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## Reclamation Issues Final EIS for Colorado River Operations under Low Reservoir Conditions

Commissioner of Reclamation Robert Johnson today announced that the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has issued a final Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed adoption of specific Colorado River Lower Basin shortage guidelines and coordinated reservoir management strategies to address operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead, particularly under low reservoir conditions.

“These proposed operational guidelines will provide Colorado River water users and managers in the U.S. a greater degree of certainty about how the two large reservoirs on the Colorado River will be operated under low water conditions, and when - and by how much - water deliveries will be reduced in the Lower Basin in drought or other low reservoir conditions,” Johnson said.

The Final EIS presents six alternatives, including a No Action Alternative and a Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative proposes that:

- \* specific water levels in Lake Mead be used to determine when a shortage condition (the availability of less than 7.5 million acre-feet of water) would be declared in the lower Colorado River Basin, and how that shortage would be shared by the three Lower Division States – Arizona, California and Nevada;

- \* specific reservoir conditions at Lakes Powell and Mead be used to determine the annual operation of these reservoirs, in a manner that would minimize shortages in the Lower Basin and avoid the risk of water delivery curtailments in the Upper Basin;

- \* a mechanism be implemented to encourage and account for augmentation and conservation of water supplies in Lake Mead to minimize the likelihood and severity of potential future shortages and to provide additional flexibility to meet water use needs, particularly under low reservoir conditions; and

- \* the Interim Surplus Guidelines established in 2001 be modified and extended through 2026.

“The Preferred Alternative was developed by Reclamation after extensive collaborative efforts with the Colorado River Basin States, environmental organizations and other stakeholders,” said Johnson. “It was designed to allow the river to be managed to meet the demands being placed on

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it today and into the future. I commend the states and all the other stakeholders who worked so long and hard to develop these guidelines and management strategies - this truly is an historic accomplishment.”

Development of the guidelines was spurred by the current drought in the Colorado River Basin, which began in the fall of 1999. In the eight years since then, the Basin has experienced the worst drought conditions in 100 years of recorded history, and storage in Colorado River reservoirs has dropped from nearly full to about 54 percent of capacity. Because there are currently no specific guidelines for determining shortage conditions in the Lower Basin, or the coordinated operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead during drought and low reservoir conditions, a public process was initiated in September 2005 to develop them. They are expected to be adopted by the Secretary of the Interior in December, and take effect in January 2008. They would then be used each year through 2026 to develop the Annual Operating Plan for Colorado River reservoirs.

The Final EIS is available for viewing and copying at Reclamation’s project website, <http://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/programs/strategies.html>. Alternatively, a compact disc or hard copy is available upon written request to: Regional Director, Lower Colorado Region, Bureau of Reclamation, Attention: BCOO-1005, P.O. Box 61470, Boulder City, Nevada 89006-1470; fax at (702) 293-8156; or e-mail at [strategies@lc.usbr.gov](mailto:strategies@lc.usbr.gov).

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