

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

California Projected to Achieve Lowest Colorado River Use Since 1949

The milestone proves that reductions in use do not preclude growth.

November 6, 2025

Glendale, California – The Colorado River Board of California (CRB) announced today that California’s 2025 use of Colorado River water is projected to hit the lowest level since 1949, marking a historic milestone for the state and the Basin. The achievement reflects decades of investment, innovation, and collaboration by California’s water agencies, farmers, cities, and tribes to use less water while doing more.

“California is showing what can be done through collaboration and a commitment to action,” said JB Hamby, Chairman of the Colorado River Board of California and California’s chief negotiator in Colorado River talks. *“We’ve proven that net reductions do not preclude growth. Every state that shares this resource must take steps to reduce its use. The sustainability of the Colorado River is a shared responsibility,”* said Hamby.

California’s population has nearly quadrupled since the 1940s—from roughly 10 million to almost 40 million residents—while the state’s economy has expanded into a \$4-trillion powerhouse, now the fifth largest in the world. California has also been the number one agricultural state in the Nation since 1947. Yet the Golden State’s Colorado River use is projected to fall to 3.76 million-acre feet, its lowest level in more than seven decades.

To achieve this record-low water use, California water agencies have invested billions of dollars in conservation programs, new storage and groundwater recovery projects, and the development of local water supplies such as recycling and the largest seawater desalination plant in the nation. Landmark efforts under the Quantification Settlement Agreement—including the largest agricultural-to-urban water transfers in U.S. history—enabled the state to permanently reduce its Colorado River use by 800,000 acre-feet in 2003, the single largest cut in the river’s history. Since then, Southern California farms have reduced water use by more than 15 percent while maintaining \$3 billion in annual productivity, and urban agencies have halved their reliance on imported water even as they continue to serve millions of new residents.

“California’s progress demonstrates what’s possible when states lead with cooperation, innovation, and accountability,” said CRB Executive Director, Jessica Neuwerth. *“This milestone reflects years of dedication by all CRB agencies, and it strengthens our resolve to continue leading with action and partnership in the work ahead.”*

These actions, combined with long-standing partnerships with federal and Basin-state counterparts, demonstrate that California remains committed to a sustainable Colorado River future. Over the past two decades, California has joined the Lower Basin States of

Arizona and Nevada on collective conservation actions that have raised the elevation of Lake Mead by nearly 160 feet. From 2020 through the end of 2026, aided in part by a partnership with the United States Department of the Interior, we are projected to cut water use by a staggering 7.5 million acre-feet. Looking towards the future, under the Lower Basin Plan, California has offered to reduce its use by 440,000 acre-feet annually—as part of the 1.25 million acre-feet in total contributions proposed by the Lower Basin—to help stabilize the river’s operation.

“Sustaining this lower water use for the long-term will take additional investments in new local water supplies and water-efficiency.” said JB Hamby. “As we work to develop new rules for operating the river starting in 2027, we know it is possible for city and farms across the Basin in all seven states to reduce their use of Colorado River water just as California has without impacting their opportunities to grow and thrive. We know there is a way; what we need is the will to act,” he said.

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About the Colorado River Board of California

For the past 88 years the Colorado River Board of California’s mission has been to protect the interests and rights of the State of California, its agencies and citizens, in the water and power resources of the Colorado River System.

The Colorado River Board represents the State of California and its Members in discussions and negotiations with the Colorado River Basin States, federal, state and local governmental agencies and Mexico regarding the management of the Colorado River.

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