



Statement from JB Hamby, Colorado River Commissioner for California

For the past three years, California has worked in good faith with the seven basin states and the federal government to establish sustainable post-2026 operations for the Colorado River.

The framework governing the river was built on hydrologic assumptions that no longer match reality. The 1922 Colorado River Compact requires the Upper Basin to deliver an average of 8.25 million acre-feet annually to the Lower Basin and Mexico. That delivery obligation is fixed in law, even when the river produces less water.

Over the last quarter century, river flows have declined significantly from the levels assumed in 1922. The result is a growing imbalance between supply and demand, visible in the declining elevations of Lake Mead and Lake Powell.

Under the Compact, prolonged drought creates real risk for the Upper Basin to cut uses in order to maintain compliance with delivery obligations to the Lower Basin and Mexico. At the same time, decades of litigation would create enormous uncertainty for every state, every water user, and every sector of the Western economy.

That is why California and the Lower Basin acted.

Three years ago, when the system approached crisis, California, Arizona, and Nevada committed to conserve 3 million acre-feet by 2026. That goal has already been exceeded, with approximately 3.7 million acre-feet projected by year's end. Those reductions have helped protect the system and stabilize reservoir levels.

We also proposed eliminating the 1.2 million acre-foot structural overdraft at Lake Mead and establishing 1.5 million acre-feet per year in durable reductions to eliminate the deficit and gradually rebuild storage at Lake Mead. In addition, we advanced shared cutbacks between the basins when overall system storage declines.

These proposals represented significant commitments from the Lower Basin. They were designed to stabilize the system and avoid conflict. The river's long-term reliability depends on shared action across the basin. Unfortunately, a consensus has not been reached.



Some Upper Basin interests remain unwilling to commit to measurable conservation and reductions, even though the Compact ultimately places delivery obligations upstream.

The central question is whether all seven states are ready and willing to participate in the necessary reductions to protect the entire system.

California remains committed to a negotiated solution. A durable agreement must include measurable, basin-wide conservation commitments that reflect the river we have today and provide long-term stability for the West.

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