



COLORADO

**Colorado Water
Conservation Board**

Department of Natural Resources

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Dan Gibbs, DNR Executive
Director

Lauren Ris, CWCB Director

TO: Colorado Water Conservation Board Members

FROM: Amy Ostdiek, Michelle Garrison, and Clint Carney

DATE: January 27, 2025

SUBJECT: Agenda Item 11: Colorado River Updates

This is an informational item with no board action requested.

1. Hydrology and operations update

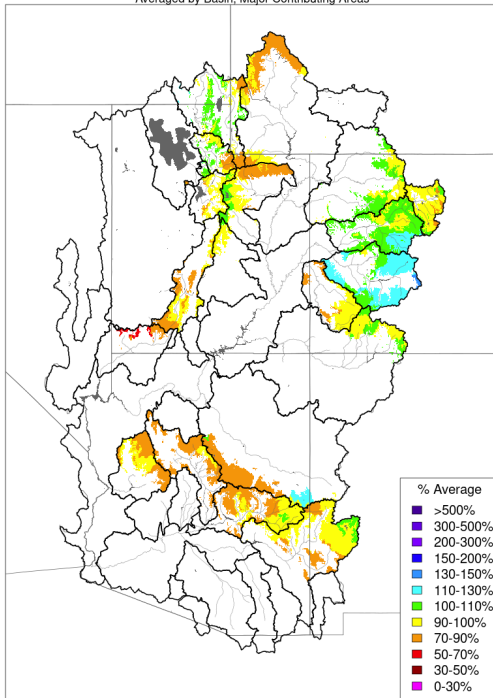
Hydrology

Extremely dry conditions in Water Years 2020 through 2022 placed significant strain on basin reservoir storage and on water users in the Upper Basin. WY 2023 precipitation and streamflow were slightly above average. WY 2024 precipitation was average, with warm, dry conditions in the summer and fall. Streamflow was below average, reflecting persistently dry soil conditions. WY 2025 precipitation, snowpack and streamflow are currently below average. Climate forecasts indicate increased likelihood of warmer and drier than average conditions for the winter and spring.

Drought and reservoir storage conditions have improved; however, long-term impacts from depleted storage are expected to continue, as indicated in current forecasts for reservoir operations.

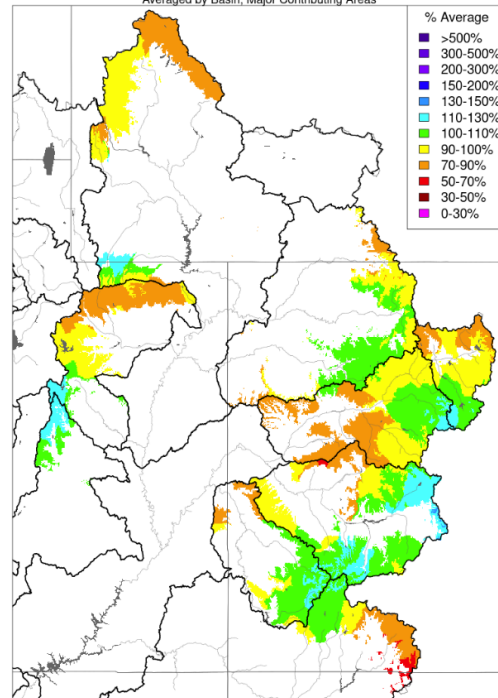


Water Year to Date Precipitation, October 01 - September 30 2024
Averaged by Basin, Major Contributing Areas



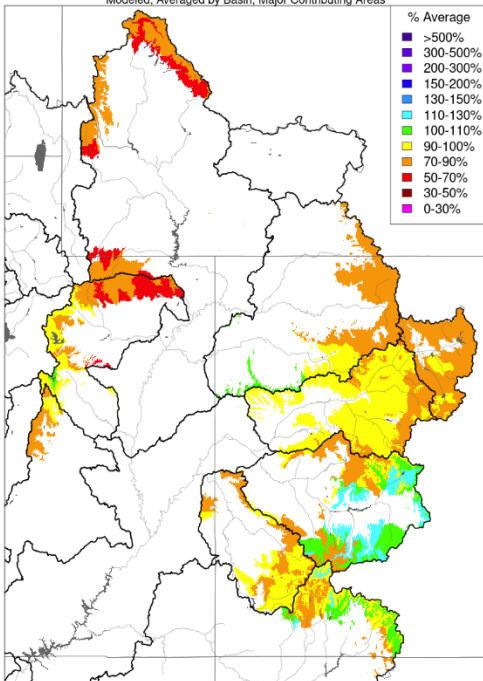
Prepared by NOAA, Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
Salt Lake City, Utah, www.cbrfc.noaa.gov

Water Year Precipitation, October 2024 - December 2024
Averaged by Basin, Major Contributing Areas



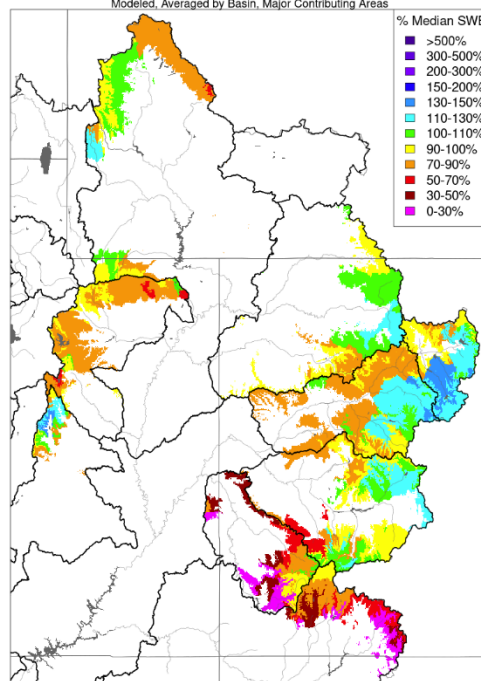
Prepared by NOAA, Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
Salt Lake City, Utah, www.cbrfc.noaa.gov

