



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

March 11, 2025

COLORADO RIVER BASIN WATER SUPPLY CONDITIONS REPORT

As of March 10th the water surface elevation of Lake Powell was 3,561.68 feet with nearly 7.91 million-acre feet (MAF) of storage, or 34% of capacity. The water surface elevation of Lake Mead was 1,067.99 feet with 9.04 MAF of storage, or 35% of capacity. As of March 9th, the total System storage was 24.11 MAF, or 41% of capacity, which is about 687 kilo-acre feet (KAF) less than the total System storage at this time last year.

As of March 5th, storage in the Upper Basin reservoirs, excluding Lake Powell, included the following volumes: 37% of capacity at Fontenelle Reservoir in Wyoming; 85% of capacity at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming and Utah; 95% of capacity at Morrow Point; 62% of capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir in Colorado; and 62% of capacity at Navajo Reservoir in New Mexico.

As of March 5th, February observed inflow into Lake Powell was 0.31 MAF (84% of normal) and the March inflow forecast is 0.42 MAF (70% of normal). The forecasted inflow into Lake Powell for WY-2025 is 6.77 MAF (71% of normal). The forecasted April through July 2025 unregulated inflow into Lake Powell was 4.3 MAF (67% of normal). As of March 10th, the precipitation to date is 93% normal and the current Basin snowpack is 91%.

Colorado Basin River Forecast Center Water Supply Webinar

On March 7th, the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) held a webinar to review Basin's current water supply conditions and forecasts. CBRFC began the presentation reviewing the soil moisture conditions from November 2024, noting that conditions in the Lower Colorado Basin were well below average and conditions in the Upper Colorado Basin were near to below average. CBRFC stated that soil moisture conditions impact spring runoff, with above normal conditions resulting in increased runoff efficiency, while below average conditions will result in decreased runoff efficiency. Snowpack conditions and temperature impact runoff efficiency as well.

Precipitation conditions over the last few months have been below average throughout the Colorado River Basin, with a few exceptions. In February, precipitation conditions were above average in the northern reaches of the Upper Colorado River Basin, and below average everywhere else. Several SNOTEL sites in Arizona, New Mexico, southern Utah and southwest Colorado reported their driest December to February readings on record. As of March 6th, the snow water equivalent (SWE) for Upper Colorado River Basin ranged from 55% to 115% of median and 0% to 10% of median in the Lower Colorado River Basin. There was little to no snow accumulation in the Lower Colorado Basin, with the exception of the Virgin River Basin. The March 1st water supply forecast for April to July runoff in the Upper Colorado River Basin ranged from 52% to 98% of normal. In the Lower Colorado River Basin, the January to May forecasted runoff volumes ranged from 6% to 43% of median. Since the beginning of Water Year 2025, runoff volumes have steadily decreased each month throughout the Basin.

Weather models indicate that storm activity is expected over the next week with a storm pattern most likely to favor the Lower Colorado River Basin. Colder temperatures are also expected which may result in snow at higher elevations.

COLORADO RIVER BASIN PROGRAM UPDATES

Post-2026 Alternatives Report

On January 17th, 2025, Reclamation published the Alternatives Report to document the alternatives anticipated to be carried forward in the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Post-2026 Colorado River Operations.

Beginning in spring 2024, Reclamation received a number of proposed stakeholder alternatives for the DEIS, 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 identified in the Alternatives Report 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 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', dropping to 5.0 MAF/yr when Lake Powell elevations fall below 3,530'.

3. *Federal Authorities Hybrid*: This alternative would require Lower Basin shortages of up to 3.5 MAF/yr, distributed pro rata and triggered by Lakes 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/yr. 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. 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/yr. Lake Powell releases would follow a ramp from 11.0 MAF/yr to 5.0 MAF/yr, based on total Colorado River Storage Project (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. Lake Powell releases would range from 5.0 - 12.0 MAF/yr, following a rule curve with limited opportunities for balancing.

The full Alternatives Report can be accessed online at:

<https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/alternatives/index.html>

On February 13th, 2025, the Lower Basin States submitted a joint letter to Secretary of the Interior Burgum noting several concerns with the Alternatives Report. The letter highlighted the failure to meaningfully incorporate compliance with the 1922 Colorado River Compact in the identified alternatives, as well as an inappropriate focus on absolute protection of reservoir elevation 3,490' at Lake Powell. The Lower Basin States also requested incorporation of the Lower Basin alternative in the forthcoming DEIS.

Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program

The Work Group of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum is scheduled to meet April 28th - 30th in Salt Lake City, UT.

Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program

The Annual Reporting meeting for the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (GCDAMP) has been rescheduled to be held virtually April 8th - 9th with a virtual meeting of the Technical Work Group to follow on April 10th. The Adaptive Management Work Group is scheduled to meet virtually on May 14th – 15th.

The GCDAMP Planning and Implementation Team is discussing potential flow experiments at Glen Canyon Dam in 2025, including a potential Spring High Flow Experiment (HFE) and/or Small Mouth Bass Flow. HFEs are designed to distribute sediment downstream to build beaches and habitat. HFEs were included in the Long Term Experimental and Management Plan (LTEMP) at its inception and have been successful in redistributing sediment. Smallmouth bass flows are designed to prevent the spawning of warmwater invasive fish, including smallmouth bass. Warmwater invasive fish have increasingly passed through Glen Canyon Dam as the reservoir level has lowered and, if established, present a significant risk to endangered fish including humpback chub. Recommendations from the Planning and Implementation Team regarding the potential appropriateness of either of these experiments this spring or summer are anticipated in the spring.

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) Financial Work Group held a virtual meeting on February 27th.

