



**MONTHLY REPORT TO THE
COLORADO RIVER BOARD OF CALIFORNIA**

August 9, 2023

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT

As of August 7th, the surface water elevation of Lake Powell was 3,579.11 feet with nearly 9.22 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 40% of capacity. The surface water elevation of Lake Mead was 1,061.74 feet with 8.56 MAF of storage, or 33% of capacity. As of August 6th, the total System storage was 25.81 MAF, or 44% of capacity, which is about 5.73 MAF more than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of August 1st, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 93% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 90% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 95% of capacity at Morrow Point and 89% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 76% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of August 1st, the July observed inflow into Lake Powell was 1.05 MAF (109% of normal) and the August forecasted inflow is 0.430 MAF (114% of normal). The forecasted unregulated inflow into Lake Powell for Water Year (WY) 2023 is 13.75 MAF (143% of normal). April through July 2023 forecasted unregulated inflow into Lake Powell is 10.62 MAF (166% of normal).

2024 Colorado River Reservoir System Annual Operation Plan- First Consultation

On June 22nd, Reclamation hosted the first consultation meeting for the development of the 2024 Annual Operation Plan (AOP) for the Colorado River System via webinar to provide an overview of Upper and Lower Basin hydrology and operations as well as review and accept comments for the first Draft AOP.

Reclamation provided an overview of Basin hydrology and presented the most probable June forecast for unregulated inflow for Upper Colorado reservoirs. Reclamation also discussed WY-2023 Upper Basin Reservoir Operations noting that the initial Glen Canyon dam release was 7.0 MAF and in April 2023, after evaluating hydrologic conditions, Reclamation determined that a

balancing release ranging between 7.0 MAF and 9.5 MAF would be appropriate for WY-2023. Reclamation stated it had removed the operational neutrality of 0.480 MAF that was held back in Lake Powell under the May 2022 action and the balancing releases are based on the physical storage of Lakes Powell and Mead.

Reclamation also reviewed the June 2023 24-Month Study. Based on the June 2023 24-Month Study and the most probable inflow scenario, the projected operational tier for WY-2024 for Lake Powell is the Mid-Elevation Release Tier with the most probable release of 7.48 MAF from Glen Canyon Dam. Based on the June 2023 24-Month Study, Lake Mead's end of Calendar Year-2023 elevation is projected to be 1,067.05 feet. It is important to note that August 2023 24-Month Study Report projections for January 1st elevations for the following year sets the operational tiers for the coordinated operations of Lakes Powell and Mead for the 2024 AOP.

The current draft of the proposed 2024 AOP can be viewed online at: https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/AOP2024/AOP24_draft.pdf. The second AOP consultation meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 6, 2023, from 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm, Pacific Daylight Time, via webinar.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES

Status of Seven Basin States Discussions and Activities

Scoping Comments for Post-2026 Operating Guidelines

On June 16, 2023, the Department of the Interior (DOI) and Reclamation published a *Federal Register* Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for development of the post-2026 operating guidelines and invited scoping comments from the public and stakeholders. The NOI can be accessed at [Fed. Reg. Vol. 88, No. 116, p. 39455 \(June 16, 2023\)](#).

The NOI seeks information and comments from the public and stakeholders associated with the scope of post-2026 operations and management of the reservoir system under a broad range of hydrologic and water supply conditions with a focus on long-term sustainability for water users and the environment while minimizing system vulnerabilities and increasing resiliency, as well as other related issues that should be considered in the upcoming EIS. Scoping comments are due on or before August 15, 2023.

This NOI soliciting comments can be viewed as a continuation of DOI's recent efforts to gain additional information to inform both management of the system in the remaining interim period and to better inform the development of the post-2026 operating guidelines. For example, in December 2020, Reclamation released its "7.D Effectiveness Review" report that evaluated the overall effectiveness of the implementation of the 2007 Interim Shortage Guidelines for the period 2008-2019.

On June 24, 2022, DOI and Reclamation published a *Federal Register* notice (87 FR 37884) requesting "pre-scoping" comments and public input on procedural approaches for development of the post-2026 operating guidelines, operational strategies, and other potential substantive elements for post-2026 operations. The seven Basin States collaborated on the development of a consensus-based comment letter submitted on September 1, 2022. In January 2023, Reclamation posted a "Pre-Scoping Comment Summary Report" on its website describing and summarizing the comments and input received and communicated key findings in a series of public outreach webinars.

