



WATER: Agencies weigh competing suggestions for new Glen Canyon Dam plan *(Wednesday, March 28, 2012)*

April Reese, E&E reporter

As the Bureau of Reclamation and National Park Service begin crafting a highly anticipated management plan for Glen Canyon Dam in Arizona, the agencies will have to make some tough choices about what to include in the new blueprint.

That became clear during a webinar that Reclamation officials held yesterday to summarize the comments they have received while gathering public input on what should be in the plan, known as the "long-term experimental and management plan" (LTEMP). The document, which is expected to be completed by fall of next year, will guide dam operations over the next 15 to 20 years.

The comments touched on almost every aspect of dam management, from protection of habitat for the federally endangered humpback chub and other resources within Grand Canyon National Park -- which lies just downstream from the dam -- to hydropower production, fisheries and recreation. The stretch of the Colorado River that winds through the scenic canyon is popular with rafters, hikers and anglers.

The planning area includes the 300-mile stretch of the river that flows southwest from Glen Canyon Dam to Lake Mead, the reservoir behind Hoover Dam near Las Vegas. In addition to the park, the area also includes Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, and natural and archaeological resources important to several Native American tribes, including the Hualapai and Havasupai.

Many comments emphasized the importance of conducting more experimental high flows to

better protect the park and native fish, while others urged Reclamation to maintain flows that will keep reservoirs full and maximize power generation.

On the subject of fisheries, some suggested stepping up efforts to remove non-native trout, which compete with the chub, while others encouraged managers to stop killing trout.

The wide range of comments reflects the complexity of managing a major dam on the Interior West's most important river. While the dam was constructed in the 1960s to provide water storage and hydropower for the growing Southwest, it profoundly altered flows in the Colorado River, contributing to the decline of the Grand Canyon's riparian ecosystem.

The comments also reflect the dueling legal mandates Reclamation is under. On one hand, the Grand Canyon Protection Act directs federal officials to protect and improve the park's world-renowned resources; on the other, a suite of other laws direct Reclamation to provide hydropower and water to cities in the Southwest.

"Some comments talked about the need to be consistent with laws, regulations and policies," said Kirk LaGory of the Energy Department's Argonne National Laboratory, who presented the summary of the comments. "But some also observed that these are not always in concert with each other."

Ted Kowalski, chief of the Interstate and Federal Section of the Colorado Water Conservation Board, said at the end of the meeting that he was concerned about some of the comments showing up in the range of alternatives the agencies will now begin forging, including a suggestion that officials rewrite the Colorado River Compact, which divvies up the river's water among the seven states in the basin.

But Beverley Heffernan, Reclamation's environmental resources division chief, said retooling the 1922 agreement, which allocates more water than the Colorado can now provide, is beyond the scope of the plan, as is the question of whether the dam should be decommissioned to help restore the Grand Canyon's riparian ecosystem.

And she assured participants in the webinar that a 2007 agreement between the Interior Department and the basin states that requires Reclamation to "equalize" water levels in Lake Powell and Lake Mead is also sacrosanct ([Land Letter](#), Dec. 13, 2007).

Lake Powell collects water from the Upper Colorado River Basin, which includes parts of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, while Lake Mead stores water for the lower basin, encompassing all of Arizona and parts of Nevada and California, as well as a small part of New Mexico.

A public meeting to discuss possible alternatives to be included in the environmental impact statement for the LTEMP will be held April 4 and 5 in Flagstaff, Ariz.

[Click here](#) for more information on the meeting.

Reese writes from Santa Fe, N.M.

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E&E Publishing, LLC
122 C St., Ste. 722, NW, Wash., D.C. 20001.
Phone: 202-628-6500. Fax: 202-737-5299.
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