

## DROUGHT WATCH on the RIO GRANDE – April 21, 2014 Press Release & Graphs

### **Water supply conditions better than 2013 but not good – the current allocation is 25% of full supply**

Rio Grande Project water supply conditions have improved compared to 2013 but still are not good. The Rio Grande Project is the area from Elephant Butte and Caballo reservoirs to Fort Quitman, Texas, 100 miles to the southeast of El Paso, Texas. The Project supplies water to as much as 160,000 acres of land for agricultural irrigation to Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) in New Mexico and El Paso County Water Improvement District No. 1 (EPCWID1) and for urban use in El Paso and for farmers in Mexico. According to Filberto Cortez at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation El Paso Office, last July Elephant Butte reservoir was 97% empty and 2013 was the shortest irrigation season (less than six weeks) and supplied the least amount of water in the almost 100 year history of the Rio Grande Project. Due to unusually heavy rainfall in September and early snowpack runoff because of warmer than normal temperatures this spring, water storage in Elephant Butte and Caballo reservoirs has increased to 402,778 acre-feet or 18% of the combined storage capacity of 2.23 million acre-feet. Approximately one-fourth of the water currently in storage is Rio Grande Compact Credit water or San Juan-Chama water which is owned by upstream users and is not available for use in southern New Mexico, Texas or Mexico. The water level in Elephant Butte reservoir is 78 feet below the dam spillway and the surface water area is 22% of a full reservoir.

Releases to the river from the reservoirs are scheduled to begin May 25, 2014 and stop in late August or early September depending on water availability. Water allocation and delivery are based on the quantity of water actually in the reservoirs, not projections. Currently the allocation is 25% of a full supply. This translates into 93,800 acre-feet for EBID farmers, 79,200 acre-feet for EPCWID1 farmers and the City of El Paso and 15,000 acre-feet for farmers in Mexico under the 1906 Treaty. The amount of water actually available to farmers in the three irrigation districts varies due to different amounts of groundwater pumping, conserved water carried over from last year and use of reclaimed water. The City of El Paso receives a portion of the water delivered to EPCWID1 so the City will experience the same reduction in their allocation of surface water. Rio Grande water in good years supplies more than half of the annual urban water demand in El Paso. Even though the El Paso Water Utilities has planned for drought conditions residents and businesses should practice water conservation measures to conserve water reserves.

While some of the nation has been wetter and colder than normal the southwest and west coast continues to have above average temperatures and be in severe to extreme drought. For the Rio Grande basin and much of the rest of Texas the Climate Prediction Center forecasts persistent or intensifying drought, above average temperatures and precipitation about average or even above average for the next one to three months. Snowpack in the upper part of the basin typical provides about 70% of the inflow to Elephant Butte reservoir. The snowpack in Colorado is currently 80% of average and in New Mexico it is 42% of average. Because of the warm temperatures and windy conditions resulting in high levels of evaporation, the spring snowpack runoff is projected to be only eight percent of average, one of the lowest on record. Without significant runoff or precipitation this spring or summer the amount of water available to farmers and the City of El Paso is unlikely to increase much. These conditions are not expected to improve soon.

**Drought Watch on the Rio Grande** is provided by the Texas AgriLife Research Center at El Paso and Texas Water Resources Institute, The Texas A&M University System in collaboration with the United States Bureau of Reclamation El Paso Field Office. E-mail or call to receive future issues of Drought Watch.

