COLORADO
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Department of Natural Resources

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Jared Polis, Governor

Dan Gibbs, DNR Executive Director

Lauren Ris, CWCB Director

TO: Colorado Water Conservation Board Members

FROM: Amy Ostdiek and Michelle Garrison

DATE: January 26, 2026

SUBJECT: Agenda Item 13: Colorado River Updates

This is an informational item with no board action requested.

1. Hydrology and operations update

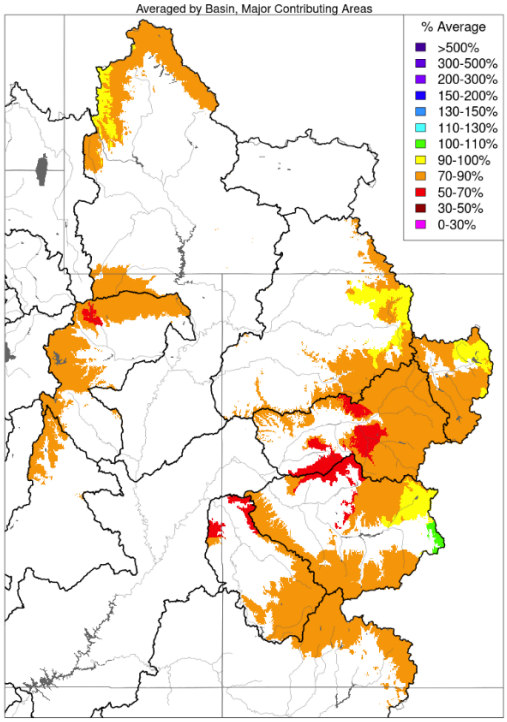
Hydrology

Aridification and extended drought conditions have placed significant strain on basin storage and on water users in the Upper Basin. Water Year 2024 precipitation was near average, while streamflow was below average. WY 2025 precipitation and streamflow were significantly below average. Inflow into Lake Powell was only 49% of average, making WY 2025 the fifth driest on record. For WY 2026, tropical storm remnants produced heavy precipitation in some areas of the Upper Basin in October followed by warm and dry conditions through January. Much below-average Lake Powell inflow forecasts for WY 2026 reflect recent precipitation, snowpack and soil moisture conditions. Climate forecasts indicate an increased likelihood of warmer than average conditions and drier than average conditions throughout the winter and spring, particularly in the southern subbasins.

Drought conditions increased in severity and reservoir storage conditions deteriorated in western Colorado and throughout the basin. Long-term impacts from depleted storage are expected to continue, as indicated in current forecasts for reservoir operations.

Water Year Precipitation, October 2024 - September 2025

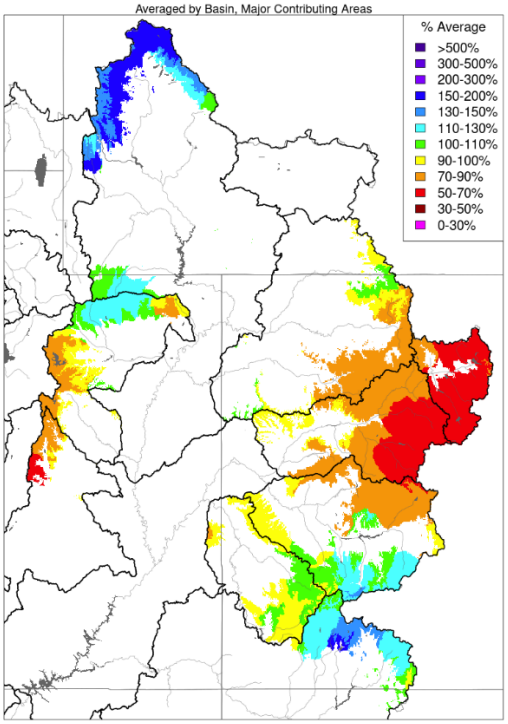
Averaged by Basin, Major Contributing Areas



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

Water Year Precipitation, October 2025 - December 2025

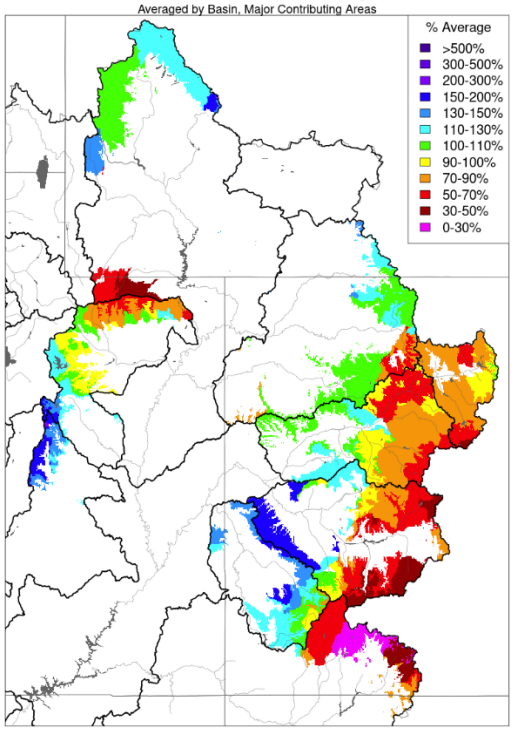
Averaged by Basin, Major Contributing Areas



