



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

November 14, 2024

### **COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT**

As of November 4<sup>th</sup>, the water surface elevation of Lake Powell was 3,576.91 feet with nearly 9.05 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 39% of capacity. The water surface elevation of Lake Mead was 1,061.17 feet with 8.51 MAF of storage, or 33% of capacity. As of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the total System storage was 24.77 MAF, or 42% of capacity, which is about 188 kilo-acre feet (KAF) less than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of November 6<sup>th</sup>, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 63% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 86% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 93% of capacity at Morrow Point; 63% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 65% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of November 1<sup>st</sup>, October observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.29 MAF (64% of normal) and the November inflow forecast is 0.40 MAF (96% of normal). The forecasted inflow into Lake Powell for WY-2025 is 8.64 MAF (90% of normal). The forecasted April through July 2025 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell was 5.80 MAF (91% of normal). The precipitation to date is 107% normal.

#### October 24-Month Study

Reclamation's October 24-Month Study reported a Most Probable total release from Lake Powell of 7.481 MAF for WY-2024 and projected a Most Probable release of 7.480 MAF for WY-2024. The October 24-Month Study projects January 1, 2025, Most Probable elevations of 3,574.53 ft for Lake Powell and 1,064.13 ft for Lake Mead. The projected WY-2025 release from Lake Powell is consistent with the August 24-Month Study, which is used to determine operating tiers for Lake Powell and Lake Mead via the 2025 Annual Operating Plan (AOP), currently under development.

Projections for WY-2026 in the October 24-Month Study include a noteworthy change from the September 24-Month Study. The September 24-Month Study projection for the Most Probable

release from Lake Powell for WY-2026 is assumed to be 9.0 MAF. In contrast, the Most Probable release from Lake Powell in the October 24-Month Study is 7.48 MAF.

## COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES

### Lower Basin Plan Update

In May 2024, the Record of Decision was signed for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the 2007 Interim Shortage Guidelines – Near-Term Colorado River Operations. The preferred alternative identified in the SEIS included the Lower Basin Interim Period Plan (Plan), which provided up to 3.0 MAF of system water conservation savings between 2023-2026, on top of the reductions required under the 2007 Guidelines and Drought Contingency Plan (DCP). Up to 2.3 MAF of the Plan’s total 3.0 MAF of system conservation contributions could be federally compensated through the Inflation Reduction Act, through the “Bucket 1” (short-term conservation) and “Bucket 2” (long-term conservation) funding opportunities.

Reclamation announced in September 2024 that the final Bucket 1 system conservation implementation agreement in the Lower Basin had been signed and that Reclamation was beginning to work with parties across the Lower Basin on Bucket 2 contracts. As of October 2024, system conservation in the Lower Basin, including Bucket 1 contracts, is estimated to total 3.22 MAF between 2023-2026. The table below shows past and projected conservation totals by entitlement holder in the Lower Basin.

