



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

January 15, 2025

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT

As of January 13th, the water surface elevation of Lake Powell was 3,570.25 feet with nearly 8.54 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 37% of capacity. The water surface elevation of Lake Mead was 1,064.70 feet with 8.78 MAF of storage, or 34% of capacity. As of January 12th, the total System storage was 24.46 MAF, or 42% of capacity, which is about 371 kilo-acre feet (KAF) less than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of January 7th, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 51% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 85% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 94% of capacity at Morrow Point; 63% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 64% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of January 6th, December the observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.30 MAF (93% of normal) and the January inflow forecast is 0.31 MAF (92% of normal). The forecasted inflow into Lake Powell for WY-2025 was 7.83 MAF (82% of normal). The forecasted April through July 2025 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell was 5.15 MAF (81% of normal). The WY-2025 precipitation to date was 95% of normal and the current Basin snowpack was 94%.

Colorado Basin River Forecast Center Water Supply Webinar

On January 10th, the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) held a webinar to review the Basin's current water supply conditions and forecasts. CBRFC began the presentation with a summary of WY-2024 conditions, with a focus on temperature and precipitation conditions from June to September. In addition, the CBRFC discussed fall 2024 soil moisture conditions. Soil moisture in the Lower Colorado River Basin ranged from 0% to 70% of average, while soil moisture in the Upper Colorado River Basin ranged between 50% to 130% of average. The best soil moisture conditions were in the Gunnison River basin and parts of the Dolores and San Juan River basins. CBRFC emphasized the impact that poor soil moisture conditions could have on spring runoff. As of January 9th, relative snow water equivalent (SWE) ranged from 65% to 115% in the Upper Colorado River Basin and 0% to 10% in the Lower Colorado River Basin.

The January 1st water supply forecast for April to July runoff in the Upper Colorado River Basin ranged from 69% to 97% of normal. In the Lower Colorado River Basin, the January to May forecasted runoff volume ranges from 25% to 50% of median.

La Niña conditions are expected from February to April with ENSO-neutral conditions likely between March and May. CBRFC explained that there is some correlation between drier winters in the Lower Colorado River Basin and La Niña conditions, noting, that there is still variability. Weather models predict over the next seven days there will be a few waves of precipitation in the Upper Colorado Basin and that there will be little to no precipitation in the Lower Colorado River Basin.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES

Post-2026 Alternatives

At the Colorado River Water Users Association (CRWUA) conference on December 5th, Reclamation shared more detailed information on a list of draft alternatives for consideration as part of the Post-2026 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). In spring 2024, Reclamation received a number of proposed stakeholder alternatives for the EIS, including separate alternatives from the Upper and Lower Basin States. After reviewing those proposals, Reclamation developed four different action alternatives, in addition to the No Action alternative, that could be analyzed in the forthcoming draft EIS. Reclamation has not proposed carrying forward either the Upper or Lower Basin alternative. The alternatives include:

1. *No Action Alternative*: The No Action alternative would revert to annual determinations through the Annual Operating Plan (AOP) process. No reductions in the Upper Basin are included. Lake Powell releases would be 8.23 MAF/yr unless a higher release is required for equalization or unless limited by Glen Canyon Dam infrastructure. Lower Basin shortages of up to 0.600 MAF/yr would be allocated by the priority system.
2. *Federal Authorities*: This alternative would require Lower Basin shortages of up to 3.5 MAF/yr, administered by the priority system and triggered by Lakes Powell and Mead storage. No reductions in the Upper Basin are included. Lake Powell releases would be as high as 9.5 MAF/yr, 8.23 MAF/yr or less at Lake Powell elevations below 3,635 feet, dropping to 5.0 MAF/yr when Lake Powell elevations fall below 3,530 feet.
3. *Federal Authorities Hybrid*: This alternative would require Lower Basin shortages of up to 3.5 MAF/yr, distributed pro rata and triggered by Powell and Mead storage. Voluntary Upper Basin conservation of up to 200 KAF/yr could be generated, subject to hydrology, stored in an operationally neutral account, and some portion would be converted into system water when Lower Basin reductions exceed 2.0 MAF. Lake Powell releases would balance Lakes Powell and Mead elevations annually, with releases between 4.7 MAF/yr and 12 MAF/yr, with a slight prioritization of Lake Powell under most elevations.
4. *Cooperative Conservation*: This alternative would require Lower Basin shortages of up to 4.0 MAF/yr, triggered by recent hydrology and seven-reservoir storage. Reductions would