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

Month to Date Precipitation - January 20 2026

Averaged by Basin, Major Contributing Areas



Prepared by NOAA, Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
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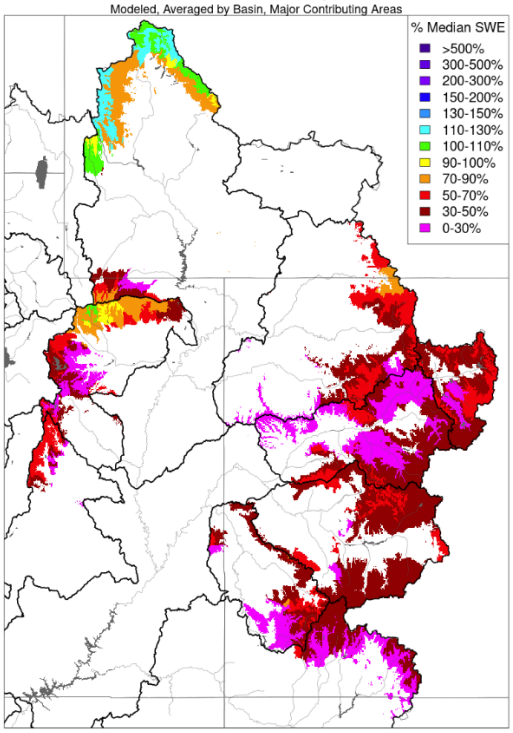
Snow Conditions - January 19 2026