## Status of SEIS ROD Lower Basin Conservation<sup>1</sup> As of October 2024 (all volumes in acre-feet)

State	LCB Water Entitlement Holder/Tribe	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
AZ	Central Arizona Project (CAP) Other Conserved Water	41,776	0	0	0	41,776
	CAP Subcontractors System Conservation Water (SCW)	141,400	129,400	128,400	2,400	401,600
	Cathcart Farms SCW	57	61	61	0	178
	Cibola Valley Irrigation & Drainage District SCW	1,682	2,328	2,328	0	6,338
	Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation SCW	13,933	13,933	13,933	0	41,799
	GM Gabrych Family Limited Partnership SCW	3,240	3,240	3,240	0	9,720
	Gila River Indian Community SCW	91,319	125,000	125,000	51,650	392,969
	Hopi Tribe SCW	2,679	3,059	3,059	0	8,797
	Mohave Valley Irrigation & Drainage District SCW	12,812	13,441	14,475	0	40,728
	San Carlos Apache Tribe SCW	23,804	0	0	0	23,804
Yuma Mesa Irrigation & Drainage District SCW	21,556	21,795	21,795	0	65,146	
CA	Coachella Valley Water District SCW	35,000	35,000	35,000	0	105,000
	Coachella Agriculture SCW	0	1,063	10,000	10,000	21,063
	Imperial Irrigation District SCW	106,111	220,000	240,000	240,000	806,111
	Metropolitan Water District (MWD) of Southern California ICS Creation	450,000	86,183	0	0	536,183
	MWD Other Conserved Water Left in Lake Mead	25,066	0	0	0	25,066
	Palo Verde Irrigation District/MWD SCW	71,507	117,021	117,021	79,830	385,379
	Bard/MWD SCW	0	5,700	5,700	5,700	17,100
Quechan Indian Tribe/MWD SCW	13,000	13,000	13,000	0	39,000	
NV	SNWA Other Conserved Water Left in Lake Mead	88,156	90,000	0	0	178,156
	SNWA Tributary ICS Creation	36,075	36,000	0	0	72,075
Annual Total		1,179,173	916,224	733,012	389,580	3,217,988
Cumulative Total		1,179,173	2,095,397	2,828,408	3,217,988	

<sup>1</sup> Volumes reflect final accounting in the 2023 Water Accounting Report and executed system conservation agreements based on current projections. Any projected or provisional volumes are subject to change. Additional conservation activities are being considered including system conservation, ICS, and other conserved water in 2024, 2025, and 2026. These additional activities will be included in Reclamation’s operational modeling.

### Post-2026 Process

Reclamation held a webinar on October 10<sup>th</sup>, to provide a status update on the Post-2026 process, including an overview of the ongoing work to develop National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) alternatives. Reclamation reported that proposed alternatives have been submitted by the Upper Division States (UDS), Lower Division States (LDS), Gila River Indian Community, and a group of conservation organizations, as well as concepts/principles from a number of other entities. Initial modeling indicates that the UDS alternative is more protective of Lake Powell elevations than any other alternative; however, it also keeps Lake Mead lower than the other proposed alternatives. The LDS alternative keeps Lake Powell elevations higher than existing operations under average hydrology, but not under the driest hydrology. A recording of the webinar and a copy of the presentation can be found at: <https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/index.html>

Reclamation announced that, by early December, it would be releasing a matrix of the alternatives that will move forward for full evaluation in the post-2026 Draft EIS. The matrix will likely include several stakeholder alternatives, a no-action alternative, a continued current strategies alternative, and potentially other federal alternatives.

### Upper Basin Provisional Accounting for Conserved Water

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, the Upper Colorado River Commission (UCRC) approved a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Bureau of Reclamation that would allow the Upper Division States to “provisionally account” for potential water savings in Upper Basin reservoirs, including Lake Powell. The activities that would qualify for provisional accounting would be identified by the Upper Division States and UCRC. Projects funded by Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding could be eligible for the program. In response to a September Lower Basin letter requesting consultation, the UCRC responded in a letter dated October 29<sup>th</sup>, confirming Reclamation’s intent to seek consensus with the Lower Basin prior to any agreement or commitment regarding potential credit for conservation in Lake Powell.

The draft MOU and provisional accounting protocol are included in the November Board packet.

### Minute Oversight Group Meeting

The Minute Oversight Group (MOG) for Minute 323 met in Tijuana on October 30<sup>th</sup>. The group heard presentations on recent hydrology and current operational conditions. The US committed to briefing Mexico on the status of post-2026 alternatives within the next month. Mexico reported that it is on track to conserve 133,000 AF in 2024 under Minute 330, the binational equivalent of the Lower Basin Plan. This conservation is in addition to the reductions required under Minute 319 and 323. Under Minute 330, Mexico committed to creating 400,000 AF of conserved water in Lake Mead between 2024 and 2026.

The MOG also received progress updates from various work groups established under Minute 323. The Projects Work Group is continuing to implement infrastructure upgrades to Mexican water conveyance facilities, including canal lining and gate replacement. The Projects Work Group is working to estimate the water savings associated with these projects. The Environmental Work Group reported that, through 2023, approximately 127,000 AF of water has been delivered to the Colorado River Delta in Mexico for environmental purposes, with the remaining 83,000 AF committed under the Minute scheduled for delivery in 2024-2026. The water deliveries support 1,340 acres of habitat established since 2014 and provide instream flows in part of the Delta.

#### Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum) and Colorado River Basin Advisory Council (Advisory Council) met from October 22<sup>nd</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup> in Scottsdale, Arizona. Both the Forum and Council approved a letter of concern regarding the proposed Dolores National Monument, which would protect approximately 400,000 acres in southwestern Colorado. The letter takes no stance on the proposed national monument but notes that the current proposed footprint would include areas that may be needed for future Paradox Valley Unit (PVU) solutions. Letters were sent to Senator Bennet, Senator Hickenlooper, and Secretary of the Interior Haaland.

Reclamation will be posting a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) in June 2025 for salinity control projects. Past NOFOs have focused on Upper Basin projects. The 2025 NOFO will also be open to Lower Basin applicants. The NOFO is for grants for cost-effective projects that minimize salt loading in the Colorado River system.

The Forum received an update on efforts to resolve ongoing funding challenges through the proposed Salinity Control Fix Act. The Forum Executive Director reported that Forum staff have faced challenges with including the proposed legislation in the current legislative agenda and are actively working with partners in Washington to advance the legislation. The Farm Bill, a previously promising vehicle for the Act, is unlikely to pass in the current session.

#### Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

The Technical Work Group (TWG) of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (GCDAMP) held a virtual meeting October 29<sup>th</sup>–30<sup>th</sup>.

Much of the TWG meeting focused on ongoing efforts by federal agencies, including the U.S. Geological Survey, Reclamation, the National Parks Service (NPS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as well as the Arizona Game and Fish Department towards monitoring and attempting to prevent the establishment of smallmouth bass below Glen Canyon Dam. Smallmouth bass are a high-risk fish that is not native to the Colorado River ecosystem.

The TWG received an update on the status of smallmouth bass: As of October 29<sup>th</sup>, 224 smallmouth bass had been captured below Glen Canyon Dam in 2024. The furthest location down

river from Glen Canyon Dam that a smallmouth has been captured is river mile 15. No age zero smallmouth have been captured in 2024. In addition to smallmouth bass, other non-natives, including walleye and green sunfish, have been captured during 2024. More than 10,000 green sunfish have been captured during 2024.

The TWG received a report from Reclamation on the deployment and monitoring of artificial nesting habitats at four sites in Lees Ferry. The first nests were placed in early July and monitored weekly throughout the summer. No spawning was detected at the artificial nest sites.

The TWG received an update from the NPS regarding the slough located at river mile -12. In previous years the slough has served as a breeding site for warmwater non-native fish. The NPS installed a block net at the slough May 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> with the intention of preventing warm-water non-native fish from entering the area. Only one small bass has been captured in the slough behind the block net.

The TWG received an update from the NPS regarding an Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating a potential action to channelize the River Mile -12 slough within the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. The potential action is being considered in order to reduce water temperature and increase water velocity to help eliminate smallmouth bass reproduction, which has been documented in this part of the river. The public comment period closed on October 14<sup>th</sup>. The NPS is currently reviewing comments received. If the project is approved, the NPS anticipates the work being completed from January to March 2025.

The TWG received a report from Reclamation regarding ongoing consideration of installing a thermal curtain above Glen Canyon Dam. A value planning study has been completed and a presentation of the results provided to Reclamation leadership. A report with the study results is under review. The next steps include identifying potential funding sources, a value design study, and modeling efforts for safety and effectiveness.

The TWG received an update from the NPS on the brown trout incentivized harvest. The initial project was carried out from November 2020 through September 2024 with funds from NPS and Reclamation. An additional \$200,000 has been obtained through the IRA to continue the program for two years (2024-2025). 6,438 brown trout have been removed from the Glen Canyon Reach through the program. The current reward is \$50/fish plus \$15/PIT tag.