Furthermore, on November 17, 2022, DOI and Reclamation initiated a process to prepare a Supplemental EIS that could potentially result in modifications to the Record of Decision (ROD) for the 2007 Interim Shortage Guidelines. DOI and Reclamation were particularly desirous of providing additional flexibility associated with annual reservoir operations and annual water supply determinations at both Lakes Powell and Mead, and this would likely require modifications to Sections 2 and 6 of the 2007 ROD. During the SEIS-development process, an agreement was reached among Lower Basin state water users in late-May 2023 to implement a predominantly voluntarily based set of annual water conservation and water use reduction activities over the remaining interim period of 2023-2026. Reclamation is currently evaluating this Lower Basin agreement in the SEIS and plans to re-release a draft SEIS for public review and comment during the fall of 2023.

Currently, the seven Basin States are committed to developing a seven-state consensus-based scoping comment response letter for submittal by August 15, 2023. Representatives of the seven states met in Manhattan Beach, California, on July 21, 2023, and developed an outline of potential issues and elements that could be included in the proposed seven states letter. An interstate drafting workgroup is currently working on a draft letter for review and consideration by the Basin States' principals.

Finally, a working group of technical and legal staff representatives of California's Colorado River water agencies met in mid-July for a multi-day workshop to identify and discuss issues associated with the development of the post-2026 operating guidelines. This workshop was held to facilitate

a robust discussion of the challenges and complexities of the issues that will need to be addressed in discussions with the other six Basin states, Tribes, federal agencies, and other stakeholders as the development of post-2026 operating strategies are identified and evaluated. This workshop, and subsequent workshops, are intended to better inform California's agencies and principals regarding the development of potential California positions and negotiation principles and support decision-making during the EIS process to develop a preferred alternative for post-2026 operations.

Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

The Technical Work Group (TWG) for the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (GCDAMP) met June 14 – 15 in Flagstaff, AZ.

The TWG received a report from the National Parks Service (NPS) on the incentivized harvest for brown trout, a non-native species in the Colorado River. The program is reaching the end of its currently available funding. NPS is evaluating whether or not to continue the program.

The TWG received preliminary reports regarding the High Flow Experiment (HFE) conducted in April. Processing of sand data is still in progress; however, preliminary results show sand concentrations were high in Marble Canyon relative to previous HFEs, though grain size was coarser. Substantial sand deposition occurred during the HFE at most sites from Upper Marble Canyon to Diamond Creek. Following the HFE, high dam releases in May and June inundated much of the newly deposited sand and likely accelerated rates of erosion. The HFE timing was selected, in part, to rebuild sand bars and beaches prior to this anticipated erosion. A complete sandbar survey in October will measure how much of the HFE deposits remain.

The TWG received a report on a Fiscal Year 2024 budget for the GCDAMP developed by a subgroup. The budget includes funding for both the Grand Canyon Monitoring and Research Center as well as the Bureau of Reclamation. The TWG unanimously approved a motion to send the budget to the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) for its consideration.

The TWG received a report from Reclamation on alternatives developed to potentially modify the -12 mile slough, which has served as a sanctuary for nonnative fish such as green sunfish and smallmouth bass. The proposed alternative would allow water temperatures in the upper and lower sloughs to approximate water temperatures in the adjacent Colorado River and deter reproduction of warm-water non-native fish. NPS will consider steps for potential modification of the slough.

The TWG received an update on work being carried out by an ad hoc group to draft a proposal for amending the HFE protocol. Work by the ad hoc group was still in progress at the time of the meeting. In an effort for the TWG to review the ad hoc group proposal and potentially present it to the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) in August, the TWG will hold a virtual meeting on August 9 to consider this item.

The AMWG is scheduled to hold a meeting in Flagstaff, AZ on August 16–17, 2023 and the TWG is scheduled to meet October 11-12 in Phoenix, AZ. Both meetings will have options for virtual attendance.

Status of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Steering Committee of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) held a virtual meeting on June 28.

The LCR MSCP Steering Committee approved the [Final Implementation Report, Fiscal Year 2024 Work Plan and Budget, Fiscal Year 2022 Accomplishment Report](#) for \$24,657,798 and encouraged the LCR MSCP Program Manager to submit the approved Final Implementation Report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a consistency review.

