



# COLORADO

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

1313 Sherman Street, Room 718  
Denver, CO 80203

P (303) 866-3441  
F (303) 866-4474

Jared Polis, Governor

Dan Gibbs, DNR Executive Director

Rebecca Mitchell, CWCB Director

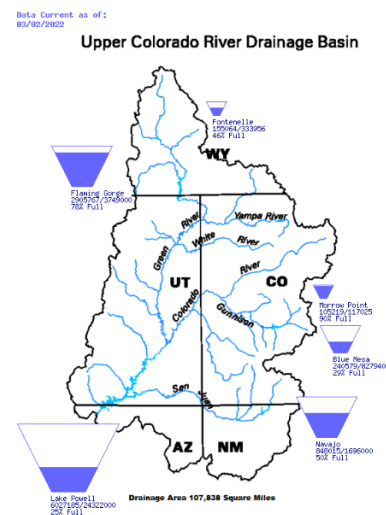
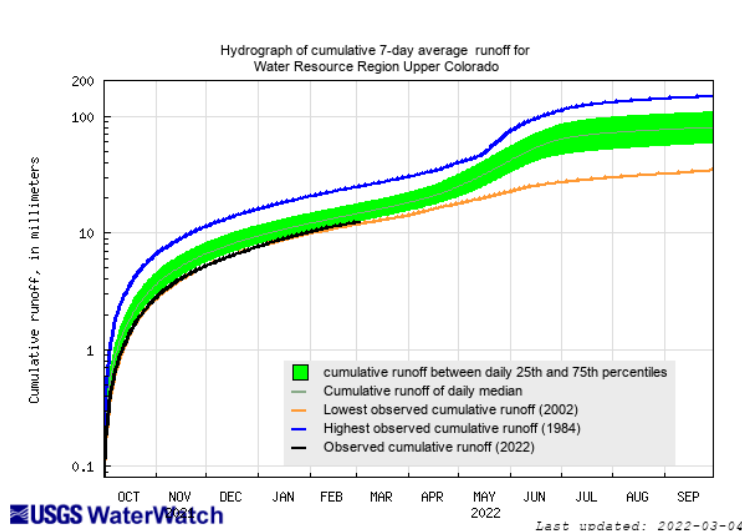
**TO:** Colorado Water Conservation Board Members  
**FROM:** Amy Ostdiek and Michelle Garrison  
**DATE:** March 16, 2022  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item 24: Colorado River Interstate Issues

This is an informational item with no board action requested.

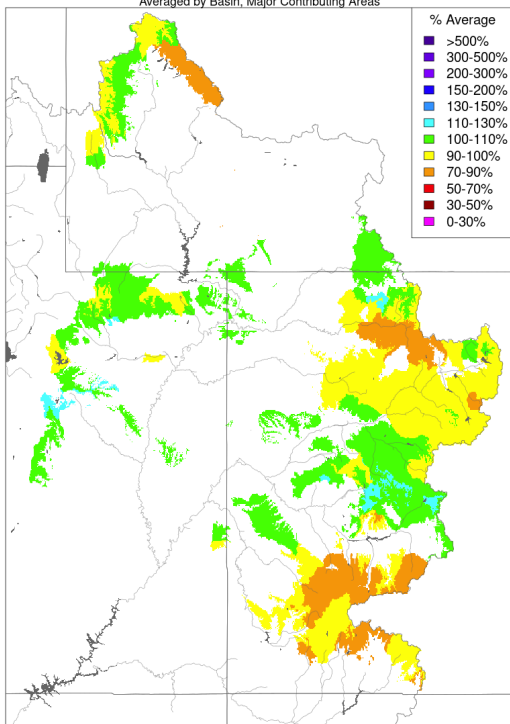
## 1. Hydrology and operations update

Inflow into Lake Powell in water year (WY) 2021 was the second lowest on record. Extremely dry soil moisture conditions combined with below average precipitation resulted in exceptionally low runoff throughout the Upper Colorado River basin.

