



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE COLORADO RIVER BOARD OF CALIFORNIA

April 10, 2024

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT

As of April 8th, the water surface elevation of Lake Powell was 3,555.57 feet with nearly 7.69 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 33% of capacity. The water surface elevation of Lake Mead was 1,074.66 feet with 9.57 MAF of storage, or 37% of capacity. As of April 7th, the total System storage was 24.56 MAF, or 42% of capacity, which is about 5.60 MAF more than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of April 3rd, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 32% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 86% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 93% of capacity at Morrow Point and 66% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 65% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of April 3rd, March observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.46 MAF (76% of normal) and the April inflow forecast is 0.70 MAF (78% of normal). The forecasted inflow into Lake Powell for WY-2024 is 8.39 MAF (87% of normal). The forecasted April through July 2024 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell was 5.7 MAF (89% of normal). The precipitation to date is 105% normal and the current Basin snowpack is 112% of normal.

Colorado Basin River Forecast Center Water Supply Webinar

On April 7th, the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) held a webinar to review the Basin's current water supply conditions and forecasts. CBRFC reported that active weather in March led to above average precipitation across most of the Colorado River Basin, noting that precipitation ranked within the fifth wettest at several SNOTEL sites across the Basin. Water Year 2024 (October to March) precipitation is above average in the Green River Basin and Colorado River Headwaters and slightly below average in Southwest Colorado and the Lower Colorado River Basin.

As of April 1st, snow water equivalent (SWE) conditions in the Upper Colorado River Basin have improved and range from 95% to 150%. The April 1st water supply forecast for April to July runoff volumes for the Upper Colorado River Basin range from 60% to 160% of normal and 55% to 130% in the Lower Colorado River Basin.

El Nino conditions are expected to transition to ENSO-neutral between April and June with a 62% chance of a La Nina developing between June and August.

Weather models forecast precipitation at higher elevations in the Upper Colorado River Basin that range from 0.25 to 0.75 inches and 0.10 and 0.25 inches in the Lower Colorado River Basin.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES

Colorado River Basin States Activities and Updates

2024 Annual Operating Plan for Colorado River Operations

The final 2024 Annual Operating Plan (AOP) has not yet been released. The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has asked for a special fourth AOP consultation webinar, scheduled for mid-day on May 14th. The purpose of the webinar is to finalize the AOP for the Secretary's approval and adoption. This action will likely result in some language additions to the 2024 AOP addressing both the preferred alternative identified in the Final Supplemental EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) for Near-Term Operations through 2026 as well as "new and emerging technical information" related to current and near-term operations at Glen Canyon Dam.

With respect to the new and emerging technical issues, Reclamation's Upper Colorado Region provided a stakeholder information webinar on Monday, April 8th that addressed "Glen Canyon Dam Interim Low Elevation Operational Guidance". Reclamation provided updates associated with maintenance-related issues with the river outlet works and erosional or depositional impacts at the Glen Canyon Dam tailrace, as well as new operational guidance at low reservoir conditions released in a Technical Decision Memorandum. The new operational guidance includes the following:

1. To address potential negative effects of scour and sedimentation below Glen Canyon Dam, Reclamation will exercise the full extent of operational capabilities within the Upper Colorado Basin to attempt to maintain reservoir levels at Lake Powell above elevation 3,490 feet, minimum power pool, to allow redundant downstream delivery of water through the penstocks and river outlet works if needed.
2. To minimize the potential for cavitation damage in the river outlet works, the maximum flow through any one of the four outlet works conduits should not exceed the interim maximum flows identified in Table 1 of the March 26, 2024, Technical Decision Memorandum prepared by Reclamation. These maximum flow release values are based

on preliminary estimates of head losses in the conduits and cavitation development in upper vertical bends of the outlet works pipes.

A copy of Reclamation's Technical Decision Memorandum and the presentation from the April 8th webinar have been included as Board meeting handout materials.

Post-2026 Process Updates

Since the March 6th submittal to Reclamation of the Lower Basin's consensus-based Post-2026 Alternative for Colorado River Operations, technical staff and agency leadership have been working closely both with the three Lower Basin states, but also in California to provide additional information and detail that is intended to support Reclamation's modeling analyses that will help inform the NEPA impacts assessment portion of the Draft EIS to be released in December 2024.

Some of the more significant issues the Lower Basin states and California agencies are working to address include the following:

- Describing a post-2026 water conservation, storage, and recovery program that provides the ability for contractors and entitlement holders to meet future water use reduction commitments or obligations.
- Developing options and/or processes for the transition of existing account volumes of the various categories of Intentionally Created Surplus created under the 2007 Interim Shortage Guidelines, 2017 Minute No. 323, and 2019 Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan.
- Developing options for a scheme to further characterize potential water use reductions in the Basinwide Reduction Zone, when additional reductions in use could be required beyond the 1.5 MAFY required in the Static Reduction Zone.
- Developing options for surplus and equalization operations as conditions in the reservoir system improve.
- Each Lower Basin state and the agencies continue to work with Reclamation's Post-2026 EIS Team to refine assumptions and potential schedules associated with Post-2026 Colorado River water demands for modeling purposes.