be distributed up to 1.5 MAF/yr as negotiated by the Lower Basin States, then by the priority system. Voluntary Upper Basin conservation, averaging 200 KAF/yr, would be created, stored in Lake Powell, and some portion converted to system water when Lower Basin reductions exceed 2.0 MAF. Lake Powell releases would follow a ramp from 11.0 MAF/yr to 5.0 MAF/yr, based on total CRSP storage and recent hydrology.

5. *Basin Hybrid*: This alternative would require Lower Basin shortages of up to 2.1 MAF/yr, triggered by seven-reservoir storage. The allocation of Lower Basin shortages would be analyzed in a number of permutations: pro rata, priority system, and with and without Tribal reductions. Voluntary Upper Basin conservation of up to 100 KAF/yr could be generated, subject to hydrology, stored in an operationally neutral account, and some portion would be converted into system water when Lower Basin reductions exceed 1.5 MAF/yr. This conversion would be reduced by Upper Basin hydrologic shortage. Lake Powell releases would range from 5.0 - 12.0 MAF/yr, following a rule curve with limited opportunities for balancing.

A copy of the presentation by Reclamation on the proposed draft alternatives can be found in the Board packet.

Reclamation intends to release an Alternatives Report on their proposed alternatives before January 20, 2025. The alternatives in the report may serve as the basis for the alternatives in the draft EIS expected in 2025.

Lower Basin Alternatives Response

On December 24th, the Lower Basin submitted a request for Reclamation to analyze the effects of 1922 Colorado River Compact (Compact) compliance as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to develop post-2026 operational alternatives. The Lower Basin commissioners stated that, unless an alternative includes a waiver or forbearance of Compact compliance by the Lower Basin, it is foreseeable that failure to maintain Compact-compliant flows at Lee Ferry would trigger the Lower Basin to make a Compact call. A Compact call could trigger Upper Basin curtailment and actions by the United States in management of federal reservoirs. The Lower Basin asked that these assumptions be incorporated into post-2026 alternatives as reasonably foreseeable activities that will interact with Reclamation's proposed operations for Lakes Powell and Mead.

On January 13th, the Lower Basin also provided Reclamation with an updated rule curve for operation of Lake Powell in the Lower Basin alternative. The new Lake Powell release curve is similar to the Lake Powell release curve included in Reclamation's Basin Hybrid alternative, but adjusts the inflection points and balancing volumes to spread the risk of low elevations more equally between Lakes Powell and Mead.

Powell Release with Mead Check:
Continuous Release Based on CRSP Capacity
 30-40-80; Adjustments at 1,000 and 1,100; 5.5 maf min. regular release

