

DIVISION 7

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1 Water Supply

Snowpack in the San Juan and Dolores River Basins during the winter of 2015-2016 (2016 Water Year) returned to a more normal pattern. The final snowpack prior to runoff was close to normal and peak runoff occurred generally in June. The winter began with a large amount of snow accumulating in December. In February and March, the temperatures were above average with very little precipitation, causing the snowpack to fall below average. Many rivers saw higher flows in February and March compared to average due to an early snowmelt at lower elevation. Above average precipitation in April and May provided moisture resulting in an average snowpack prior to the peak runoff. The weather in May provided a much needed supplement to the snowpack and also delayed the peak runoff until June.

Most reservoirs in Division 7 were able to fill completely in 2016, including McPhee Reservoir. Water was released from McPhee Reservoir into the Dolores River in early June, providing a rare downstream recreational opportunity for river users.

There was below average precipitation in June and July, causing a sharp drop in water availability following the spring runoff. Flow in the San Juan River and the Piedra River dropped in late July to a level below the Colorado Water Conservation Board's in-stream flow amount. In August, rainfall returned to the area and rivers returned to a more normal flowate, including areas which saw minor flooding.

2 Surface Water Issues

Due to the normal runoff, and well timed precipitation late in the summer, surface water administration was less challenging compared to most years. There was only a brief period in late July when water shortages were wide-spread.

There were 95 administrative calls placed on 10 different stream systems in Division 7. From the total, 52 of the calls were on the La Plata River. The other stream systems were Chicken Creek, Coal Creek, Devil Creek, Florida River, Fourmile Creek, Los Pinos River, Mancos River, Spring Creek and the West Fork of the Mancos River. It is of note that McElmo Creek did not go under administration during the 2016 water year.

An in-stream flow call was placed by the Colorado Water Conservation Board on the Dolores River downstream of McPhee Reservoir for 78 cfs on October 4th, 2016. The call was recorded in Division 4 because the most downstream location of the in-stream flow is located that Division. The Water Commissioners, Assistant Division Engineer, and Division Engineer were active in working with water users in the Dolores Basin to provide water to this river reach.

Vallecito Reservoir, with a capacity of 125,400 acre-feet, filled in June and made peak releases of 2,200 cfs. The experience gained the prior year in managing large peak flows was useful this year, although the flows this year were lower than the prior. The reservoir contained 77,506 acre-feet at the start of the water year. Vallecito Reservoir filled to a volume of 125,325 acre-feet on June 22, 2016 and later dropped to a low of 71,838 acre-feet on September 23, 2016. Ending the 2016 water year and heading into the 2017 water year, Vallecito contained 75,181 acre-feet.

McPhee Reservoir, with a live capacity of 381,051 acre-feet, contained 242,743 acre-feet at the start of the water year. McPhee filled to a volume of 380,109 acre-feet on June 16. A spill was made from the outlet into the Dolores River in from June 1 through June 20, providing a rare recreational opportunity on the Dolores River. The maximum flowrate released into the Dolores River was 1,260 cfs. Ending the 2016 water year and heading into the 2017 water year, McPhee Reservoir contained 295,110 acre-feet.

Lemon Reservoir, with a live capacity of 39,790 acre-feet, contained 20,100 acre-feet at the start of the water year. Lemon Reservoir filled to a volume of 40,040 acre-feet on June 18, 2015 and later dropped to a low of 18,490 acre-feet on September 30, 2016. Ending the 2016 water year and heading into the 2017 water year, Lemon Reservoir contained 19,810 acre-feet. The maximum release from Lemon Reservoir was 795 cfs on June 11, 2016.

The San Juan - Chama Project, which diverts water from Colorado into New Mexico, diverted 89,678 AF during the year, which was 103% of average since diversions started in 1971.

Long Hollow Reservoir, with a live capacity of 5,300 acre-feet, contained 147 acre-feet at the start of the water year. Long Hollow Reservoir filled to a volume of 769 acre-feet on April 1, 2016 and dropped to a low of 118 acre-feet on August 27, 2016. Ending the 2016 water year and heading into the 2017 water year, Long Hollow Reservoir contained 205 acre-feet. This was the second 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.

