

MRGCD Water 2018 Outlook, 8/10/2018

The 2018 irrigation season has continued to be very challenging. The summer has brought some “monsoon” rain. Unfortunately, the rain has not been as much as we hoped for. We have been releasing water from storage continuously since April. For much of the last 3 months, the only water entering the Middle Rio Grande valley has been artificial, released from reservoirs in the northern part of the State. Naturally occurring flow has often been so low that there would have been no water in the river from Cochiti all the way to Elephant Butte, had it not been for the water stored from previous seasons.

As of yesterday (Thursday, August 9), the MRGCD had just under 21,000 Acre-Feet of water remaining in upstream reservoirs. A small portion of that water will be set aside to maintain deliveries to lands of the Pueblo’s with “prior and paramount” water rights. At the present rate of release, we estimate this remaining water will be fully used in less than 2 weeks. By the last week in August, much less water will be flowing down the river, and diversions to our canals will be affected.

Without reservoir storage to release, the MRGCD will be dependent entirely on natural flow of the Rio Grande. That may be very little, possibly even no water available at times. Or, there may be a lot of water, depending on rains. The current forecast gives hope for above normal precipitation in the late summer/early fall. But until the rain falls, we never know just how much it will be. It is likely to be intermittent, with possibly no water available for extended periods of time. Our field staff (Irrigation System Operators) will remain in touch with irrigators and inform them when water will be available. The notice may be short, as rains can happen unexpectedly and make water available. Our intent will be to make the best use of whatever water is flowing to benefit as many irrigators as possible.

When storage is exhausted, we will be in what is known as “P&P Operations”. Certain lands of the Pueblos, totaling around 8850 acres, were designated long ago by an Act of Congress as having rights senior to all others within the MRGCD. When there is not enough water for all irrigators, we are obligated to meet the normal irrigation needs of these “P&P” lands first, from whatever flow is present. The small storage reserve earlier designated for this purpose may be released as needed. The Pueblos have been very helpful to the MRGCD this year, managing that “P&P” reserve to support regular irrigation as long as possible, for the benefit of all irrigators. Any water remaining after Pueblo irrigation needs have been met will become available for use by other irrigators, including Pueblo lands without the “P&P” right (referred to as “newly reclaimed” or “NR” lands). During “P&P Operations”, the MRGCD works closely with the Pueblos and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to determine Indian irrigation needs, and how much, or how little water is available for other irrigators.

We realize this will create hardship for irrigators throughout the MRGCD. Please stay in close contact with your ISO, and we will do our best to distribute whatever water becomes available as fairly as possible.

For more information, contact the MRGCD at 505-247-0234 or visit our web site at www.mrgcd.com.