



NEWS RELEASE

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California Commits to Conservation, Collaboration in New Colorado River Framework

State leaders seek durable post-2026 plan and make significant contributions

Las Vegas – California’s water, tribal, and agricultural leaders today presented a comprehensive framework for a durable, basin-wide operating agreement for the Colorado River and highlighted the state’s proposal for conserving 440,000 acre-feet of river water per year.

At the annual Colorado River Water Users Association conference, California underscored the state’s leadership in conservation, collaboration, and long-term stewardship of shared water resources that inform its approach to post-2026 negotiations.

California takes a balanced approach, relying on contributions from the upper and lower basins to maintain a shared resource. California supports hydrology-based flexibility for river users, with all states contributing real water savings. Any viable framework would need to include transparent and verifiable accounting for conserved water, along with several other elements outlined in the California framework.

State leaders also noted that they are willing to set aside many of their legal positions to reach a deal, including releases from Lake Powell under the Colorado River Compact, distribution of Lower Basin shortages, and other provisions of the Law of the River, provided that there are equitable and sufficient water contributions from every state in the Basin and the country of Mexico.

Constructive California

“California is leading with constructive action,” said JB Hamby, chairman of the Colorado River Board of California. “We have reduced our water use to the lowest levels since the 1940s, invested billions to modernize our water systems and develop new supplies, partnered with tribes and agricultural communities, and committed to real water-use

reductions that will stabilize the river. We are doing our part – and we invite every state to join us in this shared responsibility.”

Despite being home to 20 million Colorado River-reliant residents and a farming region that produces the majority of America’s winter vegetables, California’s use of Colorado River water is projected at 3.76 million acre-feet in 2025 – the lowest since 1949.

That achievement comes on top of historic reductions in water use over the past 20 years, led by collaborative conservation efforts. Urban Southern California cut imported water demand in half while adding almost 4 million residents. And farms reduced water use by more than 20% while sustaining more than \$3 billion in annual output. Tribes also have made critical contributions, including nearly 40,000 acre-feet of conserved water by the Quechan Indian Tribe to directly support river system stability.

Going forward, California is prepared to reduce water use by 440,000 acre-feet per year – in addition to existing long-standing conservation efforts – as part of the Lower Basin’s proposal to conserve up to 1.5 million acre-feet per year, which would include participation by Mexico. When conditions warrant, California is also committed to making additional reductions to address future shortages as part of a comprehensive basin-state plan.

The state’s history of conservation illustrates what can be accomplished through collaboration, and all Colorado River water users in California are preparing to contribute to these reductions – agricultural agencies, urban agencies, and tribes.

Framework for a Post-2026 Agreement

In addition to conservation contributions, California provided a framework of principles for the post-2026 river operating guidelines to advance a shared solution for the seven Basin States, the tribes and Mexico. More specifically, California outlined the following key components for a new framework:

- **Lake Powell releases** – California supports a policy of hydrology-based, flexible water releases that protects both Lake Powell and Lake Mead. Flexibility must be paired with appropriate risk-sharing across basins, avoiding disproportionate impacts to any one region.
- **Upper Initial Units (Colorado River Storage Project Act)** – Releases should be made when needed to reduce water supply and power risks to both basins.
- **Shared contributions** – The Lower Basin’s proposed 1.5 million acre-feet per year contribution to address the structural deficit, including an equitable share from Mexico (subject to binational negotiations), is the first enforceable offer on the table. When hydrology demands more, participation by all seven Basin States is essential.

- **Interstate exchanges** – Interstate exchanges need to be part of any long-term solution to encourage interstate investments in new water supply projects that may not be economically viable for just one state or agency.
- **Operational flexibility** – Continued ability to store water in Lake Mead is vital to maintain operational flexibility. California supports continuation and expansion of water storage in Lake Mead as a long-term feature of river management and to encourage conservation. We also support Upper Basin pools for conservation, allowing similar benefits.
- **Phasing of a long-term agreement** – California supports a long-term operating agreement with adaptive phases. Tools like water storage in Lake Mead and Lake Powell need to extend beyond any initial period due to significant investments required to store conserved water in the reservoirs.
- **Protections and federal support:** Any agreement should be supported with federal funding and any necessary federal authorities, allow agriculture and urban areas to continue to thrive, protect tribal rights, and address the environment, including the environmentally sensitive Salton Sea.

