

MRGCD Water 2019 Outlook, 2/25/2019

The 2019 Irrigation Season is fast approaching. The MRGCD expects to begin charging canals early next month. As usual, the month of March is mostly devoted to flushing debris, fixing leaks, and bringing our facilities up to normal operating flow/level. There isn't much consumptive demand for water, and we don't expect to make many deliveries in March. Demand for water increases in early to mid-April, eventually peaking in Late June. Typically irrigation demand decreases somewhat in July and August, as the summer rains partially provide the water our crops need.

The question we always get from irrigators this time of year is the status of our water supply. As most know, 2018 was a terribly dry year. It was one of the worst on record, and to get through it required every drop of stored water we had. El Vado reservoir was emptied on August 30 last summer. Fortunately there were some intermittent rains, and we were able to continue to deliver water to many users through September and October, but there were shortages and hardship for many users. Water Bank users in particular were hard hit, as we experienced extensive periods last year during which Water Bank deliveries were curtailed.

So what can irrigators expect in 2019? The snowpack is good right now. Not exceptional, by any means, but adequate. Most sites in the mountains are reporting 100-120% of normal. It is still early to make predictions, but if the weather continues like it has the past few months, we expect a normal spring runoff, and good natural flows through June. Once into the summer, we will likely need some supplemental water from storage, but not as much as was needed last year.

At the moment, we have almost no storage. But, we do expect to store some water this spring. We are limited this year on how much we can store by the Rio Grande Compact, which requires a substantial portion of the flow to go to Elephant Butte, for use by farmers in southern New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico. We are only able to store about 40,000 acre feet at El Vado this spring. We also expect to receive about 20,000 acre-feet from the San Juan-Chama project (Heron Reservoir). When all is said and done, including a few other small water transfers, we expect have about 65,000 acre-feet available for use this summer, to supplement any natural flow. That is not a lot of water, roughly 1/3 our storage capacity, but it should be enough to carry us through a normal summer, and into the fall.

Water Bank users should take note however that curtailment periods should be expected in 2019, especially in July and August, and will be dependent on rainfall and natural flow in the river.

For more information, contact the MRGCD at 505-247-0234,

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