Modeled, Averaged by Basin, Major Contributing Areas



Prepared by NOAA, Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
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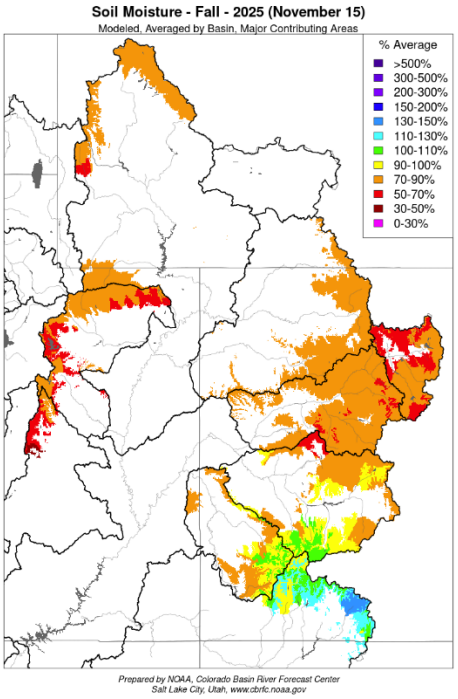
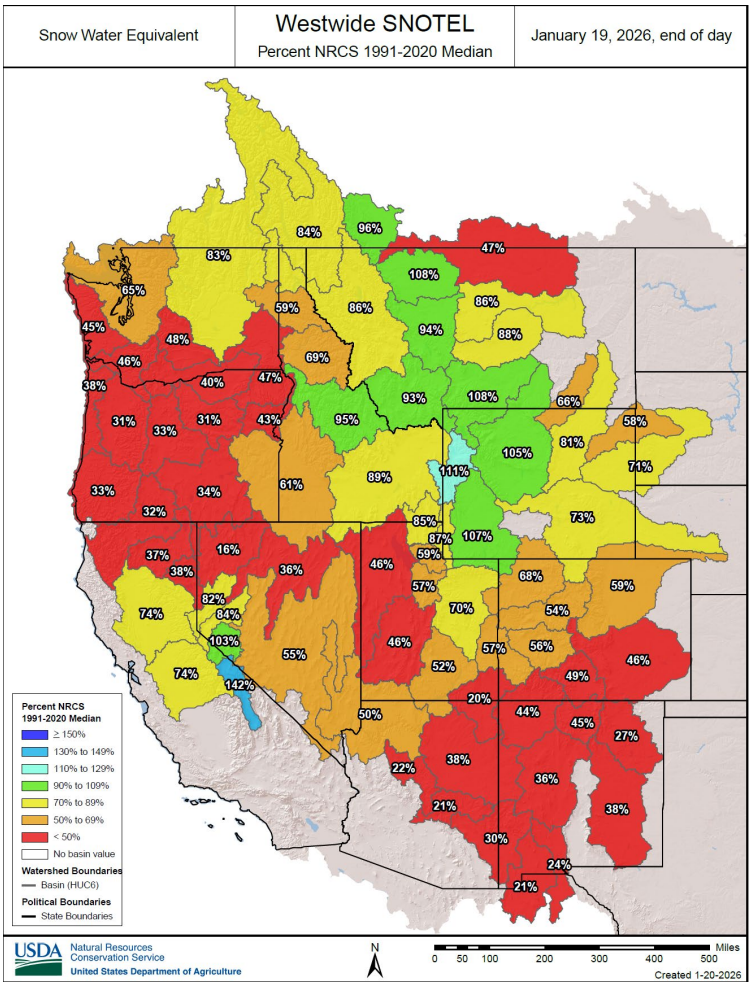
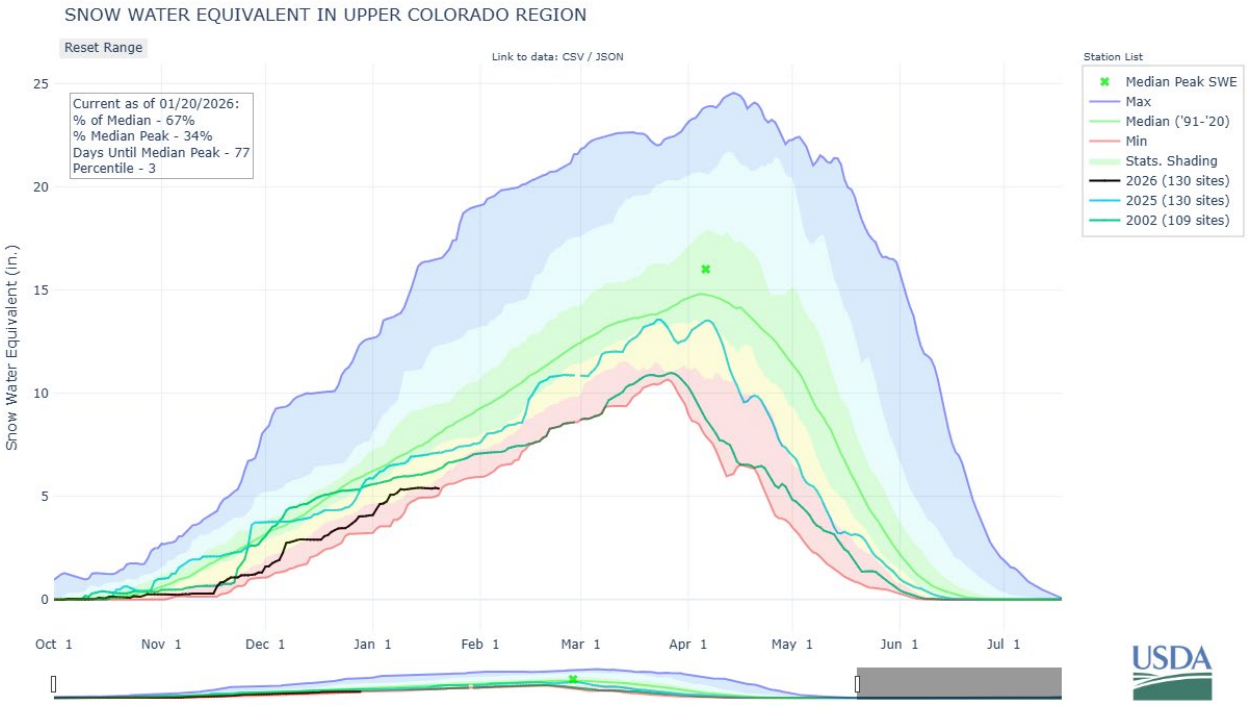
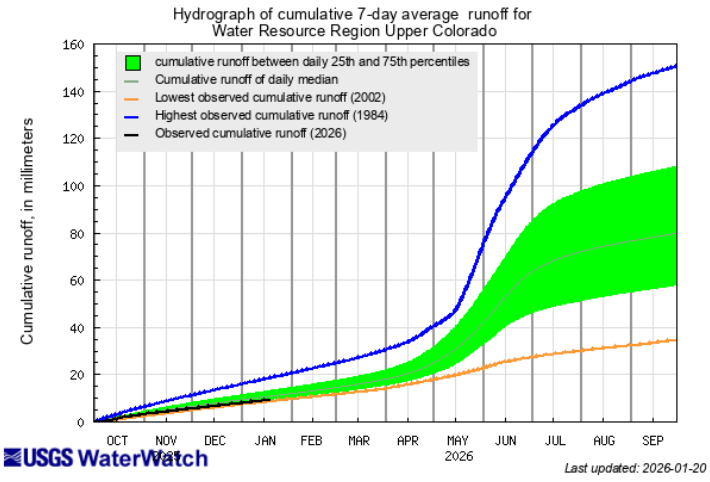
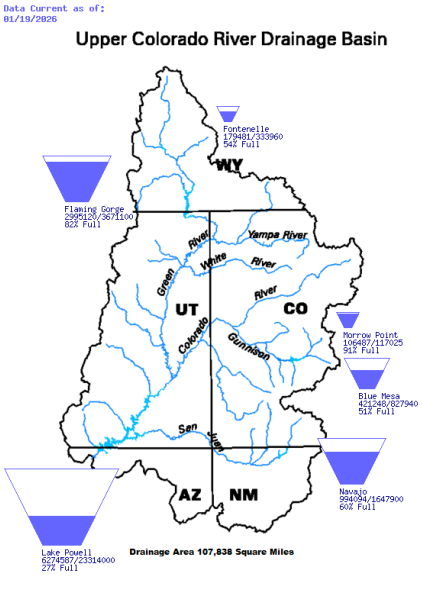