Soil Moisture - Fall - 2024 (November 15)
Modeled, Averaged by Basin, Major Contributing Areas



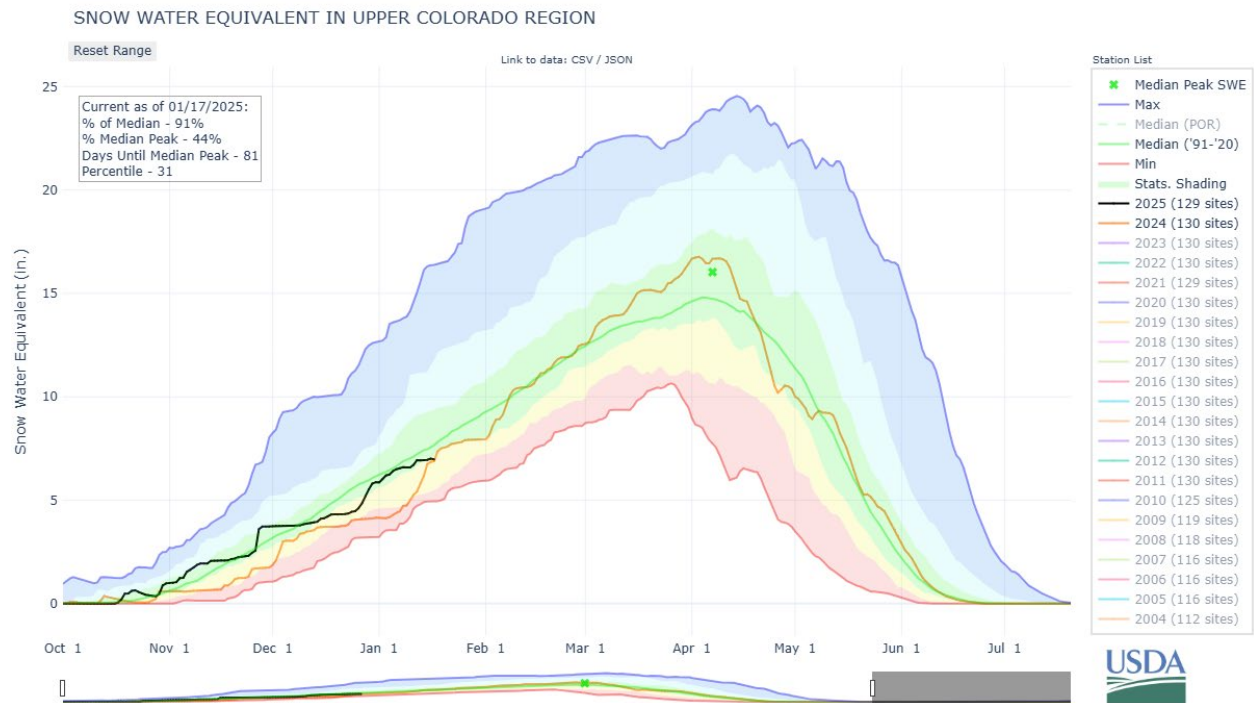
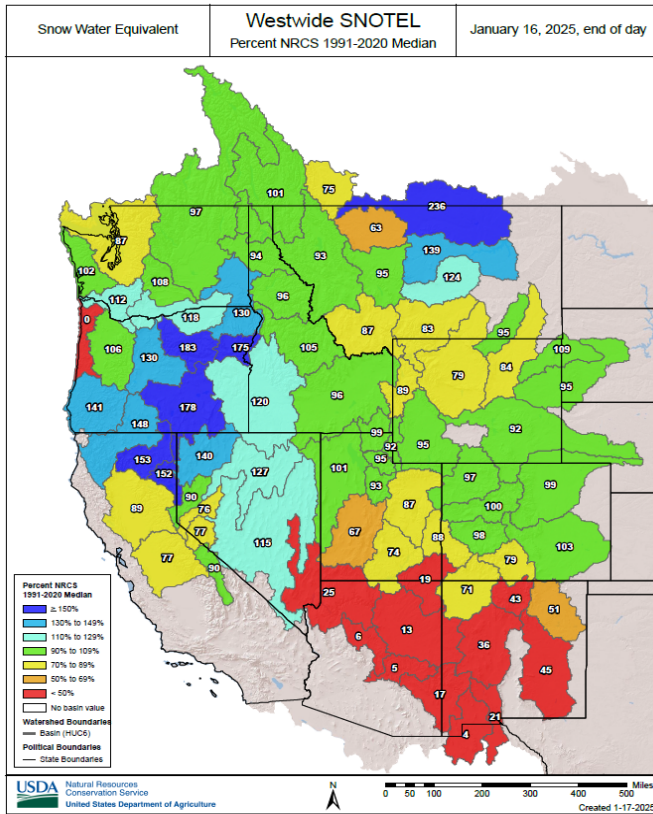
Prepared by NOAA, Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
Salt Lake City, Utah, www.cbrfc.noaa.gov

Snow Conditions - January 17 2025
Modeled, Averaged by Basin, Major Contributing Areas



