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deficit would have come from this seasons snowpack, which was a disaster in the making. Fortunately, precipitation came when it did and the soil moisture deficits have been reduced to only 2 to 5 inches, a level which is considered to be hydrologically responsive. That is to say, a state that will produce runoff next spring as opposed to simply infiltrating all snowmelt without generating runoff. Now, the bad news. Reservoir storage is extremely low. Most areas across the state have a much larger reservoir storage deficit that the average April-July streamflow. Simply put, it will take much more than average flow to fill the reservoir storage deficit in many areas. There are a lot of reservoirs that will take several above average years to fill to capacity. Keep your fingers crossed that 2003 is the beginning of a long, very wet cycle of years.

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THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ELECTRIC LAKE

By J. Craig Smith & Scott M. Ellsworth
Nielsen & Senior

Due to the region-wide drought, as we are all too well aware, Utah's water supply, along with that of her various sister states, has ebbed to alarmingly low levels. And while the ongoing drought has (rightly) garnered the lion's share of media attention, especially in the world of water use, we should not ignore an event taking place in northern Emery County, where Electric Lake is quite literally disappearing before the astonished eyes of local residents and industries.

Located primarily in Emery County, and just over the line into Carbon County on the east, Electric Lake lies high in the Huntington Creek drainage. It was created in the 1970s by Utah Power to ensure a reliable water supply for the Huntington Power Plant, located some miles downstream. Since its creation, Electric Lake has also become a popular fixture in the fishing community as well as an attraction along the scenic byways of the Wasatch Plateau.

In August of 2001, workers in the Skyline Mine unexpectedly encountered a sandstone aquifer containing a very large volume of water. A portion of the Skyline Mine is in close proximity to Electric Lake, although its portal lies in Eccles Canyon above Scofield Reservoir in Carbon County (in the Price River drainage). The flow of water in the mine near the vicinity of Electric Lake is about 4,700 gpm or about 22 acre feet per day. Initial public announcements indicated that the water was part of an ancient, underground aquifer. Soon thereafter, however, Electric Lake began losing water.

Since that time, a number of hydrological studies by both the mine owner, Arch Coal, and Utah Power, have been conducted to determine the hydrology in the area and whether the events are related. To date, these studies have suggested no answer to which all of the parties could agree. Studies are ongoing, however, including a $600,000 study funded by the Community Impact Board.

Over the past decade, water users in Emery County have become increasingly concerned that coal mining in the area could affect the hydrological balance of the area. To develop baseline data sufficient to protect its precious resource, the Emery Water Conservancy District began an extensive water monitoring program. The District Chair, Eugene Johansen, who passed away last spring, was concerned that the extensive mining in the mountains which serve as the watershed for Emery County, is having a definite impact on stream and spring flows.

Regulation of water encountered in coal mines is largely the responsibility of the Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining ("DOGM"). The DOGM has primacy to administer the federal mine regulatory program, which includes protection of the hydrological balance in mining areas. As the Electric Lake sage continues to unfold, the potential impact of mining on water shall be brought more and more to the forefront, and the ability of regulations and regulatory agencies to protect Utah's water resources may be sorely tested.

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BLUE STAKES OF UTAH

By Gary Hansen

As more and more utility lines are installed and located underground, all underground facility owners/operators should be aware of Utah law governing buried utilities - Chapter 8a of Title 54 of the Utah Code, "Damage to Underground Facilities Act."

This Act provides the legal basis for the creation of an association to function as the communications link between excavators and underground facility operators in communicating underground excavation activities in the State of Utah. The association was established in 1974 and is known as Blue Stake.

The Act is designed to minimize utility service interruptions, avoid personal injury and avoid damage to property and equipment by individuals and companies who are involved in excavation activities.

Even though membership and participation in Blue Stakes is voluntary, the Act specifies that if an operator of underground facilities does not belong to or participate in Blue Stakes, the operator is liable for damages incurred by an excavator who has complied with the Act as well as any civil penalties associated with the Act. The Act also specifies that before excavating, an excavator shall notify each operator with underground facilities in the area of proposed excavation. The Act further clarifies that if there is no association created, notice to that association constitutes notice to each operator.

The service Blue Stakes provides for contractors and homeowners is free of charge. Blue Stakes is governed by a Board of Trustees comprised of individuals from various utility classifications representing member utilities, the Intermountain Utility Contractors Association (IUCA) and Associated General Contractors Association (AGC) representing contractors, and the Utah Transportation Technology Transfer (T2) Center representing engineers. Member utility companies provide funding for the association. Blue Stakes actively supports the national "Dig Safely" campaign and encourages all contractors and homeowners to: