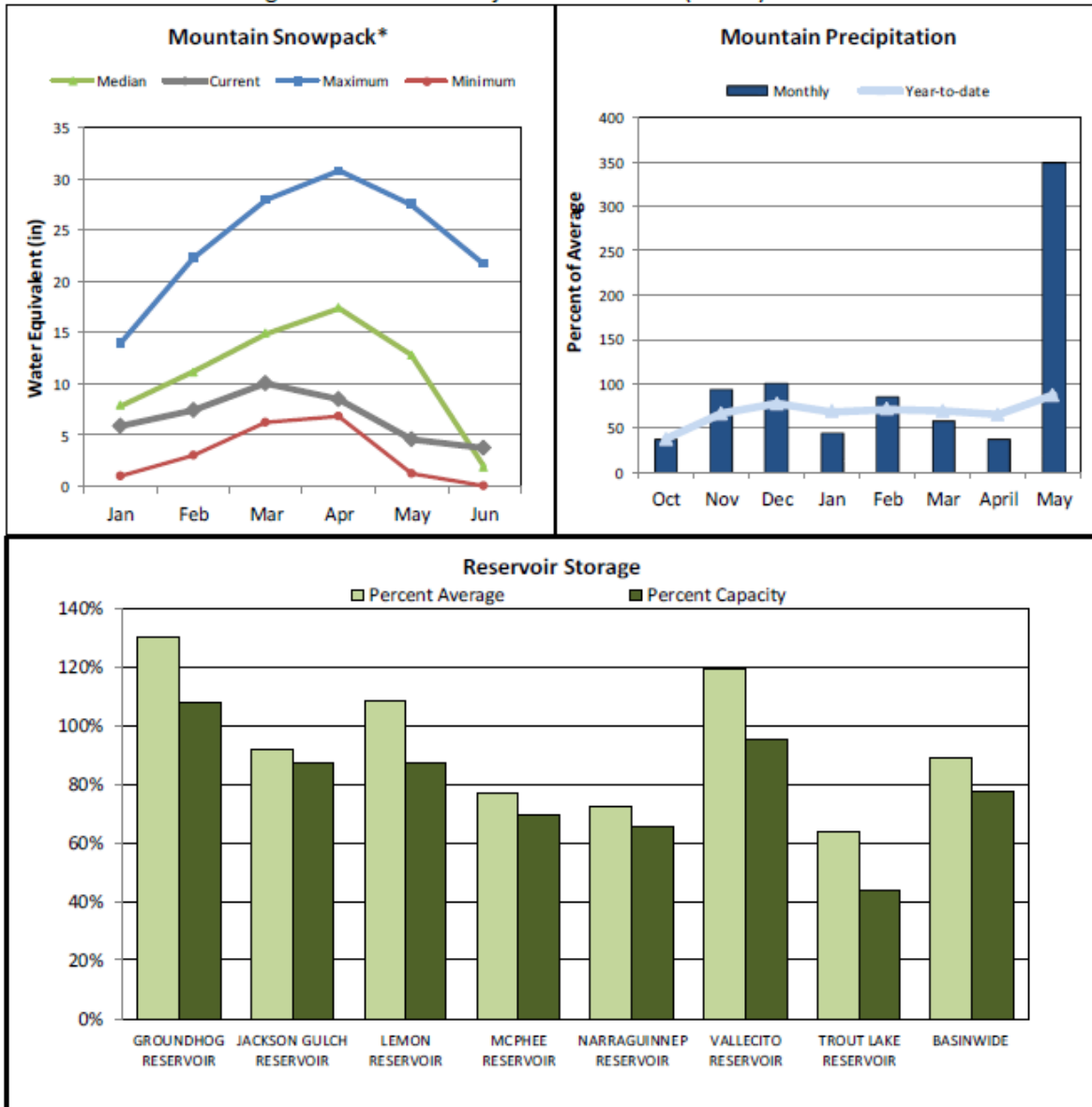
Figure 4: Gold King Mine entrance after discharge (November 2015)

Appendix

SAN MIGUEL, DOLORES, ANIMAS, AND SAN JUAN RIVER BASINS

June 1, 2015

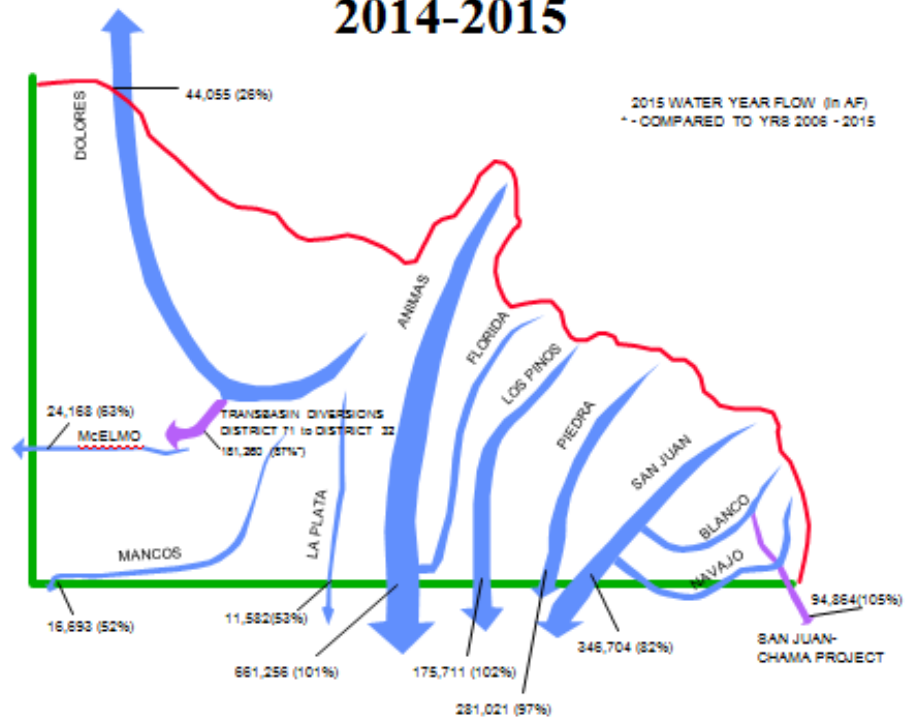
Snowpack in the combined southwest river basins is above normal at 207% of median. Precipitation for May was 349% of average which brings water year-to-date precipitation up to 87% of average. Reservoir storage at the end of May was 89%, the same as last year. Current streamflow forecasts range from 91% of average for the Animas River at Durango to 51% for the Navajo Reservoir inflow (Jun-Jul).





DIVISION OF WATER RESOURCES DIVISION VII ANNUAL REPORT

2014-2015



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