The group discussed the FY-2024 budget, which was \$32.7 million. Actual expenditures in FY-2024 were above budget at \$50.4 million. The largest contributing factor to the greater than projected budget expenditure was the acquisition of the Gabrych property for \$25.5 million. This land is being incorporated into the existing LCR MSCP habit restoration site at the Palo Verde Ecological Reserve (PVER). Work to develop habitat at some of the other LCR MSCP sites has been paused as the program evaluates the habitat opportunities at the expanded PVER site .

Costs to develop and maintain habitat, including construction costs, are continuing to increase. Cibola National Wildlife Refuge saw an increase in expenses due to increasing construction costs.

Habitat development at this site is on pause while the program's need for this habitat following the PVER expansion is evaluated.

The program experienced increased costs for data management projects in FY-2024. This effort is complete and the program will see reduction moving forward as a result. As anticipated, overall spending on research is decreasing as the program matures and the knowledge gaps needed to implement and monitor projects have been addressed.

Use of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds resulted in reduced need for LCR MSCP program funds for certain projects, including work at the Yuma Meadows and Section 26 habitat restoration sites.

As part of the LCR MSCP's planning for post-2026 program needs, the LCR MSCP Technical Work Group (LCR MSCP TWG) has scheduled monthly meetings. The LCR MSCP TWG met on January 15th and February 19th.

The LCR MSCP TWG is evaluating non-flow actions requiring coverage, species that may need to be included in a new permit, and the needs of all permittees for reduction in flow coverage to comply with post-2026 operational guidelines. The LCR MSCP TWG is developing a Public Involvement Plan to be utilized throughout this process.

Jessica Gwinn, Colorado River Supervisory Fish and Wildlife Biologist at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has left federal service. The Colorado River Board thanks Ms. Gwinn for her service and partnership with the LCR MSCP.

The LCR MSCP TWG will meet virtually on March 19th. The LCR MSCP Steering Committee is scheduled to hold a hybrid meeting with in-person attendance in Las Vegas, NV on April 23rd.

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

Washington, D.C. Report

Executive Orders

On January 22th, the White House issued the "Unleashing American Energy" Executive Order, mandating agencies to immediately halt the disbursement of funds allocated under the BIL and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), including previously obligated and announced funding awards for the Colorado River Basin. Subsequently, on February 3rd, the Department of the Interior released

a Secretarial Order instructing all Assistant Secretaries to review BIL and IRA funds for alignment with the Executive Order. The funding freeze's impact on the Colorado River Basin has drawn significant media coverage and letters from Congress, including a letter from the Lower Basin Senate delegations to Secretary Burgum. Several BOR funds remain frozen, including BIL-funded ecosystem restoration projects and IRA allocations.

White House Orders “Large-Scale Reductions” in Federal Agencies

On February 11th, the White House issued an Executive Order titled “Implementing The President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ (DOGE) Workforce Optimization Initiative,” leading to a substantial reduction in the Federal workforce across agencies.

The White House directed federal agencies to submit plans by March 13th for “largescale reductions in force”, the first phase of an effort to drastically reduce the size of the national government. The White House memo – authored by Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russ Vought and the acting director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Charles Ezell – proposes a two-phase plan for federal agencies to reorganize themselves. Agencies must complete a Phase 2 plan to OMB and OPM by April 14, 2025, that outlines a “positive vision for more productive, efficient agency operations going forward”. Phase 2 plans should be planned for implementation by September 30, 2025. Teams from Elon Musk-headed DOGE at each agency would help execute the plans.

Confirmations

The following list includes both confirmed and nominated political appointments:

- Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Russ Vought (confirmed)
- Secretary of Agriculture, Brooke Rollins (confirmed)
- Secretary of the Interior, Doug Burgum (confirmed)
- Deputy Secretary of the Interior, Kate McGregor (nominated)
- Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, Department of the Interior, Dr. Andrea Travnicek (nominated)
- Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Brian Nesvik (nominated)
- EPA’s Assistant Administrator for Water, Jessica Kramer (nominated)
- US Forest Service Chief, Tom Schultz (no confirmation needed)

Trump White House CEQ Rescinds National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Rule

The Trump White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has revoked its NEPA implementing rule, replacing it with nonbinding guidance that directs agencies to follow their own NEPA regulations. The guidance, issued by CEQ Chief of Staff Katherine Scarlett, encourages agencies to expedite approvals but lacks detailed instructions.

This shift returns NEPA implementation to pre-2020 conditions but leaves room for varied agency interpretations. The guidance also minimizes focus on cumulative environmental effects and environmental justice. This move aligns with a January executive order aimed at rolling back longstanding regulations to speed up project approvals.

Resources Committee Marks Up Western Water Bills

The House Natural Resources Committee had a markup on February 12th on several bills, including:

- H.R. 231 (Rep. Hageman), “Colorado River Basin System Conservation Extension Act of 2025”
- H.R. 302 (Rep. Maloy), “Water Rights Protection Act of 2025”.
- H.R. 331 (Rep. Fulcher), To amend the Aquifer Recharge Flexibility Act to clarify a provision relating to conveyances for aquifer recharge purposes.
- H.R. 1001 (Rep. Hageman), To provide for a memorandum of understanding to address the impacts of a certain record of decision on the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund.
- H.R. 1044 (Rep. Valadao), To amend Public Law 99338 with respect to Kaweah Project permits.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee has set subcommittee chairs – Sen. Hoeven (R-ND) will chair Water and Power and Sen. Wyden (D-OR) will be the ranking member. In the near-term, the Senate will be focusing on Subcabinet-level confirmation of Trump appointees.

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Legislation

On January 29th, Rep. Ken Calvert (R-CA) and Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA) reintroduced legislation to support LCR MSCP activities. The bill would establish an interest-bearing account at the Department of Treasury to hold the funds contributed by the states of Arizona, California, and Nevada for the LCR MSCP.

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