Soil Moisture - Fall - 2025 (November 15)
Modeled, Averaged by Basin, Major Contributing Areas
% Average
>500%
300-500%
200-300%
150-200%
130-150%
110-130%
100-110%
90-100%
70-90%
50-70%
30-50%
0-30%
Prepared by NOAA, Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
Salt Lake City, Utah, www.cbrfc.noaa.gov


Snow Water Equivalent
Westwide SNOTEL
Percent NRCS 1991-2020 Median
January 19, 2026, end of day
Percent NRCS 1991-2020 Median
≥ 150%
130% to 149%
110% to 129%
90% to 109%
70% to 89%
50% to 69%
< 50%
No basin value
Watershed Boundaries
Basin (HUC6)
Political Boundaries
State Boundaries
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture
N
0 50 100 200 300 400 500 Miles
Created 1-20-2026

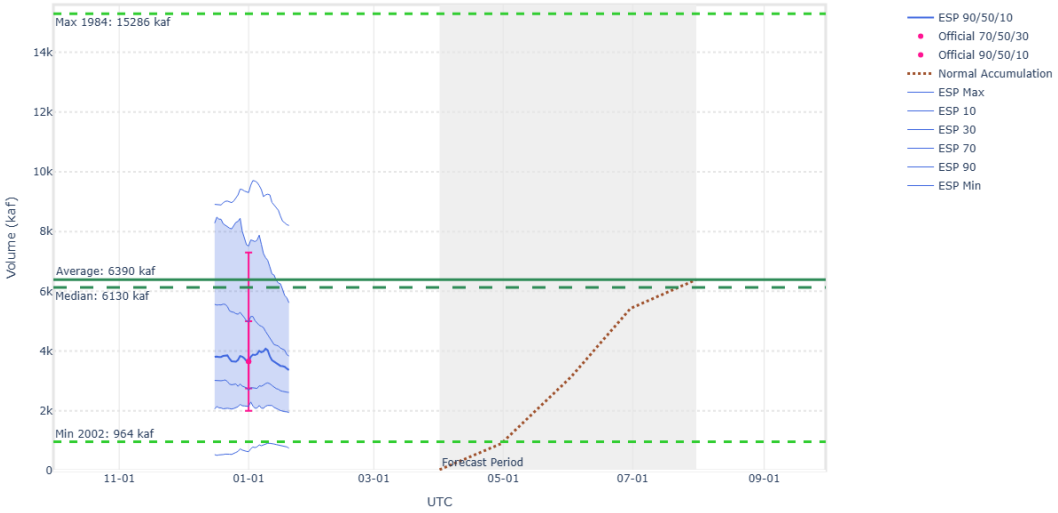

SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT IN UPPER COLORADO REGION
Reset Range
Link to data: CSV / JSON
Station List
Median Peak SWE
Max
Median ('91-'20)
Min
Stats. Shading
2026 (130 sites)
2025 (130 sites)
2002 (109 sites)
Current as of 01/20/2026:
% of Median - 67%
% Median Peak - 34%
Days Until Median Peak - 77
Percentile - 3
Snow Water Equivalent (in.)
0
5
10
15
20
25
Oct 1
Nov 1
Dec 1
Jan 1
Feb 1
Mar 1
Apr 1
May 1
Jun 1
Jul 1
USDA

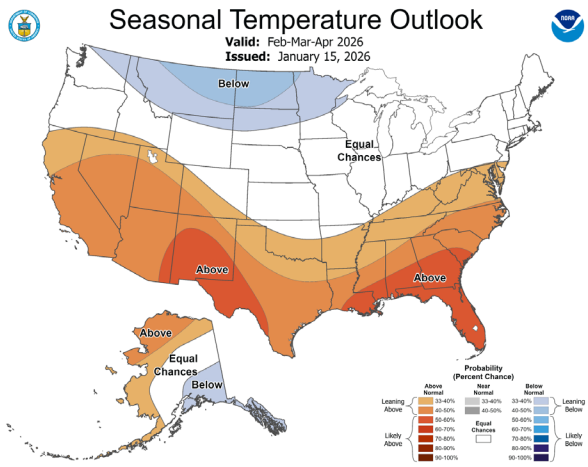

Hydrograph of cumulative 7-day average runoff for
Water Resource Region Upper Colorado
cumulative runoff between daily 25th and 75th percentiles
Cumulative runoff of daily median
Lowest observed cumulative runoff (2002)
Highest observed cumulative runoff (1984)
Observed cumulative runoff (2026)
Cumulative runoff, in millimeters
0
20
40
60
80
100
120
140
160
OCT
NOV
DEC
JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
2026
USGS WaterWatch
Last updated: 2026-01-20

