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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT REPORTS PROGRESS ON IRRIGATION DRAINAGE STUDIES

The Department of the Interior today reported its progress in conducting studies of potential irrigation drainage problems at nine sites in seven states in the western United States.

The report, summarizing the results of research and sampling on the sites to date, was provided to Congress following an intensive review of the studies by the National Research Council/ National Academy of Science's Committee on Irrigation-Induced Water Quality Problems, held in Tucson, Arizona, March 4-6.

"The issue of potential irrigation-induced water quality problems is important to both the fish and wildlife concerns and the water resources responsibilities of the Department," Wayne Marchant, Acting Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, said. "Secretary Hodel has continued to place high priority on the completion of these investigations. We are pleased to see them progressing on schedule."

The nine areas under study are the Lower Colorado-Gila River Valley area in California and Arizona, the Salton Sea and Tulare Lake areas in California, the Sun River and Milk River Reclamation Project areas in Montana, the Stillwater Wildlife Management Area in Nevada, the Lower Rio Grande-Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge area in Texas, the middle Green River Basin area in Utah, and the Kendrick Reclamation Project area in Wyoming.

"Although it is still too early in the investigation to make definitive statements about conditions in the areas under study, we have not uncovered any major surprises," Jon Deason, Coordinator for the Department's Irrigation Drainage Program said. "Our report does note the wildlife deaths at Stillwater and also notes that trace elements exceed both state and federal water quality standards in several areas. We are following up on those findings to gain a more specific understanding of their environmental implications."

In each area, an interagency team of scientists and engineers from the U.S. Geological Survey, Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Reclamation are collecting hundreds of water, sediment, plant and animal samples for laboratory analysis. Each sample is being analyzed for the presence of natural trace elements, such as arsenic, cadmium, and selenium, and man-made pesticides.

Final reports of the reconnaissance studies are expected to be complete by the end of 1987, except for the Stillwater and Salton Sea studies which will be completed in 1988.

Copies of the progress report are available to reporters from the Office of Public Affairs at (202) 343-3171 and to the public from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science at (202) 343-4457.

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