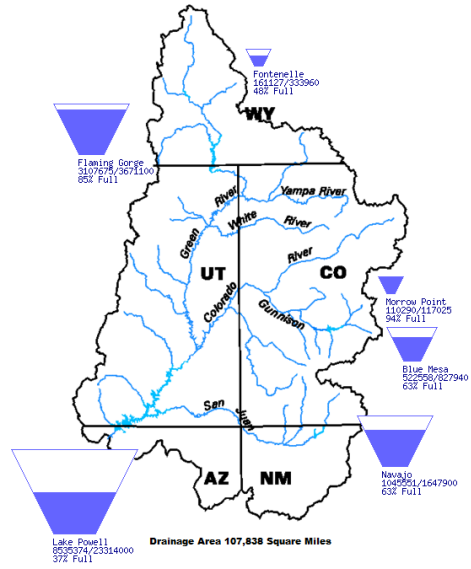
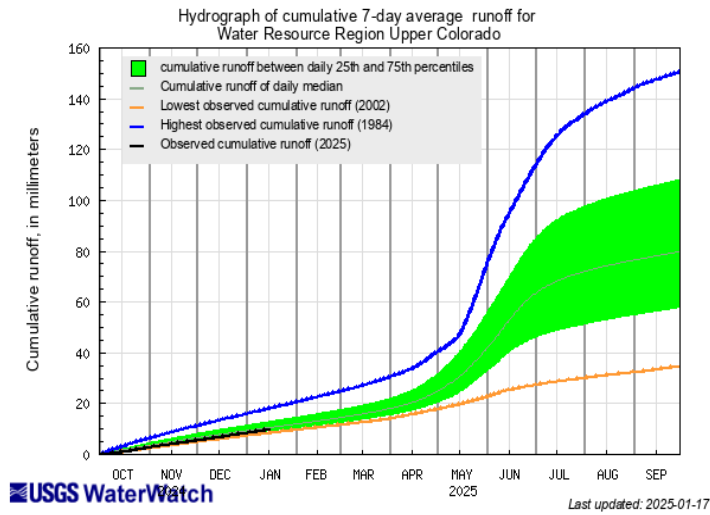
Prepared by NOAA, Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
Salt Lake City, Utah, www.cbrfc.noaa.gov





Data Current as of:
01/16/2025

Upper Colorado River Drainage Basin



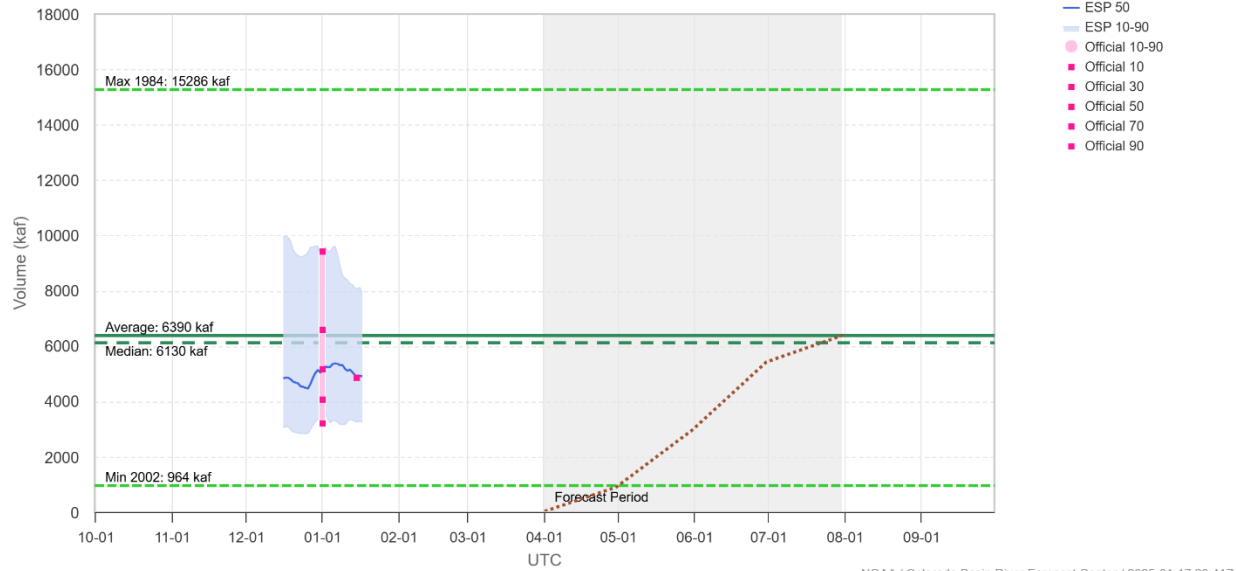
2025 Water Supply Forecast - Colorado - Lake Powell, Glen Cyn Dam, At (GLDA3)