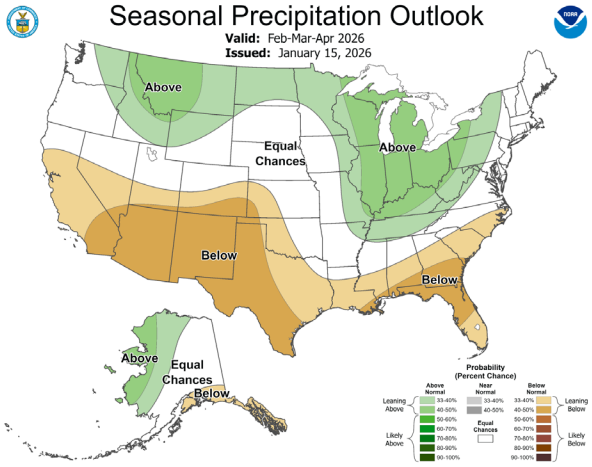

Data Current as of:
01/19/2026
Upper Colorado River Drainage Basin
Fontenelle
179481/333960
54% Full
Flaming Gorge
2905120/4671100
62% Full
WY
Yampa River
White River
Green River
UT
CO
Colorado
Gunnison
Morrow Point
106487/117025
91% Full
Blue Mesa
421240/827940
51% Full
San Juan
AZ
NM
Navajo
994094/1647900
60% Full
Lake Powell
6274587/23314000
27% Full
Drainage Area 107,838 Square Miles

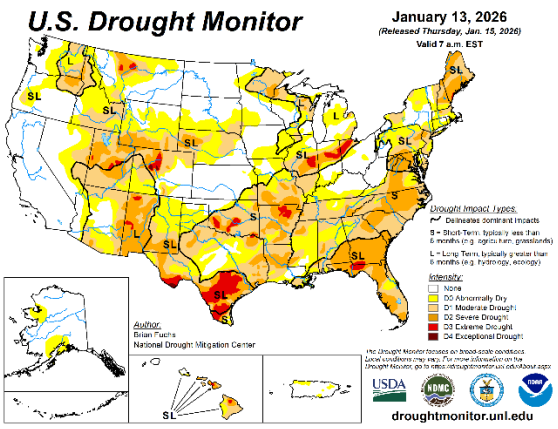
2026 Water Supply Forecast - Colorado - Lake Powell, Glen Cyn Dam, At (GLDA3)

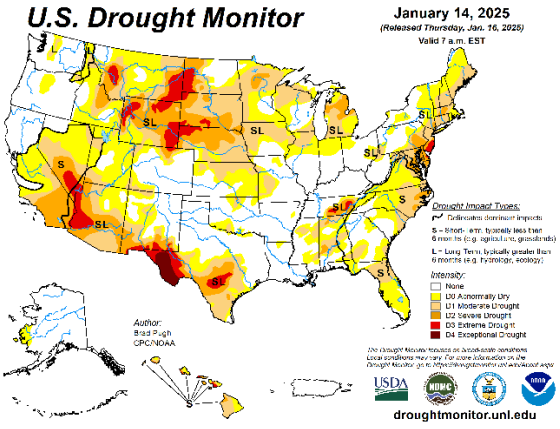
ESP is Unregulated and No Precipitation Forecast Included
Official 50% Fcst (2026-01-15): 3250 kaf (51% Avg, 53% Med), (14% of Yrs Below Fcst, 54 Highest Flow / 62 Tot Yrs)
ESP 50% Fcst (2026-01-20): 3367 kaf (53% Avg, 55% Med), (14% of Yrs Below Fcst, 54 Highest Flow / 62 Tot Yrs)
No Observed











