

A Sustainable Colorado River

UPPER DIVISION STATES ALTERNATIVE FAQ

What is the purpose of the UDS Alternative?

The Upper Division States Alternative (UDS Alternative) was submitted to the Bureau of Reclamation by Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. Reclamation will model the UDS Alternative as part of the NEPA process for Post-2026 Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The Alternative presents a way to operate Lake Powell and Lake Mead based on observed, real-world hydrologic conditions (instead of unreliable forecasts). The plan would help rebuild storage in the reservoirs and protect water users and resources. The current guidelines expire in 2026.

How will the UDS Alternative improve Colorado River management?

Under the guidelines in place through 2026, more water is regularly released from Lake Powell and Lake Mead than flows in. These large downstream releases support overuse in the Lower Basin States. The current guidelines tie together the operations of Powell and Mead, so the drawdown of Mead consequently causes a drawdown of Powell as well. This has caused both reservoirs to reach critically low elevations in recent years. The UDS Alternative is designed to operate within the means of the river by only releasing what is available in a given year based on storage conditions.

Are there conservation proposals in the UDS Alternative?

The UDS Alternative will consider 'parallel activities' that support Upper Basin resilience and protect Lake Powell. These potential activities would be separate from the post-2026 NEPA process. The activities could include voluntary conservation and potential releases from the Colorado River Storage Project Act Initial Unit reservoirs, which include Flaming Gorge, the Aspinall Unit (Blue Mesa), and Navajo, in order to protect Lake Powell's ability to continue to release water.

Help tell the story of why Colorado River water is important to Colorado

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Call us and leave a voicemail about what it's like to take cuts to your water supply



michael.sakas@state.co.us

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COLORADO
Upper Colorado River
Commissioner

UPPER DIVISION STATES ALTERNATIVE FOR POST-2026 OPERATIONS OF LAKE POWELL AND LAKE MEAD

Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming's alternative provides for **sustainable** operations that are aligned with **hydrologic conditions**, help to **rebuild storage**, and **operate within the Law of the River**.

1

POWELL OPERATIONS

Lake Powell releases are aligned with hydrologic conditions, which helps re-build storage and adapts to variability

POWELL RELEASES

100% FULL

Releases as required for dam safety

81% - 100% FULL

8.1 - 9.0 MAF per year

20% - 81% FULL

6.0 - 8.1 MAF per year

< 20% FULL

6.0 MAF per year

MEAD RELEASES

Lake Mead operations are adapted from a concept first proposed by the Lower Division States

2

LAKE MEAD OPERATIONS

Modeled Lower Basin operations call for reductions in use depending upon reservoir conditions, with Lower Basin reductions of 1.5 million acre-feet under most conditions

3

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

PARALLEL ACTIVITIES

Under agreements separate from the Post-2026 NEPA process, Upper Basin actions could include CRSPA* initial units and voluntary conservation, and acknowledgement of undeveloped settled Tribal water rights

*Colorado River Storage Project Act

CONTINUED COLLABORATION

The Upper Division States are committed to continued collaboration with the Bureau of Reclamation, Basin States, Tribal Nations, water users, and environmental and recreation groups



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Contact Information:

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Powell Operations

Lake Powell releases are aligned with hydrologic conditions, which helps re-build storage and adapts to variability.

Powell Releases

1. When the reservoir is 100% full, releases are done as required for dam safety
2. At 81%-100% Full, releases equal 8.1-9.0 Million Acre-feet (MAF) per year
3. At 20%-81% Full, releases equal 6.0-8.1 MAF per year
4. When the reservoir is less than 20% full, releases are 6.0 MAF per year

Mead Releases

Lake Mead operations are adapted from a concept first proposed by the Lower Division States.

Lake Mead Operations

Modeled Lower Basin operations call for reductions in use depending upon reservoir conditions, with Lower Basin reductions of 1.5 million acre-feet under most conditions.

Other Considerations

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