



Colorado River Upper Division State Representatives of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming

MEDIA RELEASE

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Upper Division Colorado River States Propose Alternative for Sustainable Operations of Post-2026 Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead

This week, the Upper Division States of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming submitted to the Bureau of Reclamation an Alternative for Post-2026 Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The UDS Alternative proposes operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead designed to help provide water supply certainty and sustainability in the face of a drying and uncertain future.

The purpose of the Upper Division States Alternative is to provide a set of modeling assumptions and operating parameters to the Bureau of Reclamation for Post-2026 Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead as part of the review process required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Separate from this NEPA process, the Upper Division States (UDS) will also pursue Parallel Activities. Parallel Activities are other activities the Upper Division States might take under certain conditions. Examples include potential releases and recovery at the Colorado River Storage Project Act (CRSPA) Initial Units and voluntary water conservation programs that would help to protect the ability of Lake Powell to make releases.

The Upper Division States Alternative provides:

- Management of the reservoirs to address the existing imbalance between water supply and demands in the Lower Basin;
- Operations based on actual conditions—instead of unreliable forecasts—to ensure that Lake Powell and Lake Mead are operated sustainably;
- Efforts to rebuild storage at Lake Powell to protect the reservoir's ability to provide water to Lake Mead;
- Reliance on the best available science and information, including impacts caused by climate change;
- Consistency with the Law of the River;

- Accounting of Upper Basin’s hydrologic shortages, which average an estimated 1.2 million acre-feet each year; and
- Acknowledgement of the settled but undeveloped Tribal water rights in the Upper Basin.

“We can no longer accept the status quo of Colorado River operations,” said Becky Mitchell, Colorado’s Commissioner to the Upper Colorado River Commission. “If we want to protect the system and ensure certainty for the 40 million people who rely on this water source, then we need to address the existing imbalance between supply and demand. That means using the best available science to work within reality and the actual conditions of Lake Powell and Lake Mead. We must plan for the river we have - not the river we dream for.”

Estevan Lopez, New Mexico’s Commissioner, said, “The Colorado River Basin is at a critical juncture. The UDS Alternative seeks to acknowledge the Upper Basin’s realities, including hydrologic shortages, protect Upper Basin interests, and contribute towards future sustainability of the entire basin. We look forward to working with our sister Lower Basin States to resolve differences in approach and create a 7-state consensus alternative.”

“This is a pivotal moment for Utah and the entire Upper Basin,” said Gene Shawcroft, Utah’s Upper Colorado River Commissioner. “Our proposal represents a balanced approach, combining immediate action with long-term planning to ensure the sustainability of both Lake Powell and Lake Mead. It’s about adapting to the realities we face today and securing a water-resilient future for our region.”

Wyoming’s Commissioner, Brandon Gebhart, said, “Our Alternative focuses on building storage in Lake Powell to help provide a sustainable water supply into the drying future, and avoid the constant crisis of recent years. It’s a response to the lessons we’ve learned, and acknowledges the uncertain future we face. Although our proposal can stand on its own, it was also designed to promote the development of a seven-state consensus alternative which is a goal we all still seek to achieve.”

The Upper Division States are committed to working with partners in developing a preferred alternative. The UDS Alternative is available in detail on the Upper Colorado River Commission’s website, along with an infographic.