Reclamation has requested additional information, data refinements, etc. by mid-April so that the modeling team can begin evaluating the performance of the Lower Basin's Post-2026 Alternative utilizing the recently developed on-line web-tool. The results of the alternatives modeling exercises will be incorporated in Reclamation's preparation of the impacts assessment section of the Draft EIS.

Finally, two additional proposed Post-2026 operations alternatives were received by Reclamation in late-March. The first was prepared by a coalition of non-governmental environmental organizations and has many similarities and differences from that submitted by the Lower Basin States on March 6th. The second alternative was submitted by Dr. Jack Schmidt, Eric Kuhn, and John Fleck and is generally focused on Glen Canyon Dam operations and future management of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program and endangered species in the Grand Canyon. These two additional submitted alternatives were distributed with the Board meeting packet materials.

Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

Reclamation released a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Draft SEIS) to potentially revise the December 2016 Record of Decision titled “Glen Canyon Dam Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan” (LTEMP) published on February 9, 2024. The public comment period for the Draft SEIS closed on March 25, 2024. Representatives from Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming (Basin States’ Representatives) submitted a joint comment letter. Comments focused on expressing mutual desire to see flows to help prevent non-native invasive fish establishment, particularly smallmouth bass, be available this summer. Additionally, the Basin States’ Representatives are seeking assurance that the proposed experimental flows are protective of dam infrastructure, are implemented in conjunction with additional actions to increase the likelihood of effectiveness, and include robust monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of the potential experiment. The Basin States’ Representatives also expressed support for modification of the High Flow Experiment (HFE) protocol and requested the decision-making process for the proposed processes be clarified. A copy of the letter is included in the Board Packet.

Reclamation determined that there was insufficient sediment to support implementation of an HFE in Glen Canyon Dam during the Spring 2024 and thus there would not be an HFE this spring. This decision and supporting information were shared in a decision memorandum released on March 29, 2024. A copy of the letter is included in the Board Packet.

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

2025 Colorado River Annual Operating Plan (AOP)

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has scheduled consultation meetings for the 2025 AOP. The AOP contains the projected plan of operation of Colorado River reservoirs for the next year based on the most probable runoff conditions.

The Consultation Meetings are scheduled as follows:

First Consultation (via webinar) – Tuesday, June 11th from 12pm to 3pm PDT

Second Consultation (via webinar) – Thursday, July 25th from 12pm to 3pm PDT

Third Consultation (TBD) – Wednesday, September 11th, from 12pm to 3pm PDT

Washington, D.C. Report

Budget

On March 11th, President Biden submitted the Administration’s budget request for fiscal year 2025. Reclamation included this summary of the budget request in an email to stakeholders: “The budget supports many of the Biden-Harris administration priorities, including those for Conservation and Climate Resilience. This is emphasized by a \$49.1 million request for the Lower Colorado River Operations Program, including \$10.2 million to build on the work of Reclamation, Colorado River partners and stakeholders to implement drought contingency plans; \$8.3 million for the Upper Colorado River Operations Program to support Drought Response Operations; \$205.4 million to find long-term, comprehensive water supply solutions for farmers, families, and communities in the Central Valley Project of California; and \$65.6 million for the WaterSMART Program to support Reclamation’s collaboration with non-federal partners in efforts to address emerging water demands and water shortage issues in the West. A total of \$29.6 million will continue Reclamation’s Research and Development investments in science, technology, and desalination research in support of prize competitions, technology transfers, and pilot testing projects.”

Appropriations Committees in the House and Senate will start holding hearings in the coming weeks/months and we can assume the topic of drought and Colorado River will be come up repeatedly.

Appropriations

On March 9th, President Biden signed into law a package of six FY2024 appropriations bills, including the bills that fund the Bureau of Reclamation. Here is a quick summary of some relevant items and report language.

Energy and Water Development

- \$54 million for WaterSMART grants (FY23 enacted = \$65 million)

- \$50 million for the Lower Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan (FY23 enacted = \$50 million)
- \$30 million for WaterSMART Drought Response (FY23 enacted = \$38 million)
- \$19 million for Desalination and Water Purification (FY23 enacted = \$17 million)

The following report language was also included in the bill:

Salton Sea.—The Committee supports the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Department of the Interior and the California Natural Resources Agency to support management activities at the Salton Sea. The Committee is pleased Reclamation recently committed funding from the Inflation Reduction Act to assist with Salton Sea mitigation. It is critical that Reclamation continues to fund research and development projects to support current and future efforts to reduce the likelihood of severe health and environmental impacts. The Committee encourages Reclamation to include adequate funding for the Salton Sea in future budget requests and reminds Reclamation additional work is eligible for additional funding recommended in this account.

Salton Sea.—The fiscal year 2023 Act directed Reclamation to provide a briefing on Reclamation’s plan for managing the air quality impacts of the estimated 8.75 square miles of lands it owns that will emerge from the receding Sea over the next decade. The Committee is still awaiting this briefing, and Reclamation is directed to provide this briefing not later than 30 days after enactment of this Act. Reclamation is further directed to provide to the Committee not later than 90 days after enactment of this Act a report containing an updated estimate of anticipated exposed federal lands over the next decade and a funding estimate associated with meeting federal Salton Sea obligations. Reclamation is encouraged to work with other federal agencies with interests at the Salton Sea to provide this report.