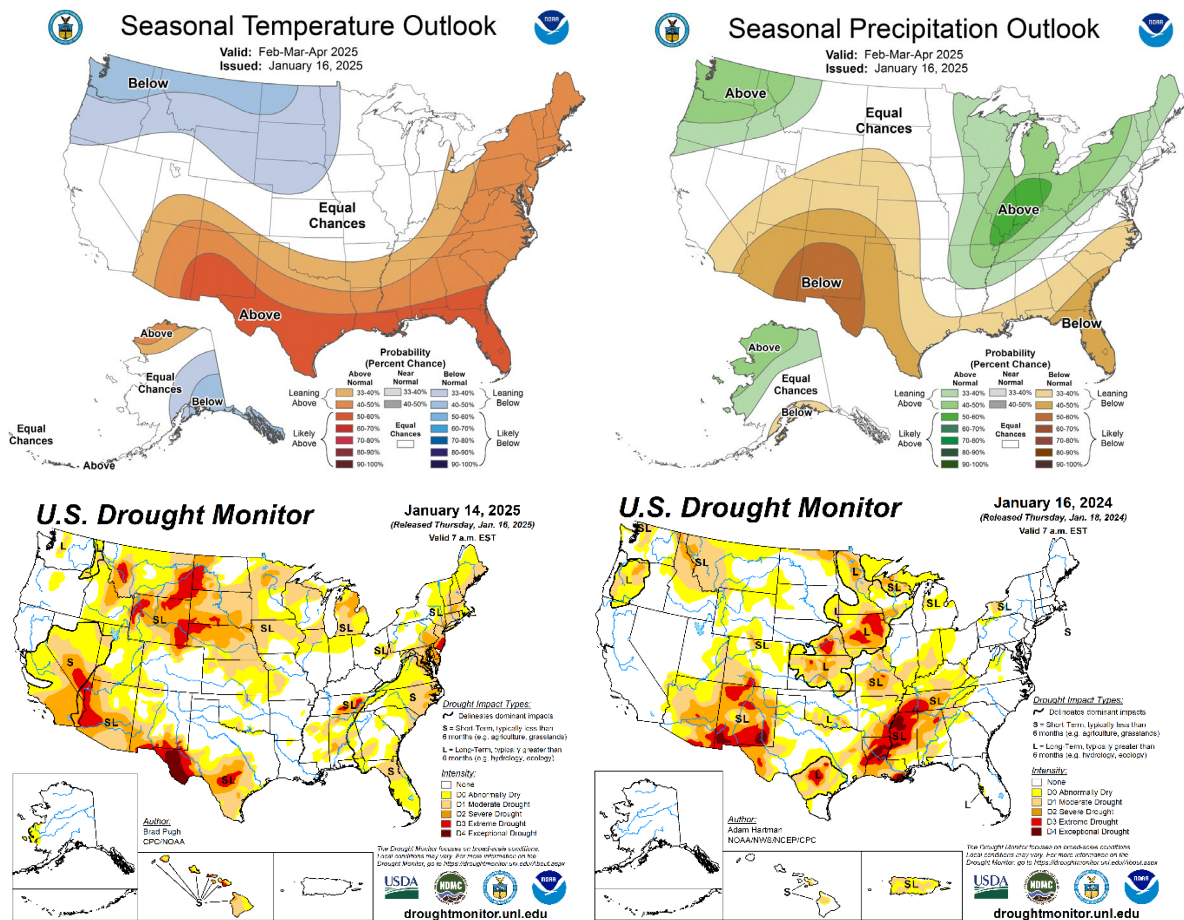
ESP is Unregulated and No Precipitation Forecast Included

Official 50% Fcst (2025-01-15): 4850 kaf (76% Avg, 79% Med), (32% of Yrs Below Fcst, 42 Highest Flow / 61 Tot Yrs)

ESP 50% Fcst (2025-01-17): 4911 kaf (77% Avg, 80% Med), (32% of Yrs Below Fcst, 42 Highest Flow / 61 Tot Yrs)

No Observed





Operations

Upper Basin

Low inflows and reservoir storage prompted multiple reservoir operation changes and Upper Basin Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) activities in WY 2022 and 2023. To protect critical infrastructure in Lake Powell, Reclamation decreased WY 2022 Lake Powell releases. May 2022 - April 2023 Flaming Gorge reservoir releases were increased as part of the Drought Response Operations Plan. Lake Powell rose above elevation 3525' in May 2022 and fell below that threshold elevation in December 2022. Due to improved hydrologic conditions in WY 2023, Lake Powell elevations rose significantly in April 2023 and continue to remain above the 3525' threshold.

High spring runoff and increasing reservoir elevations prompted the cessation of Drought Response Operations Agreement (DROA) releases in March 2023, changing focus to recovery of previously released DROA water for the May 2023 - April 2024 plan, and a substantial increase in WY 2023 releases from Lake Powell. WY 2023 was the first year in which Lake Powell operated in the Lower Elevation Balancing Tier. In that tier, releases from Lake Powell are initially set to 7.0 MAF but can be adjusted up to a maximum of 9.5 MAF based on inflow and



reservoir storage forecasts. Releases were adjusted monthly from April through September based on updated inflow and reservoir storage forecasts. Lake Powell releases totaled 8.58 MAF for WY 2023, including the release of the 480,000 acre-feet withheld in Lake Powell in WY 2022. As the Lake Powell inflow forecasts declined quickly due to the warm and dry summer conditions in the Upper Basin and Lake Mead storage projections increased due to precipitation and decreasing demand in the Lower Basin, Reclamation decreased Lake Powell releases, but still inadvertently released 40,000 acre-feet more from Powell than was required under balancing. They claim to have no authority to correct this inadvertent release.

In spring 2023 as Lake Powell elevation was very low but inflow and elevation were rising, Reclamation increased releases significantly for several days to mobilize sediment remaining in the system from tributary inflows below Glen Canyon Dam and deposit it onto eroding sandbars within the Grand Canyon. Reclamation increased powerplant releases and made releases through the bypass tubes similar to a High Flow Experiment (HFE), but this high release was conducted outside the LTEMP protocol for such experiments. This was the first time releases of that magnitude were made through the bypass tubes with Lake Powell at such a low elevation, and the altered hydraulic conditions damaged one of the bypass tubes. Reclamation is evaluating potential short-term limitations to Glen Canyon Dam operations and long-term actions to prevent additional damage to the bypass tubes and has issued temporary guidance limiting bypass tube releases at low elevation while it analyzes potential solutions.