“There are no easy choices left, but California has always done what is required to protect the river,” said Jessica Neuwerth, executive director of the Colorado River Board of California. “We have proven that conservation and growth can coexist. We have shown that reductions can be real, measurable, and durable. And we have demonstrated how states, tribes, cities, and farms can work together to build a sustainable future for the Colorado River.”

What California agencies are saying:

“The future of the Colorado River is vital to California – and our nation. As the fourth largest economy in the world, we rely on the Colorado River to support the water needs of millions of Californians and our agricultural community which feeds the rest of the nation. California is doing more with less, maintaining our economic growth while using less water in our urban and agricultural communities. We have cut our water use to its lowest levels in decades and are investing in diverse water supply infrastructure throughout California, doing our part to protect the Colorado River for generations to come. We look forward to continued discussions with our partners across the West to find the best path forward to keep the Colorado River healthy for all those who rely on it.”

– Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources

“Metropolitan’s story is one of collaboration, of finding common ground. We have forged partnerships across California and the Basin – with agriculture, urban agencies and tribes. And through that experience, we know that we can build a comprehensive Colorado River Agreement that includes all seven states and the country of Mexico. We must reach a consensus. That is the only option.”

– Adán Ortega, Jr., Chair, Metropolitan Water District Board of Directors

“California’s leadership is grounded in results, and the Imperial Valley is proud to contribute to that record. Our growers have created one of the most efficient agricultural regions in the Basin—cutting use by over 20% while supporting a \$3 billion farm economy that feeds America. Since 2003, IID has conserved more than nine million acre-feet, and with the Colorado River as our sole water supply, we remain firmly committed to constructive, collaborative solutions that protect America’s hardest-working river.”

– Gina Dockstader, Chairwoman, Imperial Irrigation District

“The path to resiliency requires innovation, cooperation, and every Basin state’s commitment to conservation. The San Diego County Water Authority supports an approach that provides flexibility to adapt to changing climate conditions. That means developing a new framework that allows for interstate water transfers to move water where it’s most needed and incentivizes the development of new supplies for augmentation.”

– CRB Vice Chair Jim Madaffer, San Diego County Water Authority

“Palo Verde Irrigation District is committed to maintaining a healthy, viable river system into the future. We at PVID have always gone above and beyond in supporting the river in times of need. Since 2023 our 95,000-acre valley, in collaboration with Metropolitan and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation have committed over 351,000 acre-feet of verifiable wet water to support the river system and Lake Mead. It is important to our stakeholders in the Palo Verde Valley and all of California that Colorado River water continues to meet the needs of both rural and urban areas. We must find workable solutions that keep food on people's plates and water running thru the faucets of homes.”

– Brad Robinson, Board President, Palo Verde Irrigation District

“California continues to lead in conservation and collaboration, setting the standard for innovation and sustainability. Together, we strive to ensure reliability for millions of people, tribes, and acres of farmland. For decades, CVWD has invested in conservation efficiency, alongside investments from growers. Additionally, we have saved more than 118,000 acre-feet of Colorado River water since 2022 — underscoring our shared commitment to long-term sustainability. CVWD remains dedicated to finding collaborative solutions to protect the river’s health and stability.”

– Peter Nelson, Board Director, Coachella Valley Water District

“As stewards of the Colorado River since time immemorial, our Tribe is committed to protecting the river for the benefit of our people and all of the communities and ecosystems that rely on it. We believe partnerships and collaboration, such as our agreement with Metropolitan Water District and the Bureau of Reclamation to conserve over 50,000 acre-feet of our water in Lake Mead between 2023 and 2026, are essential to ensure that we have a truly living river.”

– President Jonathan Koteen, Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe

"Bard Water District remains committed to continued system conservation and responsible water management. While small in size, the District continues to make meaningful contributions to regional sustainability efforts on the Colorado River."

– Ray Face, Board President, Bard Water District

"LADWP is dedicated to delivering and managing a water supply that prioritizes resilience, high quality, and cost-effectiveness. These investments illustrate that achieving urban water resiliency is indeed feasible."

**– Dave Pettijohn, Water Resources Director,
Los Angeles Department of Water & Power**

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For nearly 90 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, local governmental agencies, and Mexico regarding the management of the Colorado River.