Colorado River Basin Report.—A train derailment along the Colorado River could have significant impacts on the beneficial uses of the river, the water itself, and the ecosystem. Reclamation understanding and preparing for such an event is critical. Of the additional funding recommended under the heading “Water Conservation and Delivery”, \$300,000 shall be for a report on the potential impacts on water resources from a derailment of a train transporting hazardous material along the Colorado River.

Colorado River Basin Collaboration.—The Committee understands growing water-thrifty crops in the Colorado River Basin could, if voluntarily planted by Basin farmers, help keep agricultural lands in production and support rural economies while adjusting to diminishing water supplies from the Colorado River. The Committee directs Reclamation to provide a briefing within 30 days of enactment of this act on the ability to partner with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to fund

research and provide technical support for this effort. The briefing should identify existing authorities that could be used and recommend additional authorities that would be required.

Drought Contingency Plans.—The Committee commends Reclamation, the Department of the Interior, and the seven Colorado River Basin States for completing drought contingency plans to conserve water and reduce risks from ongoing drought for the Upper and Lower Colorado River basins. The completion of these plans marks a major milestone in protecting a critical water source in the western United States. The Committee encourages Reclamation to provide sufficient funding for activities that support these plans.

Green Groups Float Colorado River proposal

The Water for Colorado Coalition presented their post-2026 proposal, named "[Cooperative Conservation](#)" to the Bureau of Reclamation last week. The coalition includes Western Resource Advocates, Audubon Rockies, American Rivers, Conservation Colorado, Business for Water Stewardship, Environmental Defense Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, and Trout Unlimited.

The coalition urges the federal government to adopt new measures ensuring environmental safeguards are integrated into any potential agreement among the seven states along the Colorado River concerning significant reductions in water allocations. In contrast to state proposals, the initiative doesn't advocate for a specific strategy for managing the river's primary reservoirs or dictate the allocation of water use reductions. Instead, it suggests incorporating environmental considerations, such as establishing flow targets in areas like the Grand Canyon, and proposes establishing a new reserved water pool that federal water managers could utilize to benefit the environment.

The groups contend that the requirements of several ecologically significant areas and programs should be embedded in the operational regulations for major reservoirs along the river system. These include:

- The Grand Canyon, housing endangered fish populations.
- Upper and Lower Basin Endangered Species Act recovery programs.
- The shrinking Salton Sea in California, causing ecological and public health concerns due to reduced runoff from an adjacent agricultural district.
- The Colorado River Delta and the Cienega de Santa Clara, a significant wetland complex in Mexico, rich in biodiversity, particularly for migratory birds.

One aspect of the proposal is the transformation of the existing Lower Basin water Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS) storage program into a "conservation reserve." The proposal from environmental organizations advocates maintaining a storage program enabling water agencies to access conserved water but suggests altering the rules to allow storing this water anywhere along the river system. This would grant the Bureau of Reclamation greater flexibility in adjusting dam operations or flow rates to benefit the environment without reallocating water from existing users. Additionally, the proposal envisions expanding the program to include Upper Basin water users and potentially tribes.

Watershed Protection and Forest Recovery Act

Rep. Joe Neguse (D-Colo.) and Sen. Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) introduced S. 3760, the Watershed Protection and Forest Recovery Act, to help communities and water users protect their water supply after natural disasters on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands. The legislation would create a new Emergency Forest Watershed Program (EFWP) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to streamline recovery efforts and protect life, private property, and water resources downstream of America's national forests. Sen. Butler (D-Calif.) is a cosponsor of this legislation.

Specifically, the bill would:

- Create the Emergency Forest Watershed Program and authorize watershed recovery protection measures to protect downstream private property and water resources following natural disasters on USFS lands;
- Allow Tribes, States, local governments, and water providers to enter into agreements with USFS to implement watershed recovery protection measures;
- Speed up project timelines and require recovery project to be completed within two years after the conclusion of a natural disaster; and
- Fully fund projects on federal lands by waiving matching requirements.

Hoover Dam

Representative Susie Lee (D-Nev.) and Senator Kyrsten Sinema (I-Ariz.) each introduced the "[Help Hoover Dam Act](#)" in their respective chambers last week. The legislation seeks to increase operational funding for the Hoover Dam by unlocking \$45 million from an account that has been stuck in bureaucratic limbo for over two decades.

The approximately \$45 million account has accrued funds from fees levied by the federal Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) since 2001. These additional charges, mandated by the Department of Energy, were initially intended to cover deficits in funding for certain post-

retirement benefits of WAPA and Reclamation employees. However, as these shortfalls are already covered by general appropriations, WAPA has amassed millions of dollars in its Colorado River Dam Fund that remain inaccessible for other purposes.

The American Public Power Association and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association have endorsed the bill, highlighting that diminished flows in the Colorado River Basin have led to a 40 percent reduction in hydropower generation at the Hoover Dam.