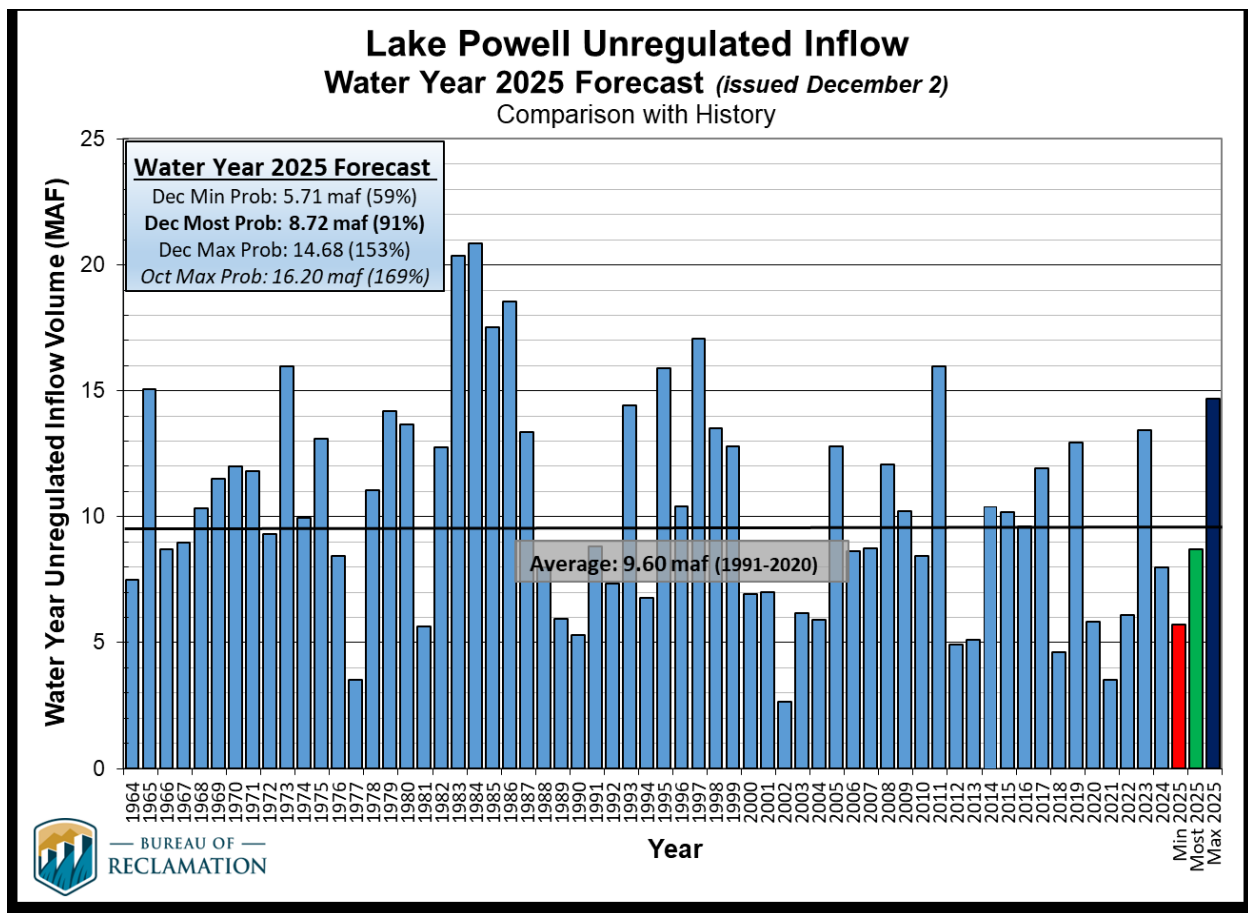
In WY 2024 Lake Powell operated in the Mid-Elevation Release Tier with a fixed annual release of 7.48 MAF. Streamflow at the Lees Ferry gage includes Lake Powell releases, flow of water around the Glen Canyon dam through bank storage and leakage, and inflows from the Paria River. The 10-year cumulative streamflow at Lees Ferry through WY 2024 was approximately 86 million acre-feet.

Blue Mesa reservoir achieved recovery of its previously released DROA water in late December 2023. Flaming Gorge reservoir achieved recovery of previously released DROA water in late February 2024. No DROA operations are expected during the May 2024 - April 2025 DROA planning period.

DROA actions helped protect critical infrastructure in Lake Powell from late 2021 through April 2023. However, half of the DROA water in Lake Powell was released in WY 2023 as part of the balancing releases. Lake Powell elevations are now lower than they would have been without DROA releases, leaving Lake Powell at increased risk of dropping below critical elevations in the future. The lack of long-term effectiveness of the 2021 - 2023 DROA releases does not match the goals and objectives of the DROA and may factor into future Upper Basin DCP decisions.

As determined by Reclamation's August 2024 24-Month Study, Lake Powell will operate in the Mid-Elevation Release Tier in WY 2025 with a fixed annual release of 7.48 MAF.





Lower Basin

The table below describes the Interim Guideline Lower Basin shortage tiers, reduction of deliveries to Mexico pursuant to Minute 323, Lower Basin DCP contributions and Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan contributions as determined by projected elevations at Lake Mead. In Calendar Year 2023 Lake Mead operated in a Tier 2a shortage condition. In CY 2024 Lake Mead is operating in a Tier 1 shortage condition. As determined by the August 2024 24-Month Study, Lake Mead will also operate in a Tier 1 shortage condition in CY 2025.

**2007 Interim Guidelines, Minute 323, Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan,
and Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan**
Total Volumes (kaf)