Operations

Upper Basin

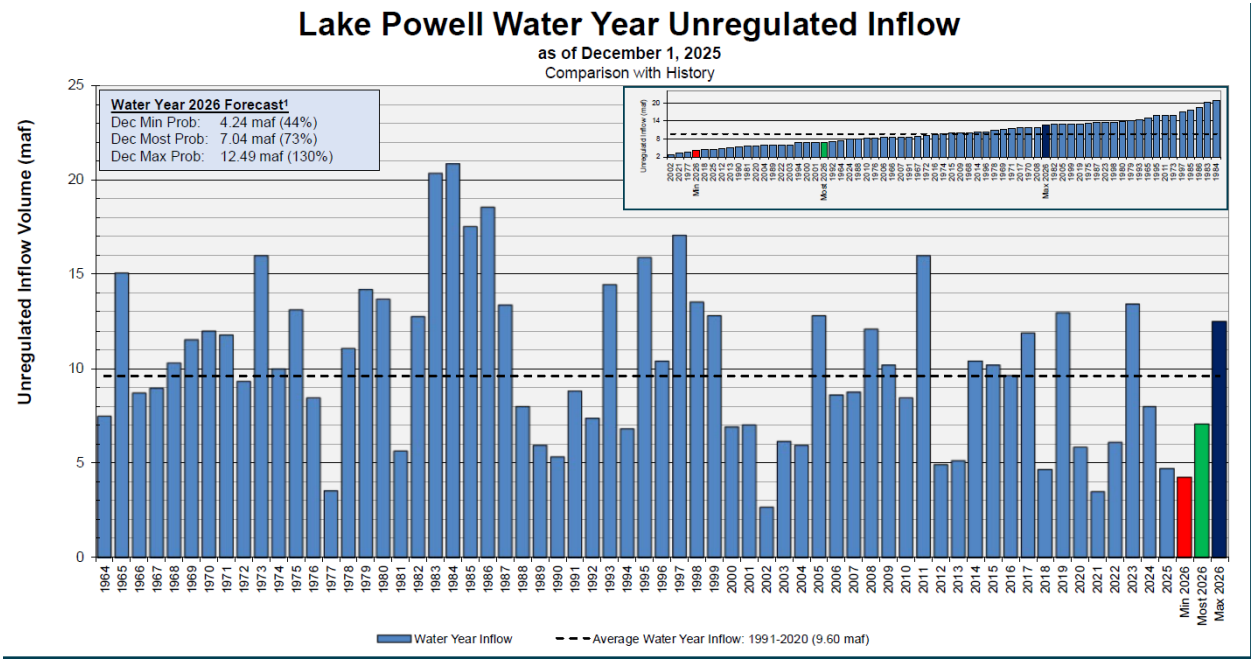
Low inflows and reservoir storage prompted multiple reservoir operation changes and Upper Basin Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) activities in WY 2022 and early 2023 to protect critical infrastructure in Lake Powell, including Drought Response Operations Agreement (DROA) releases from Blue Mesa and Flaming Gorge reservoirs to increase Lake Powell elevations. With wet hydrologic conditions in WY 2023, Lake Powell elevations rose significantly in April 2023 and remained above the 3525' threshold through 2025 but are projected to decline below 3525' in 2026. Blue Mesa and Flaming Gorge reservoirs recovered the previously released water in WY 2024. However, due to release of half of the DROA water from Lake Powell in summer 2023 as part of Lower Elevation Balancing Tier operations, 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 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 2025 24-Month Study, Lake Powell is operating in the Mid-Elevation Release Tier in WY 2026 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 2025 was slightly more than 84 million acre-feet.

Lake Powell storage declined significantly in WY 2025 due to extremely low inflows and is expected to decline again in WY2026 due to below average inflow forecasts. Based on earlier Lake Powell elevation projections dropping below the 3525' threshold in early 2026, Reclamation altered monthly release volumes from Glen Canyon Dam starting in December 2025. Releases will be decreased in winter and spring to maintain higher elevations in Lake Powell through spring runoff and then increased for the remainder of the water year to achieve the 7.48 MAF annual release for WY 2026. The monthly operational changes are detailed in the table below. Actual monthly operations will be adjusted based on updated Lake Powell inflow forecasts. Continued decreases in forecasted inflows have initiated discussions of potential additional actions to maintain Lake Powell elevations. Staff will provide updates as the snow accumulation and runoff seasons progress.

7.48 LTMP Comparison to Proposed Pattern - using Oct 24MS Most

	7.48 LTMP Pattern (kaf)	Proposed (kaf)	Retained Volume (kaf)	Additional Releases (kaf)	Powell Elevation OCT MOST with 7.48 maf Pattern (ft)	Powell Elevation OCT MOST with Proposed Pattern (ft)	Mead Elevation OCT MOST with 7.48 maf Pattern (ft)	Mead Elevation OCT MOST with Proposed Pattern (ft)
Oct	480	480			3,543.40	3,543.40	1,056.39	1,056.39
Nov	500	500			3,541.07	3,541.07	1,056.62	1,056.62
Dec	600	500	100		3,536.36	3,537.85	1,059.79	1,058.55
Jan	723	625	98		3,529.18	3,532.26	1,062.93	1,060.50
Feb	639	525	114		3,523.63	3,528.61	1,064.97	1,061.17
Mar	675	500	175		3,519.09	3,527.00	1,064.74	1,058.78
Apr	601	490	111		3,517.79	3,527.52	1,061.32	1,053.86
May	599	600		1	3,530.00	3,539.01	1,056.76	1,049.16
Jun	628	800		172	3,547.12	3,552.95	1,053.33	1,047.89
Jul	709	890		181	3,547.17	3,550.50	1,052.40	1,049.32
Aug	758	900		142	3,541.57	3,542.96	1,053.38	1,052.16
Sep	568	670		102	3,538.43	3,538.33	1,052.73	1,052.82
Totals	7480	7480	598	598				