The TWG received an update on the recovery of humpback chub from the USFWS. The USFWS convened a formal recovery team in January 2023 that is initially tasked with (1) revising the Species Status Assessment, (2) revising the Recovery Plan, and (3) creating a Recovery

Implementation Strategy. The revised Species Status Assessment, incorporating updated policy, biology, and environmental information, is anticipated to be available in 2025.

The GCDAMP will hold its annual reporting meeting February 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> and the TWG will meet on February 6<sup>th</sup> in Tempe, Arizona. The next meeting of the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) will be held February 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> in Tempe, Arizona.

The Planning and Implementation Leadership Team (Leadership Team) met virtually on November 5<sup>th</sup>. The Leadership Team recommended to the Secretary of the Interior that the ongoing cool-mix flow experiment stop when penstock release temperatures are observed to be at or below 15.5°C and are anticipated to remain below that threshold as measured by the sonde immediately below Glen Canyon Dam.

#### Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) held a Steering Committee meeting at Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas, NV on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

Acquisition of the Gabrych property closed on September 11<sup>th</sup>. The property consists of 1,978 acres of land within the Palo Verde Valley. There are two active farm leases on the property that are valid until January 1, 2025. This purchase was possible through a \$10 million cost-share from the State of California in the form of a grant from the California Wildlife Conservation Board. Habitat will become part of the Palo Verde Ecological Reserve and provide assistance both in meeting existing LCR MSCP existing commitments as well as potential post-2026 commitments.

The State of Arizona reported that legislation to potentially facilitate the creation of an interest-bearing account for non-federal funds contributed to the program continues to move forward. A Senate committee hearing is scheduled for November 19<sup>th</sup> and a House hearing is scheduled for November 20<sup>th</sup>.

Reclamation reported that a contract had been executed in September to provide support for preparing Habit Conservation Plan, Biological Assessment, and NEPA and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documentation in conjunction with the development of post-2026 operating guidelines. In accordance with the contract, contracts to gather information and conduct analyses needed to update the environmental baseline have also been executed. These contracts will facilitate incorporation of updated vegetation and bathymetry data as well as the conduct of surveys for the Mexican garter snake.

Reclamation requested a consistency review from the USFWS for the “Final Implementation Report, Fiscal Year 2025 Work Plan and Budget, Fiscal Year 2023 Accomplishment Report” in a letter dated August 19, 2024. The USFWS accepted the document in a letter dated September 24, 2024. Both letters acknowledge that in federal FY 2023, October 1, 2022 – September 31, 2023, the total reduction in flow below Hoover Dam exceeded the surrogate incidental take coverage by approximately 38,000 acre-feet. The LCR MSCP promptly notified the USFWS of the potential exceedance and had initiated an Endangered Species Act section 7 consultation in response to long-term drought and increased water conservation efforts in the Colorado River watershed prior to the occurrence of the exceedance. This section 7 consultation was completed on April 8, 2024. In addition, to minimize the chance of any future exceedances Reclamation is performing a detailed analysis of flow reporting processes that will track future flow activities in coordination with the USFWS and LCR MSCP partners.

## **GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES**

### Washington, D.C. Report

The Senate Indian Affairs Committee is looking to mark up the Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 2024 ([H.R. 8940/S. 4633](#)) later this month. It is unclear if the legislation has a path forward due to concerns around the \$5 billion price tag as well as the accounting of the water between the two basins.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee tentatively scheduled a markup for November 19<sup>th</sup> that includes several water bills. It is expected that these bills will be considered as part of a year-end legislative package if one comes together. Bills of note include:

- [S. 5012/H.R. 9515](#), to establish an interest-bearing account for the non-Federal contributions to the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (Padilla/Butler and Calvert/Napolitano); and,
- [S. 4576](#), to amend the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015, to reauthorize the Colorado River System conservation pilot program (Hickenlooper/Barrasso).

The House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries, is planning to hold a legislative hearing on November 20. Representatives Calvert and Napolitano’s Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program bill, [H.R. 9515](#), is expected to be on the agenda.

There may be a public lands and water package that comes together during the lame duck session. If a package arises, the Lower Colorado MSCP bill may be included as it has bi-partisan support.

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