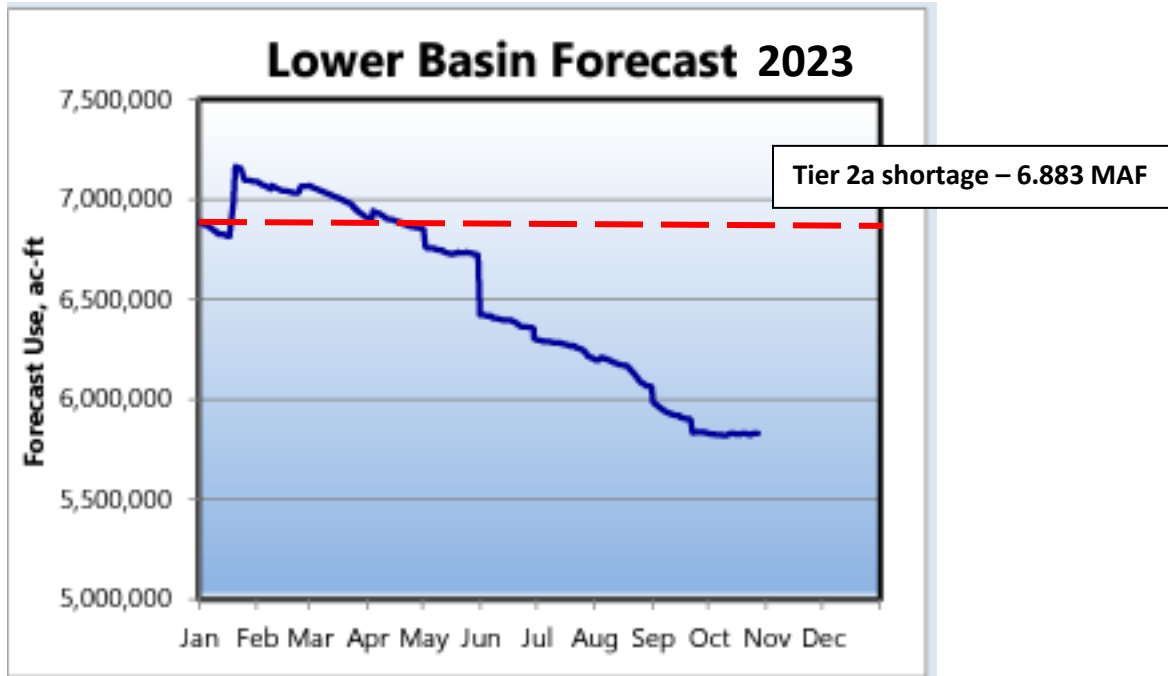
Lake Mead Elevation (feet msl)	2007 Interim Guidelines Shortages		Minute 323 Delivery Reductions	Total Combined Reductions	DCP Water Savings Contributions			Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan Savings	Combined Volumes by Country US: (2007 Interim Guidelines Shortages + DCP Contributions) Mexico: (Minute 323 Delivery Reductions + Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan Savings)					Total Combined Volumes
	AZ	NV	Mexico	Lower Basin States + Mexico	AZ	NV	CA	Mexico	AZ Total	NV Total	CA Total	Lower Basin States Total	Mexico Total	Lower Basin States + Mexico
1,090 - 1,075	0	0	0	0	192	8	0	41	192	8	0	200	41	241
1,075 - 1,050	320	13	50	383	192	8	0	30	512	21	0	533	80	613
1,050 - 1,045	400	17	70	487	192	8	0	34	592	25	0	617	104	721
1,045 - 1,040	400	17	70	487	240	10	200	76	640	27	200	867	146	1,013
1,040 - 1,035	400	17	70	487	240	10	250	84	640	27	250	917	154	1,071
1,035 - 1,030	400	17	70	487	240	10	300	92	640	27	300	967	162	1,129
1,030 - 1,025	400	17	70	487	240	10	350	101	640	27	350	1,017	171	1,188
<1,025	480	20	125	625	240	10	350	150	720	30	350	1,100	275	1,375

The Secretary of the Interior will take affirmative actions to implement programs designed to create or conserve 100,000 acre-ft per annum or more of Colorado River System water to contribute to conservation of water supplies in Lake Mead and other Colorado River reservoirs in the lower basin. All actions taken by the United States shall be subject to applicable law, including availability of appropriations.



Early in CY 2023, the Lower Basin was projecting to consumptively use up to 7.2 MAF - about 320,000 AF more than their allocation under Tier 2a shortage. This would have involved the withdrawal of banked ICS. However, as the spring came, historic precipitation flooded the Arizona tributaries, and the California State Water Project issued a 100% allocation for the first time since the year 2006 (due to high snow in the Sierras; Lake Oroville spilled by May 2023). Hurricane Hilary in August 2023 further reduced Lower Basin demands due to heavy local precipitation. The large decrease in demands allowed for creation of ICS instead of the projected withdrawal. This “historically low consumptive use” in the Lower Basin was due to local hydrology - it was not caused by significant actions by the Lower Basin contractors.





California State Water Project Allocation

YEAR	DATE	ALLOCATION
2020	12/2/2019	10%
	1/24/2020	15%
	5/22/2020	20%
2021	12/1/2020	10%
	3/23/2021	5%
2022	12/1/2021	0% ³
	1/20/2022	15%
	3/18/2022	5% ⁴
2023	12/1/2022	5% ⁵
	1/26/2023	30%
	2/22/2023	35%
	3/24/2023	75%
	4/20/2023	100%



In addition to the shortages agreed to pursuant to the 2007 Guidelines and 2019 Drought Contingency Plans, in December 2021 the Lower Division States also committed to creating an additional 500,000 acre-feet of water per year in 2021-2022, and 2023, of conserved water to remain in Lake Mead on a voluntary basis. Planned conservation in late 2022 and 2023 increased significantly from 2022 projections, reflecting the improved hydrology in the Lower Basin. Similar to shortage conditions, the amount of water conserved in Lake Mead under the “500+ Plan” may be partially offset by other withdrawals.

The Lower Basin proposed up to 3 million acre-feet of compensated conservation and other activities through 2025 to address drought conditions as part of Reclamation’s Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) process to contemplate additional changes to Lake Powell and Lake Mead reservoir operations through the end of the Interim Guidelines (“near-term operations”). Reclamation released its final Interim Guidelines SEIS in March 2024 and issued its Record of Decision (ROD) in May 2024. The final SEIS analyzed only two alternatives, a No Action alternative and the Lower Basin alternative, removing the previously proposed action alternatives from final consideration. Reclamation is adding the expected conservation volumes to its models as conservation agreements with participating entities are signed, which is increasing projected Lake Mead elevations. The contracted conservation volumes as of August 2024 are summarized in the tables below. The hydrology-driven increase in ICS creation in 2023 is also reflected. Volumes listed in the tables are subject to change. Staff does not have information regarding verification of these conservation estimates.

