

Storms produce little change in water resevoir

The recent series of storms in the Colorado River Basin has done little to increase the Colorado River water storage situation, Bureau of Reclamation Regional Director Robert J. Towles said recently.

While the basin-wide snowpack is 115% of normal, much of the runoff is expected to be absorbed by land parched with six years of drought. As a result, predictions at this early stage of the water year call for inflow into Lake Powell at approximately 85% of normal.

The 60 million acre-feet Colorado River storage system now contains about 40 maf, or about two-thirds of its capacity, Towles said. With more than 20 million acre-feet of storage available, it is highly improbable that Colorado River storage dams above Parker Dam will release any extra water in 1993, he said.

The storms are responsible for

two changes in operations. As tributary inflows from the Bill Williams and Gila Rivers in Arizona flow into the Colorado, less water is needed from upstream reservoirs. Releases from Lakes Mead and Mohave have been reduced. Lake Mead release through Hoover Dam will drop to a daily average of 1,300 cubic feet per second through February.

This cutback, coupled with reduced downstream water orders from rain-soaked irrigation districts, will result in a four-foot rise in the Lake Mead elevation. The Jan. 15 Lake Mead elevation was 1,179 feet and is expected to rise to 1,183 feet by March 1.

The reduced Hoover release will also mean lower flows from downstream structures. At Parker Dam, releases will be held near the 1,500 cubic foot-per-second level until Lake Havasu is filled, probably at the end of January.