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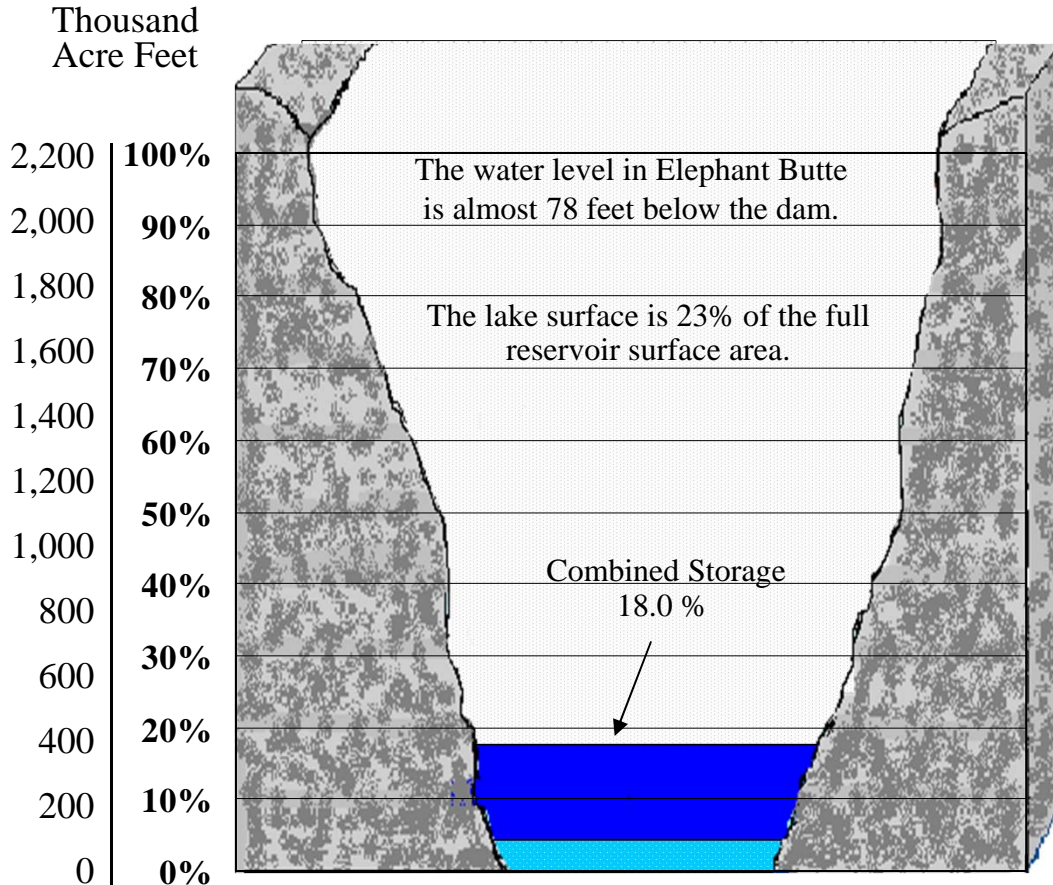


# Drought Watch on the Rio Grande Surface Water Supply Conditions April 21, 2014



## Combined Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoir Storage

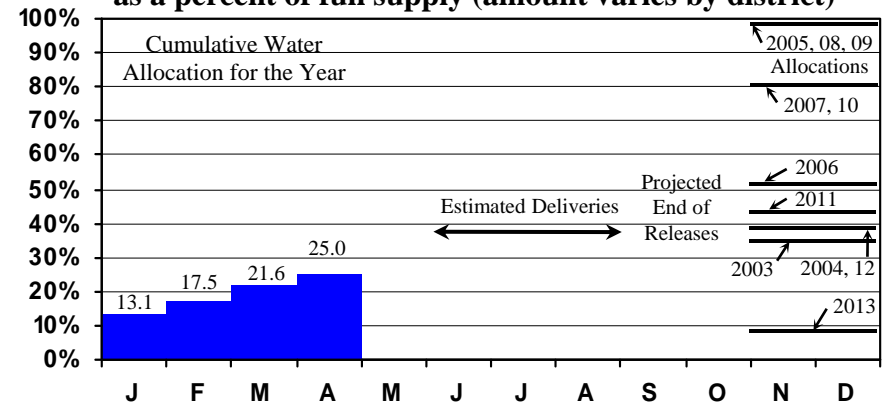
■ Water Available for Allocation  
■ Water Not Available for Allocation



## Water Supply Conditions & Forecasts

- Water in Storage** is 402,778 acre-feet or **18.0%** of the combined reservoir capacity of 2.23 million acre-feet. Of this 100,000 acre-feet of the amount in storage is Rio Grande Compact and San Juan-Chama credit water which is not available for use, leaving 13.6% of capacity or 302,000 acre-feet available.
- Spring snowpack runoff into Elephant Butte Reservoir is forecast to be only 8% of average.** This is one of the lowest in the almost 100 year history of Rio Grande Project. The Climate Prediction Center three-month forecast calls for above normal temperatures and average chances of precipitation. The forecast is for drought to persist or intensify.
- The 2014 Rio Grande Project water allocation to-date is 25% of a full supply.** The 2013 water allocation was 6.1% of a full supply.

### Water allocation to agricultural and urban users as a percent of full supply (amount varies by district)



Produced by: Texas A&M AgriLife Research Center at El Paso, Texas A&M University System  
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