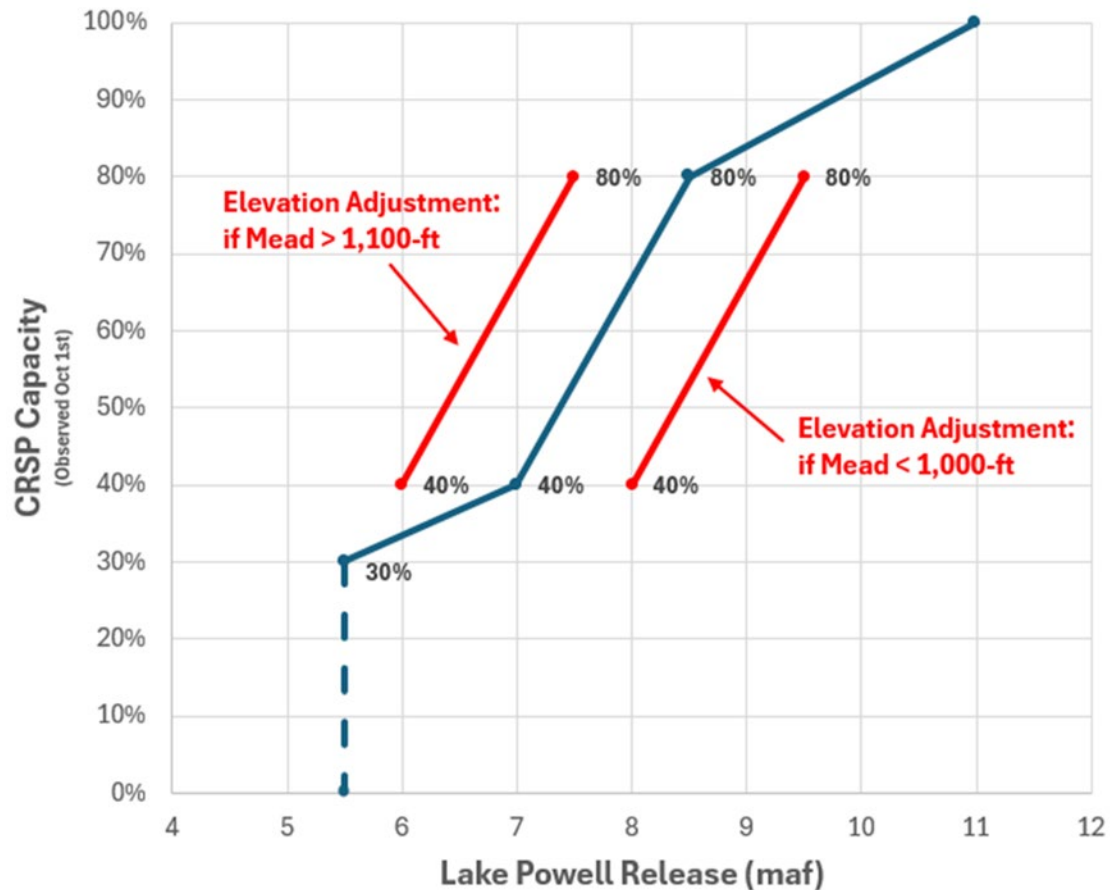


Figure 1: The new Lake Powell release curve for inclusion in the Lower Basin alternative.

Upper Basin Alternatives Response

The Upper Basin States submitted a letter to Reclamation on December 30th, 2024, amending parts of the alternative they submitted in March 2024. Minor changes were made to the storage volumes that would trigger Lower Basin reductions, and new provisions meant to encapsulate Lower Basin storage were added. The Lake Powell release curve was adjusted, reducing the minimum release from 6.0 MAF/yr to 5.0 MAF/yr. Maximum Lake Powell releases were increased to 12.0 MAF/yr. No balancing or equalization provisions are included.

The updated Upper Basin alternative also includes the creation of two new storage accounts in Lake Powell: a Lake Powell Conservation Account for Upper Basin conservation and a Lake Powell Protection Account to store elevation protection releases from the initial CRSP units. Both accounts would be operationally neutral (i.e. not subject to downstream release). If the

Lower Basin takes reductions greater than 1.5 MAF/yr, the Upper Basin proposes converting water from its new accounts into system water, in an amount equal to half the volume of the Lower Basin reduction beyond 1.5 MAF/yr. If the Upper Basin is taking hydrologic shortages calculated at more than 1.5 MAF/yr, the volume above 1.5 MAF/yr would reduce the amount converted out of their storage accounts.