Status of SEIS ROD Lower Basin Conservation¹

As of August 2024 (all volumes in acre-feet)

State	LCB Water Entitlement Holder/Tribe	2023	2024	2025	2026
Arizona	Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation SCW	13,933	13,933	13,933	
Arizona	Gila River Indian Community SCW	91,319	125,000	125,000	
Arizona	Hopi Tribe SCW	2,679	3,059	3,059	
Arizona	San Carlos Apache Tribe SCW	23,804			
Arizona	Central Arizona Project (CAP) Subcontractors SCW	141,400	129,400	128,800	2,400
Arizona	Mohave Valley Irrigation and Drainage District SCW	12,819	13,441	13,441	
Arizona	Yuma Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District SCW	21,556	21,795	21,795	
Arizona	Cibola Valley Irrigation and Drainage District SCW	1,682	2,328	2,328	
Arizona	Cathcart Farms SCW	57	61	61	
Arizona	GM Gabrych Family Limited Partnership SCW	3,240	3,240	3,240	
Arizona	CAP ICS Preservation Program	41,776			
California	Coachella Valley Water District SCW	35,000	35,000	45,000	10,000
California	Quechan Tribe-Metropolitan Water District (MWD) SCW	13,000	13,000	13,000	
California	Palo Verde Irrigation District-MWD SCW	71,507	117,021	117,021	79,830
California	Imperial Irrigation District SCW	106,111			
California	MWD Extraordinary Conservation ICS	450,000			
California	MWD Extraordinary Conservation Left in Lake Mead (non-ICS)	25,066			
Nevada	SNWA Tributary Conservation ICS	36,075			
Nevada	SNWA Extraordinary Conservation Left in Mead (non-ICS)	88,156			
Annual Volumes		1,179,180	477,278	486,678	92,230
Cumulative Volumes		1,179,180	1,656,458	2,143,136	2,235,366

¹ Volumes reflect final accounting in the 2023 Water Accounting Report and executed system conservation agreements based on current projections. Any projected or provisional volumes are subject to change. Additional conservation activities are being considered including system conservation, ICS, and other conserved water in 2024, 2025, and 2026. These additional activities will be included in Reclamation’s operational modeling.



Projected Modeled Conservation Activities

As anticipated to be modeled in the August 2024 Most Probable 24-Month Study^{1,2}

Conservation Activity (ac-ft)	2024	2025	2026	Total
242 Wellfield Additional Pumping Agreement	25,000	25,000	25,000	75,000
CAP ICS Preservation Program	0	0	0	0
CAP System Conservation Agreements	129,400	128,800	2,400	260,600
Cathcart Farms System Conservation	61	61	0	121
Cibola Valley IDD System Conservation	2,328	2,328	0	4,656
Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation System Conservation	13,933	13,933	0	27,866
GM Gabrych System Conservation	3,240	3,240	0	6,480
GRIC System Conservation	125,000	125,000	0	250,000
Hopi Tribe System Conservation	3,059	3,059	0	6,118
MVIDD System Conservation	13,441	13,441	0	26,882
San Carlos Apache Tribe System Conservation	0	0	0	0
YMIDD System Conservation	21,795	21,795	0	43,590
Coachella Groundwater System Conservation	35,000	35,000	0	70,000
Coachella Ag System Conservation	1,063	10,000	10,000	21,063
CA Other Conserved Water Left in Lake Mead	41,928	0	0	41,928
PVID-MWD System Conservation	117,021	117,021	79,830	313,872
Quechan Indian Tribe-MWD System Conservation	13,000	13,000	0	26,000
SNWA Other Conserved Water Left in Lake Mead	90,000	40,000	35,000	165,000
SNWA Tributary ICS/System Water	36,000	30,000	30,000	96,000
Pilot System Conservation Program	545	545	545	1,635
Annual Total	671,814	582,223	182,775	1,436,811

¹ Volumes reflect executed agreements and/or current operational projections and are subject to change. Additional conservation activities are being considered. After new agreements are finalized and executed, these additional activities will be included in Reclamation's operational modeling.

² New agreements under the LC Conservation Program are being developed.



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Minute 330: Expansion of Colorado River Temporary Measures

The United States and Mexico entered into Minute 330 to the 1944 U.S. - Mexico Water Treaty in April 2024. This agreement includes a commitment from Mexico to generate 400,000 acre-feet of water through conservation projects through 2026. 250,000 acre-feet of water will benefit the Colorado River System, and Mexico will receive \$65 million from the United States to help fund that conservation effort. The additional 150,000 acre-feet of water will be deferred for delivery beyond CY 2026 as part of Mexico's Water Reserve. These volumes are in addition to any volumes conserved under Minute 323. Both minutes expire in 2026. The schedule for generation of water by Mexico is described in the table below.

Date	Minimum Cumulative Volume (acre-feet)	Minimum Cumulative Volume (cubic meters)
By December 31, 2024	133,000	164,054,000
By December 31, 2025	333,000	410,752,000
By December 31, 2026	400,000	493,396,000

Minute 330 can be accessed at the following link: [Minute No. 330](#)

LTEMP

In July 2024 Reclamation released its Final SEIS and ROD for the Glen Canyon Dam Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan (LTEMP) that explores options for changing monthly and daily releases and release temperatures to help prevent establishment of smallmouth bass



and other non-native fish in the Grand Canyon and to alter sediment accounting and implementation windows for high flow experiments to distribute sand higher on sandbars. The options include releases through the bypass tubes, limited by the new interim operating guidance. LTEMP does not alter annual releases, which are determined according to the Interim Guidelines. Bypass releases to reduce water temperatures from Glen Canyon Dam to disadvantage smallmouth bass reproduction began July 9 and continued through November 19. Monitoring is being conducted to assess the effectiveness of the colder release temperature operations. Bypass releases decrease hydropower production from Glen Canyon Dam and increase costs to hydropower customers to obtain alternate power supplies. Current estimates of the cost of the 2024 bypass releases to the Western Area Power Administration's Basin Fund, which funds the operation and maintenance of the Colorado River Storage Project reservoirs, powerplants and related infrastructure, exceeds \$18 million.