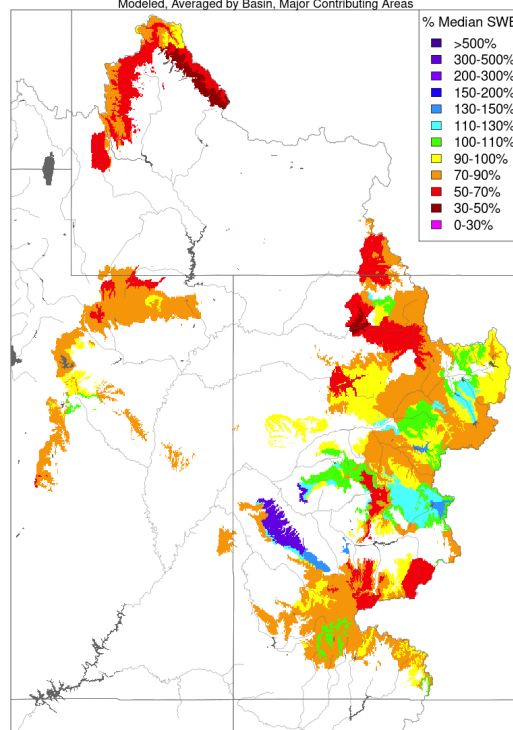
For WY 2022, precipitation has been approximately average. Monthly precipitation has varied drastically, with October and December being well above average and November, January and February being extremely dry. Due to continued dry soil moisture conditions, runoff forecasts for WY 2022 are below average throughout the basin.



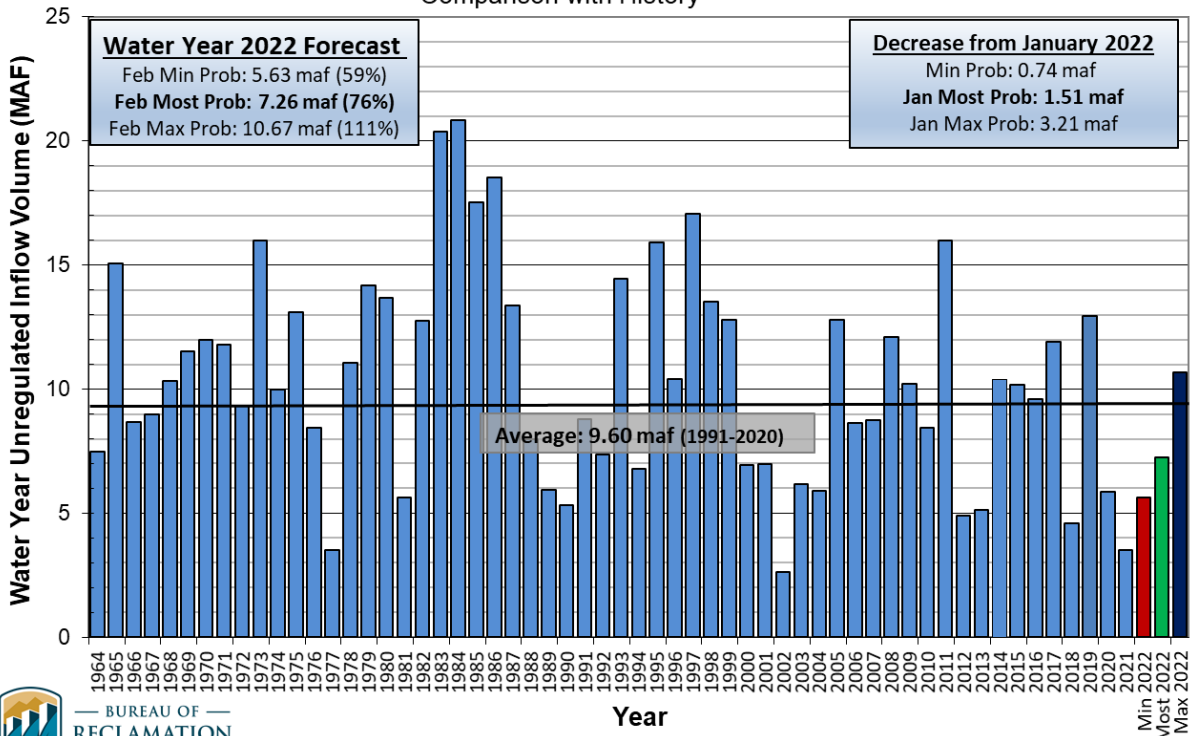
**Water Year Precipitation, October 2021 - February 2022**



**Snow Conditions - March 03 2022**



**Lake Powell Unregulated Inflow**  
**Water Year 2022 Forecast (issued February 3)**  
Comparison with History



Lake Powell released 8.23 MAF in WY 2021 and is releasing 7.48 MAF in WY 2022, as determined by Reclamation's August 2021 24-Month Study. Projected Lake Powell elevations triggered planning activities pursuant to the Upper Basin Drought Contingency Plan (DCP).