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Technical Work Group of the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) held a meeting on December 5th in Las Vegas, NV. The primary purpose of the meeting was for the Technical Work Group members to meet with representatives from AECOM, the contractor selected by Reclamation to assist with both federal and California's post-2026 environmental compliance. Productive discussions were held among Reclamation, the non-federal LCR MSCP participants, and AECOM regarding roles and responsibilities, deliverables, timelines, and communication processes.

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

Reclamation Lower Colorado Basin Region Updates

Lower Colorado Basin Regional Director Jacklyn (Jaci) Gould announced that she would retire from the position effective February 28th, 2025. Ms. Gould has served as Regional Director since 2021 and retires after more than 30 years with the Bureau of Reclamation. The Colorado River Board of California thanks Regional Director Gould for her service.

On January 6th, Reclamation also announced the appointment of two new Deputy Regional Directors for the Lower Colorado Region: Genevieve Johnson and Christi Davis-Kernan. They join the current Deputy Regional Director Stacey Wade. Ms. Johnson will oversee the Boulder Canyon Operations Area Office, the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program, the Project and Program Office, and the Phoenix Area Office. Ms. Davis-Kernan will oversee the Lower Colorado Dams Office, the Power, Engineering, and Financial Management Offices, the Office of Communications, and the Regional Safety and Occupational Health Office.

Salton Sea

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Colorado River Basin Region (Colorado River Basin Water Board) will be holding two California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) scoping meetings to discuss the development of a proposed amendment to the Water Quality Control Plan for the Colorado River Basin Region (Basin Plan). The proposed Basin Plan Amendment (Project) would designate the Inland Saline Water Habitat beneficial use and de-designate the Warm Freshwater Habitat beneficial use for the Salton Sea.

An in-person meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 23, 2025, 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM at the North Shore Yacht Club (99155 Sea View Drive, Mecca, CA 92254). A virtual meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 28, 2025, at 10:00 AM. The public notice with details on how to participate in the meetings is available on the Colorado River Basin Water Board’s website at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/coloradoriver/public_notices/.

Washington, D.C. Report

Water Bills Signed into Law

President Biden signed two key water bills into law last month. The Colorado River Salinity Control Fix Act, introduced by Reps. John Curtis (R-UT) and Joe Neguse (D-CO) and Sens. Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), includes provisions to raise the federal cost-share for initiatives aimed at desalinating the Colorado River. In a May House Natural Resources Committee hearing, David Palumbo, Reclamation’s Deputy Commissioner of Operations, expressed the Reclamation’s support for the bill's objective to tackle the existing funding deficit for the salinity control program, emphasizing the adverse effects of high river salinity on agricultural lands and water consumers.

President Biden also signed the National Defense Authorization Act into law last month, which included the Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basins Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Reauthorization Act. The bill extends the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program for seven years, advancing protections for four threatened and endangered native fish species in the region. The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program, founded in collaboration with public and private entities, was established in 1988 to save four endangered fish species from extinction.

Reclamation Boosts Cap for Water Recycling Projects

Reclamation has announced plans to increase federal funding for large-scale water recycling projects by up to \$10 million per project, addressing the rising costs of construction. Commissioner Touton informed Senator Padilla (D-CA) and nearly 30 other lawmakers who advocated for the increase that the agency will raise the per-project funding cap from \$30 million to \$40 million.

“Reclamation recognizes that project costs for many water infrastructure projects have increased significantly in recent years,” Commissioner Touton wrote in a December 6th letter. “Based on a review of project costs, as well as the expected availability of funding to support the current number of applicable projects, we agree that a further increase in the project ceiling to \$40 million is appropriate.”

The cap was last increased in 2022, rising from its original \$20 million level.

“I am grateful the Biden Administration recognizes the severity of the water challenges facing Americans living in the West with increased federal funding for local water recycling projects,” Senator Padilla said. “This funding increase will help us boost local water supplies, reduce local water districts’ reliance on the Colorado River, and improve drought resiliency.”

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