3 *Ground Water Issues*

There were 156 well permits issued in Division 7 in calendar year 2016. Of these, 131 were exempt well permits, 10 were non-exempt well permits, and 15 monitoring well permits were processed in the Durango office. There were also 40 non-exempt well permits, 44 monitoring well permits, 15 monitoring holes, and 12 Oil and Gas (Coal Bed Methane) well permits processed in the Denver office. There were no dewatering wells nor geothermal wells permitted in the 2016 Water 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. Case stayed pending Supreme Court rulings became active once again. Consultation between the Division 7 Office and the Attorney General occurred in preparation for the anticipated work load in 2017 to address these wells and associated applications for water rights and plans for augmentation.

4 Compact Issues

4.1 La Plata River Compact Issues

A Compact call was made by New Mexico on April 1st, 2016. Deliveries to New Mexico were successfully made via the main stem of the La Plata River through the beginning of July in order to fulfill Compact obligations. Dry summer conditions made deliveries difficult, at which time Cherry Creek was used to deliver water from the upper basin of the La Plata River to the lower basin in order to minimize stream losses. Compact releases from Long Hollow Reservoir were made from mid-July through the end of September.

4.2 Animas La-Plata Compact

No deliveries were made from Ridges Basin Reservoir to project beneficiaries. Evaporative losses were not replaced from water pumped from the Animas Pumping Plant.

The Application to Make Absolute and for a Finding for a Reasonable Diligence for the Animas La-Plata Project (Case Number 2013CW3011) was signed the Division 7 Water Judge on February 24, 2016. The State Engineer's Office as well as all other opposers stipulated out of this case, and no trial was required.

Construction on infrastructure to deliver water from Lake Nighthorse to the western part of La Plata County was started in September 2016. The project is a joint venture with La Plata West Water Authority, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and Lake Durango Water Authority.

5 *Problems Solved*

5.1 Dolores River Call

A valid call by the Colorado Water Conservation Board was placed on the Dolores River, after many years of “Free River” conditions. Division 7 staff worked with irrigators, municipalities, and reservoir operators to administer the basin in accordance with court decrees.

6 *Community Involvement*

Division 7 strived to be involved in the community in 2016. Division staff regularly attended meetings of the Southwestern Water Conservation District; Animas-La Plata Operation, Maintenance, and Replacement Association; Animas-La Plata Water Conservancy District; Dolores Water Conservancy District; Montezuma Valley Irrigation Company; Pagosa Area Water and Sanitation District; and other water user group meeting they were invited to attend.

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 television stations. The Division worked 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 water comes from, what it is used for, and how it gets to their homes and farms. The Division presented at Water 101 and Water 202, which was well attended, including a visit from Justice Hobbs.

7 Highlights

7.1 Abandonment

There were no abandonment cases this year.

7.2 Important Court Cases

There were no court cases that went to trial this year in Division 7. The trial scheduled for 13CW3011 and 13CW3034 (Animas-La Plata) was vacated after successful negotiations between the applicant and all opposers.

7.2.1 Case 13CW3011 and Case 13CW3034 - Animas La Plata Project

A decree was issued in Case 13CW3011 and Case 13CW3034, in the Interest of Southwestern Water Conservation District. These cases related 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.

7.3 Hydrography

7.3.1 Mancos River at CJ's Bridge Near Mancos (MANCHICO)

A new gage on the Mancos River was installed, which provided valuable information to improve the administration on the Mancos River. Releases from Jackson Reservoir are being refined to more closely match demands on the system. This will conserve water when over delivery is occurring, while ensuring all users receive their requested amount of water.



Figure 1: Down looking radar installed on CJ's Bridge on Mancos River



Figure 2: Mancos River downstream from MANCHICO gage

7.3.2 Pioneer Ditch at the Colorado-New Mexico Stateline (PIODITCO)

Staff has been coordinating the relocation of the Pioneer Ditch (La Plata River) at the Colorado-New Mexico Stateline Gage to improve safety and accuracy of the gage. This gage is important to the administration of the La Plata River Compact. Coordination with New Mexico and the Pioneer Ditch Company (New Mexico) occurred and relocation is expected in 2017.