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. As determined by the August 2025 24-Month Study, in Calendar Year 2026 Lake Mead is operating in a Tier 1 shortage condition, as it did 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 - 1050	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***

2025 Reductions + Contributions

2025 Reductions + Contributions

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.

The Lower Basin proposed up to 3 million acre-feet of compensated conservation and other activities 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 and issued its Record of Decision (ROD) in 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. Estimates from May and August 2025 are summarized in the tables below. Note that the conservation numbers for 2023 include large volumes of water that were not a result of intentional conservation actions but were produced by extremely wet hydrology in certain locations in the Lower Basin.

Status of SEIS ROD Lower Basin Conservation
As of May 2025

Year	Amount Conserved (acre-feet)	Cumulative Conserved (acre-feet)
2023[1]	1,160,697	1,160,697
2024[1]	871,014	2,031,711
2025[2]	876,483	2,908,194
2026[2]	692,098	3,600,292

Projected Modeled Conservation Activities
As anticipated to be modeled in the August 2025 Most Probable 24-Month Study[1,2]

Year	Modeled Activities (acre-feet)	Cumulative Modeled (acre-feet)
2025[2]	899,821	899,821
2026[2]	805,564	1,705,385
2027[2]	68,669	1,774,054

[1] To date, 2.03 maf has been conserved between 2023 and 2024. Information on accounted system conservation is documented in the 2023 and 2024 Water Accounting Reports, respectively, and can be found online at: https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/wtracct.html.
[2] All projected volumes are as modeled in the August 2025 24-Month Study and are subject to change. Additional conservation activities are being considered including system conservation, ICS, and other conserved water in 2025, 2026, and 2027. These additional activities will be included in Reclamation's operational modeling.

Lower Basin Modeled Conservation[1]

As of July 2025 (all volumes in acre-feet)

State	Conservation Activity	2025	2026	2027	Total
AZ	CAP System Conservation Agreements	125,503	101,000	7,224	233,727
	Cathcart Farms System Conservation	61	61	0	122
	Cibola Valley IDD System Conservation	2,328	2,329	0	4,657
	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	115,000	125,000	26,300	266,300
	Hopi Tribe System Conservation	3,059	3,059	0	6,118
	MVIDD System Conservation	13,694	13,694	0	27,388
	San Carlos Apache Tribe System Conservation	23,451	23,451	0	46,902
	YMIDD System Conservation	22,010	22,010	0	44,020
CA	Coachella Groundwater System Conservation	35,000	35,000	0	70,000
	Coachella Ag System Conservation	3,889	10,000	0	13,889
	IID System Conservation	250,000	192,360	0	442,360
	MWD ICS Creation	0	0	0	0
	MWD System Conservation	0	0	0	0
	PVID-MWD System Conservation	117,021	79,830	0	196,851
	Bard-MWD System Conservation	9,286	11,400	0	20,686
	Quechan Indian Tribe-MWD System Conservation	13,000	13,000	0	26,000
NV	SNWA System Conservation Water	86,000	86,000	0	172,000
	SNWA Tributary Conservation	35,000	35,000	35,000	105,000
Other	242 Wellfield Additional Pumping Agreement	25,000	32,000	0	57,000
	PSCP	3,346	3,197	145	6,688
	Annual Total	899,821	805,564	68,669	1,774,054
	Cumulative Total	899,821	1,705,385	1,774,054	

[1] All projected volumes are subject to change. Additional conservation activities are being considered including system conservation, ICS, and other conserved water in 2025 through 2027. These additional activities will be included in Reclamation's operational modeling.

[2] Reclamation has funded a total of 2.03 maf of conservation between 2023-2024 in accordance with the Reservoir Protection Conservation requirements under the 2007 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD. Information on accounted system conservation can be found online at: https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/wtracct.html.

25

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 2024 Reclamation also 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 new interim operating guidance to prevent further damage to the bypass tubes at low elevations. 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 were conducted July – November 2024 resulting in a hydropower cost to the Basin Fund exceeding $18 million. Monitoring indicated the releases were likely effective in reducing smallmouth bass reproduction. Bypass releases were conducted again August – October 2025 with a shortened target stream reach. Decreases in the duration and stream reach are expected to significantly decrease the costs to hydropower in 2025. A potential short-duration High Flow Experiment (HFE) was considered for November 2025 but not implemented due to uncertainty regarding available resources during the federal government shutdown.