2. Post-2026 Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead

In December 2024, the Upper Division States (UDS) submitted refinements to the UDS Alternative to the Bureau of Reclamation for consideration in the NEPA process for post-2026 operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The limited refinements are designed to optimize performance of the UDS Alternative and provide additional clarity about Parallel Activities. This was submitted based on input and information received from the Bureau of Reclamation. The UDS Alternative as refined maintains the key components of the UDS Alternative, including supply-driven operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The limited refinements include:

- A modified Powell release curve that expands the scope of potential releases on both the high and low ends, with releases between 12 MAF - 5 MAF. Releases are still based on the contents of Powell, as an indicator for hydrologic conditions.
- Additional details regarding Parallel Activities - specifically, a reasonable range of water to be conserved, provided from Upstream Initial Units, or through Tribal forbearance.

The UDS continue to support this Alternative because it performs very well under dry and variable hydrology using Reclamation's data, and as verified by Upper Basin technical teams. The UDS Alternative is a supply-driven alternative that is based on actual hydrologic conditions at Lake Powell and that prioritizes rebuilding storage at Lake Powell and Lake Mead. It offers greater certainty as to supply and operations for water users across the basin and preserves ongoing ESA compliance and ecosystem protections above and below Glen Canyon Dam, all within the existing authorities.

The UDS Alternative focuses on the sustainability of the entire system in the face of a drier future. It includes static adjustments to Lower Basin water users of 1.5 MAF to account for evaporation and system losses for the first time since Mead's construction, and in the driest of years, calls for Lower Basin reductions of up to a maximum of 2.4 MAF. These reductions are proportional to cuts experienced in the Upper Basin over the last quarter century in relation to current demands.



3. Post-118th Congress Legislation Review

Bills that passed relevant to Colorado water

Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basins Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Reauthorization Act of 2023 (S. 2247 / H.R. 4596)

This bill reauthorizes funding the Upper Colorado and San Juan endangered fish recovery programs through 2031, with the increased spending levels requested in the Senate version of the bill. It passed as a rider to the National Defense Authorization Act and was signed into law on 23 December 2024.

CO sponsors/co-sponsors (Bennet, Hickenlooper, Boebert, Lamborn, Buck)

Drought Preparedness Act (S. 4242 / H.R. 4385)

The DPA extends the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991 through 2028. The act authorizes the Interior Secretary to undertake construction, management, and conservation activities in the Reclamation states to mitigate the effects of drought at the request of a governor or through a congressionally-approved drought contingency plan submitted by the Secretary. IFWI staff will continue to monitor implementation of this bill. It became law on 23 December 2024.

CO sponsors/co-sponsors (Hickenlooper, Neguse)

Colorado River Salinity Control Fix Act (S. 2514 / H.R. 7872)

The “salinity fix” bill increases the federal (“non-reimbursable”) contributions to the program for construction, maintenance, etc. of new projects, and addresses a funding imbalance between program contributions from the Lower Colorado River Basin Fund and the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund. The Salinity Control Forum supported this legislation. The bill became law on 23 December 2024.

CO sponsors/co-sponsors (Bennet, Hickenlooper, Neguse, Crow)

Water Resources Development Act of 2024 (S. 4367 / H.R. 8812)

WRDA 2024 authorizes \$10.7B for Army Corps of Engineers (CoE) projects and studies nationwide (note: funding is provided separately through annual energy and water development appropriations). Colorado will receive \$70M for projects in El Paso and Fremont Counties. Also of importance to Colorado, WRDA 2024 allows pilot studies in the Lower CRB states for repurposing flood control reservoirs for water supply needs. The bill became law on 04 January 2025. No Colorado sponsors were involved.

WATER Data Improvement Act (S. 4245 / H.R. 5770)

The Water Monitoring and Tracking Essential Resources (WATER) Data Improvement Act amends and extends the 2009 Omnibus Public Land Management Act through 2028. The bill supports the USGSs Federal Priority Stream Gage Network, National Groundwater Resources Monitoring Network, and investments in other monitoring, measurement, and technological needs. The bill became law on 23 December 2024.

CO sponsors/co-sponsors (Neguse, Hickenlooper)

Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act of 2024 (S. 2781 / H.R. 7779)

The “Good Samaritan” Act establishes a pilot project program for the cleanup of up to 15 low risk abandoned mines by state agencies, tribes, and volunteer groups. The bill provides limited liability protections for the groups conducting cleanups. The program will be carried out by the U.S. EPA. The bill became law on 17 December 2024.

CO sponsors/co-sponsors (Hickenlooper, Bennet, Pettersen, Crow, Boebert, Caraveo, Neguse)



Bills that did not become law

- A bill to make certain modifications to the repayment for the Arkansas Valley Conduit in the State of Colorado (S. 5013 / H.R. 9514)

Status Update: This bill was reintroduced in the House by Rep. Boebert on January 3, 2025.

- Colorado River Basin System Conservation Extension Act (S. 4576)

Status Update: A similar bill was reintroduced in the House by Rep. Harriet Hageman (WY) on January 7, 2025.

- Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 2024 (S. 4633 / H.R. 8940)
- A bill to prohibit the use of amounts from the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund to implement a certain record of decision*, and for other purposes (S. 5000)
- To provide for a memorandum of understanding to address the impacts of a certain record of decision* on the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund (H.R. 9969)
- Water Project Navigators Act (S. 4995 / H.R. 9506)
- To designate certain lands in the State of Colorado as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System, and for other purposes (H.R. 9400)
- Fix our Forests Act (H.R. 8790)

** The Record of Decision referred to in S. 5000 and H.R. 9969 involves the Glen Canyon Dam Long-Term Experimental Management Plan (LTEMP) that was revised in July 2024 through a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement that 1) addresses the threat of smallmouth bass below Glen Canyon Dam and 2) incorporates the latest science on sediment transport to inform high-flow experiment planning from Glen Canyon Dam.*