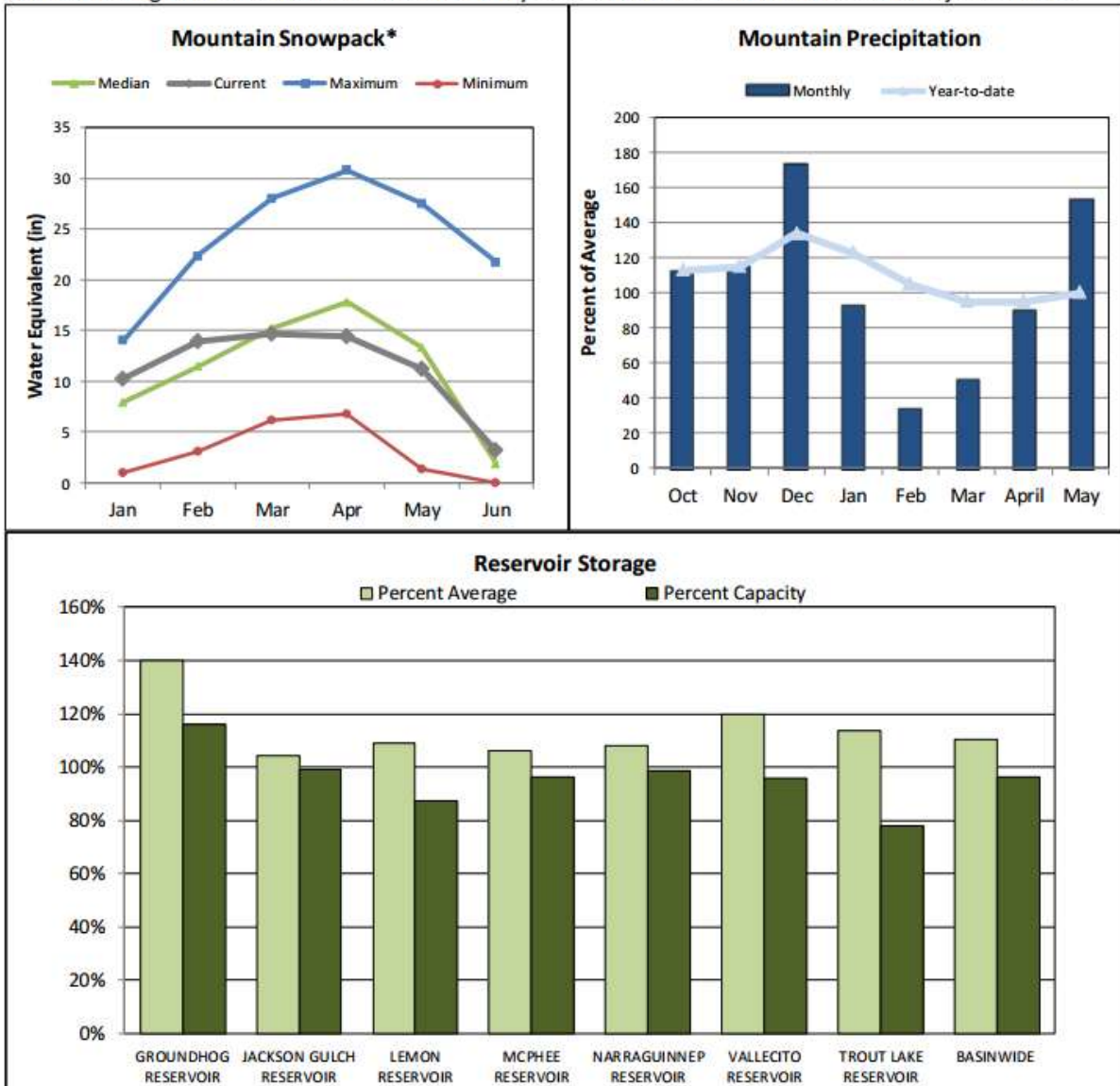
Figure 3: Pioneer Ditch flume to be relocated

8 Appendix

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

June 1, 2016

Snowpack in the combined southwest river basins is above normal at 171% of median. Precipitation for May was 154% of average which brings water year-to-date precipitation to 100% of average. Reservoir storage at the end of May was 110% of average compared to 89% last year. Current streamflow forecasts range from 105% of average for the inflows to Cone and Gurley Reservoirs to 69% for the inflow to Navajo Reservoir.



Appendix A: Caption