Lake Mead elevations triggered water conservation measures under the Lower Basin DCP and the Binational Water Scarcity Plan for calendar year 2021. For calendar year 2022, projected Lake Mead elevations from Reclamation's August 2021 24-Month Study triggered Level 1 shortage conditions for the Lower Basin and reduced deliveries to Mexico pursuant to Minute 323 for the first time. Water conservation measures under the Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan and Binational Water Scarcity Plan are also required in 2022.

Staff will continue to actively monitor and provide updates regarding projections and discussions of potential impacts of continued dry conditions.

## **2. Status of Lake Powell and Drought Response Operations Agreement Implementation**

Lake Powell is projected to decline below 3525' in March 2022. This decline is temporary and anticipated. Lake Powell typically drops to its lowest elevation of the water year in March and April just prior to spring runoff, and will recover above 3525' during the spring and summer runoff season. This temporary and relatively small decline in Lake Powell is not expected to result in any adverse consequences.

Proactive measures taken pursuant to the Drought Response Operations Agreement have reduced the magnitude and duration of the Spring 2022 decline in Lake Powell. The Bureau of Reclamation is currently holding 350,000 acre-feet of water back in Lake Powell that otherwise would have been released between January - April 2022. This will not impact the annual release volume, and additional releases will be made June - September 2022 to accommodate this operational change. This is in addition to the imminent need releases from Upper Basin reservoirs of 161,000 acre-feet to date.

The Drought Response Operations Plan Framework has been circulated broadly. This framework document does not include specific information about hydrology and potential releases. Currently, work is focused on a specific plan for potential 2022 releases that will incorporate hydrologic projections. This plan will be finalized in April 2022.

## **3. Demand Management**

Following adoption of the decision-making roadmap at the September 2021 Board meeting, staff will provide an update on interstate and intrastate elements of the feasibility investigation.

At an interstate level, the three other Upper Division States are continuing their Demand Management feasibility investigations while also recognizing that implementation of the DROA has informed and will continue to inform the investigation. The work of the Upper Colorado River Commission will be ongoing through September 2022, and this will also inform the states' investigations. Colorado has progressed further in its feasibility investigation than other Upper Basin States.



#### 4. Intrastate Resiliency Toolkit

At the November board meeting, staff was directed to initiate work on an “Intrastate Resiliency Toolkit,” with the goal of developing a suite of potential mechanisms to improve drought resiliency across the state. These options would not be dependent upon the actions of other states, but could be designed to be appropriately responsive to interstate conditions as needed.

At the January board meeting, staff outlined potential goals of the drought resiliency toolkit. Based on that discussion, the following goals and objectives have been identified:

- Identify mechanisms to increase Colorado’s drought resiliency that are not dependent on other states and are intrastate focused
- Consider potential tools to protect Colorado and its water users in the face of an uncertain future, including consideration of how water users can survive and thrive in a drier future with increased variability
- Build on existing opportunities and projects where possible
- Incorporate previous work and analyses where possible, including through the Demand Management feasibility investigation
- Leverage federal funds where possible
- Identify opportunities for partnership
- Consider potential opportunities that:
  - Address measurement and infrastructure needs
  - Increase agricultural viability
  - Have multiple benefits, including watershed and forest health and restoration

Since this work will be focused on intrastate tools, staff will work collaboratively with the Water Supply Planning Section in implementing this concept. WSP and IFWI staff suggest an appropriate next step would be to hold a Board forum or workshop to which various water uses, stakeholders, NGOs, Tribal representatives, and others are invited to share their thoughts and ideas relating to the drought resiliency toolkit. This facilitated workshop would be jointly hosted by the WSP and IFWI Sections and will help to inform potential next steps the Board may consider in developing its drought resiliency toolkit.

In developing and preparing for this workshop, staff seeks input from the Board on the following questions:

- Is the above list of goals and objectives an appropriate scope for the drought resiliency toolkit?
- Is there anything that should be added to or reframed on this list?
- Who are appropriate attendees for the workshop?
- Is April an appropriate timeframe for the workshop?
- What are the appropriate sideboards for the workshop and ongoing discussion about the drought resiliency toolkit?

Staff looks forward to discussing the above questions at the March board meeting.