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

The Basin States continue negotiations about post-2026 operational guidelines for Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The Bureau of Reclamation has provided a deadline of February 14, 2026, for a Basin States consensus. Basin State discussions are ongoing. Commissioner Mitchell remains committed to working towards a consensus agreement while protecting Colorado's significant rights and interests in the Colorado River.

Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The Bureau of Reclamation has released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Post-2026 Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead. Comments are due on March 2, 2026. Interstate, Federal, and Water Information Section staff are working with the Attorney General's Office on Colorado's comments to the DEIS. The DEIS provides five alternatives: (1) No Action Alternative; (2) Basic Coordination Alternative; (3) Enhanced Coordination Alternative; (4) Maximum Operational Flexibility Alternative; and (5) Supply-Driven Alternative. Each alternative contains: (1) guidelines to reduce or increase deliveries from Lake Mead; (2) coordinated reservoir operations (Lake Powell operations); (3) mechanisms for storage and delivery of conserved water; and (4) provisions for additional activities above Powell.

According to the DEIS, it is designed to provide a broad range of operational options so that any consensus-based approach could incorporate various elements or variations in the Draft EIS to be analyzed in the final EIS. There is no preferred alternative identified in the Draft EIS. A brief overview of each alternative is provided below.

No Action Alternative

- Guidelines to reduce or increase deliveries from Mead: Lower Basin reductions based on Mead elevations, distributed by priority, up to 600,000 acre-feet

- Coordinated reservoir operations: Lake Powell release is 8.23 million acre-feet (MAF) per year, with potential for equalization of Powell and Mead contents under certain conditions, and releases below 8.23 MAF as needed to protect critical infrastructure
- Storage and delivery of conserved water: Existing Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS) is operated pursuant to current agreements. No new ICS
- Additional activities above Powell: No Upper Basin conservation contemplated

Basic Coordination Alternative

- Guidelines to reduce or increase deliveries from Mead: Lower Basin reductions based on Mead elevations, distributed by priority, up to 1.48 MAF per year
- Coordinated reservoir operations: Lake Powell release is based on Powell elevation, ranging from 7 – 9.0 MAF.
- Storage and delivery of conserved water: Existing ICS is operated pursuant to current agreements. No new ICS
- Additional activities above Powell: Upstream Initial Unit (UIU) releases within existing Records of Decisions and contingent upon hydrologic conditions to protect Glen Canyon Dam; no Upper Basin conservation contemplated

Enhanced Coordination Alternative

- Guidelines to reduce or increase deliveries from Mead: Lower Basin reductions based on combined Powell and Mead storage, distributed pro rata, up to 3 MAF per year
- Coordinated reservoir operations: Lake Powell release is based on multiple factors, including Powell and Mead contents and hydrologic contents; release ranges from 4.7 – 10.8 MAF
- Storage and delivery of conserved water: Up to 5 MAF in Lower Basin pool in Lake Mead; up to 2 MAF in federal protection pool in Mead; up to 2 MAF in Upper Basin pool in Powell
- Additional activities above Powell: UIU releases contemplated; Upper Basin conservation contemplated based on hydrologic conditions, up to 200,000 acre-feet per year in first five years, up to 275,000 acre-feet in years 6-10, and up to 350,000 acre-feet in years 11-20

Maximum Operational Flexibility Alternative

- Guidelines to reduce or increase deliveries from Mead: Lower Basin reductions based on "total system storage" and hydrologic conditions, distributed by priority, up to 4 MAF per year
- Coordinated reservoir operations: Lake Powell release is based on Upper Basin system storage and recent hydrology, with annual releases ranging from 5 – 11 MAF
- Storage and delivery of conserved water: Up to 8 MAF pool in Powell and Mead with extensive flexibilities
- Additional activities above Powell: UIU releases contemplated; Upper Basin conservation contemplated based on hydrologic conditions, averaging 200,000 acre-feet per year and up to 500,000 acre-feet per year

Supply-Driven Alternative

- Guidelines to reduce or increase deliveries from Mead: Lower Basin reductions based on Mead storage, up to 2.1 MAF per year with varying distributions
- Coordinated reservoir operations: Lake Powell annual release is 65% of preceding 3-year average natural flow at Lees Ferry, constrained at 4.7 – 12 MAF
- Storage and delivery of conserved water: Up to 8 MAF in Lower Basin pool in Lake Mead and up to to 3 MAF in Upper Basin pool in Powell
- Additional activities above Powell: UIU releases up to 500,000 acre-feet per year within existing Records of Decision; Upper Basin conservation contemplated based on hydrologic conditions, averaging 200,000 per year; "gap water" introduced into Lake Powell for modeling purposes when the annual release cannot be met

Staff will provide additional detail on the DEIS at the board meeting.