As part of preparations for the withdrawal of the Southern California Public Power Authority (SCPPA) as a permittee, the LCR MSCP Steering Committee approved the “Procedures for Assignment or Transfer to Add and Remove Members of a State Participant Group of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program, the Procedures for Certificate of Inclusion to Add Member to a State Participant Group of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program, and Procedures to Remove Members from a State Participant Group of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program.”

The next meeting of the LCR MSCP Steering Committee will be a hybrid meeting on October 18 with in-person attendance at the Harry Reid International Airport.

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

Status of Reclamation’s Post-2026 Integrated Technical Education Workgroup

Reclamation’s Post-2026 Integrated Technical Education Workgroup (ITEW) held its 3rd and 4th public meetings to review and discuss Reclamation’s technical framework for conducting

stakeholder-informed modeling studies to inform development of the post-2026 operations of Lakes Powell and Mead. These sessions are intended to help interested stakeholders understand how Reclamation is approaching modeling and how stakeholders will be able to do their own modeling and analysis, including with a simplified web tool.

Session #3, held virtually on June 28, 2023, focused on hydrology. A range of hydrologic scenarios will be considered, informed by knowledge of past and projected future conditions. Session #4, held virtually on August 2, 2023, focused on representation of demands. Baseline Upper Basin depletion demand assumptions will be from the 2016 Upper Colorado River Commission (UCRC) Demand Schedule updated in June 2022; and, for Tribal demands, as described in the 2018 Tribal Water Study, which are both already currently used for modeling studies. Baseline Lower Basin demand assumptions will be incorporated from existing operational guidelines, with some modifications based on input from Lower Basin water users.

Reclamation indicated that Upper Basin depletion demands will be varied by Reclamation in the post-2026 modeling analysis for the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and stakeholders will be able to change them as well, but they will be considered in the model as an uncertainty akin to hydrology rather than as a policy lever. Lower Basin depletion demands will be varied implicitly through Lake Mead operating policy. Reclamation emphasized that only operations of Lakes Powell and Mead will be considered for operations policy within the modeling framework, but that this does not rule out considering alternative demand or operational assumptions for analysis in the EIS. Three more ITEW sessions are planned to be held through early November and will cover (1) analysis metrics, (2) alternative operational strategies, and (3) the web tool to be employed.

Washington, D.C. Report

Appropriations

On July 20th, the Senate Appropriations Committee marked up its Energy & Water Development bill, sending it to the full Senate. Unlike their House counterparts, Senate Appropriators wrote the bills to the spending levels agreed to in the debt limit deal. House Republicans are maintaining their position on lower spending levels.

STREAM Act

On July 20th, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a legislative hearing on several western water bills, including the STREAM Act. The only witness in the hearing was Commissioner Touton. During her testimony, Commissioner Touton stated that the Bureau of

Reclamation supports the intent of the STREAM Act but wants to work with the Committee to ensure that new authorities authorized by the bill can be integrated with existing laws.

During the hearing, Commissioner Touton also spoke briefly about Phase 2 funding for the Upper Basin from the Inflation Reduction Act. She stated that the Bureau expects to release an RFP later this summer in the Upper Basin and award funds later in the year. Phase 2 projects could fall into the following three general categories:

1. System conservation and efficiency projects that achieve verifiable, multi-year reductions in use of or demand for water supplies.
2. Demonstration projects to spur advances in water conservation and efficiency using innovative techniques.
3. Ecosystem and habitat restoration projects to address issues directly caused by drought.

Colorado River Salinity Control Fix Act

On July 26th, Senators Mr. Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Ms. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) introduced the [Colorado River Salinity Control Fix Act](#) to provide greater support for Colorado River Basin water users and local governments working to reduce the salt load in the Colorado River.

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act of 1974 authorized and supported salinity control projects and research across the West, including through the Bureau of Reclamation's Basin States Program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program. These programs provide assistance to farmers, ranchers, and water users who utilize salinity control measures. The Colorado River Salinity Control Fix Act would increase the federal cost-share for these salinity control programs across the Colorado River Basin. The goal is to have this legislation included in this year's Farm Bill.

Cosponsors include Senators Mr. Alex Padilla (D-CA), Mr. John Barrasso (R-WY), Ms. Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ), Ms. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Mr. Mitt Romney (R-UT), and Mr. John Hickenlooper (D-CO).

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