PRESS RELEASE

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IMPERIAL IRRIGATION DISTRICT, METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT  
COLLABORATE ON U.S.-MEXICO PILOT PROJECT ON COLORADO RIVER

LAS VEGAS, Nev.—California’s largest agricultural and urban water districts that make use of supplies from the Colorado River agreed today to share the costs of water conservation projects in Mexico and share the saved supplies as part of a bi-national pilot project.

Imperial Irrigation District General Manager Kevin Kelley joined Jeffrey Kightlinger, general manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, to sign the agreement at the Colorado River Water Users Association’s annual conference. The pact calls on each agency to provide $2.5 million for infrastructure upgrades in Mexico.

"IID is stepping up efforts in 2014 to meet water transfer obligations under the Quantification Settlement Agreement as well as generate water for payback to the river for previous years’ overruns. In its narrowest sense, this is a water-sharing pact at a time when IID can best use it," Kelley said.

Kightlinger said the need for the bi-national project arose from a severe earthquake in Mexico’s Mexicali valley in 2010.

“Our agencies are investing in Mexico’s infrastructure to help the country rebuild its system, and we will get a share of the conserved water as our benefit. This is a win-win-win for Mexico, IID and Metropolitan,” Kightlinger said.

Today’s agreement relates to a pilot project established by Minute 319, a 2012 implementing agreement to the 1944 U.S.-Mexico treaty. Minute 319, a five-year agreement, includes shortage and surplus sharing between the two nations and allows Mexico to store water in U.S. reservoirs on the Colorado River.

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Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Michael L. Connor heralded the cooperation between IID and Metropolitan in reaching the agreement.

"Reclamation welcomes this significant progress by IID and MWD and looks forward to working with these key California partners and the other partners in the basin states in 2014 to recognize IID as a full participant in the implementation of Minute No. 319 and the corresponding domestic implementing agreements. This partnership is a positive signal to future Colorado River and bi-national collaborative efforts," Connor wrote in a letter today to both agencies.

Under the trial project, IID will join Metropolitan, Southern Nevada Water Authority and Central Arizona Project to help fund improvements to Mexico's earthquake-damaged water system. In exchange, the U.S. agencies will receive the ability to store up to 95,000 acre-feet of conserved water in Lake Mead. Metropolitan and IID will each receive 23,750 acre-foot shares.

In addition to the water storage credit, Imperial can use its share of the saved supplies for municipal or industrial purposes or to pay back the district's water overruns on the Colorado River.

Edward Drusina, U.S. commissioner of the International Boundary and Water Commission, noted that the two nations have worked for years "to promote cooperation on the Colorado River."

"This new partnership between Imperial and Metropolitan will enhance those efforts," Drusina said.

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The Imperial Irrigation District is a public water and power provider located in the southeastern region of California. One of the largest irrigation districts in the nation, IID maintains more than 3,000 miles of canals and drains to effectively deliver up to 2.6 million acre-feet of Colorado River water annually to the Imperial Valley. IID is also the third largest public energy provider in the state, serving electricity to more than 145,000 accounts.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a cooperative of 26 cities and water agencies serving nearly 19 million people in six counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies, and helps its members to develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.