



**COLORADO**  
**Colorado Water Conservation Board**  
 Department of Natural Resources

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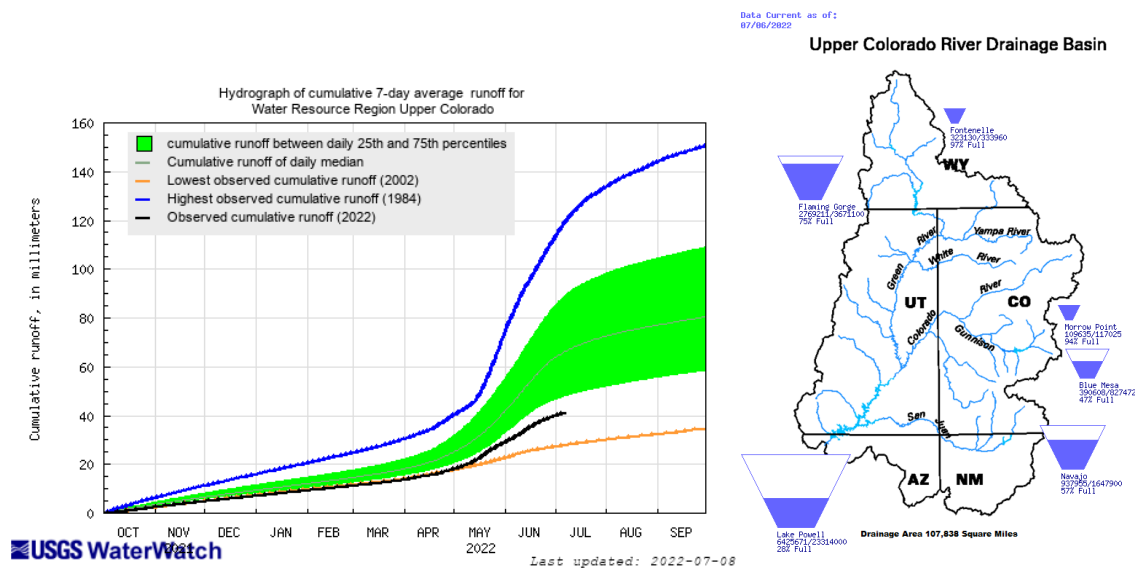
**TO:** Colorado Water Conservation Board Members  
**FROM:** Amy Ostdiek and Michelle Garrison  
**DATE:** July 20, 2022  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item 8: Colorado River Updates

This is an informational item with no board action requested.

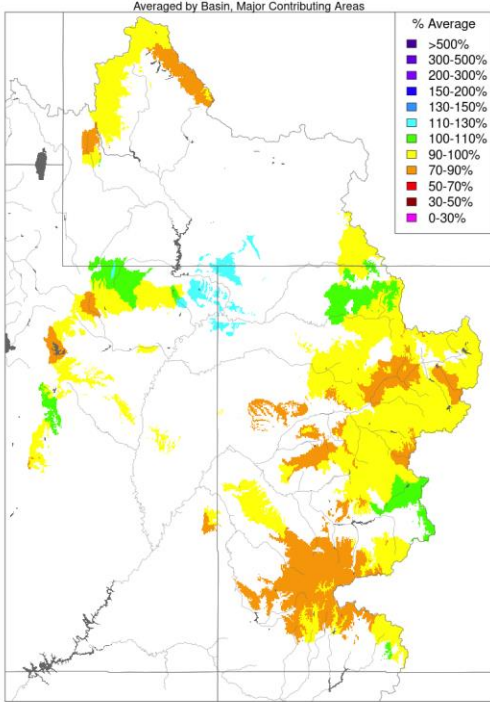
**1. Hydrology and operations update**

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 slightly below average with long periods of dry conditions and a few strong storms during the snow accumulation season. Due to continued dry soil moisture conditions, runoff forecasts for WY 2022 are below to well below average throughout the basin.

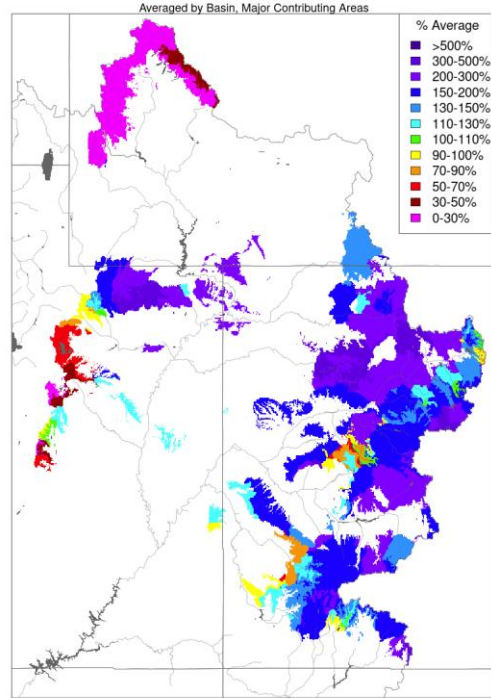


**Water Year Precipitation, October 2021 - June 2022**



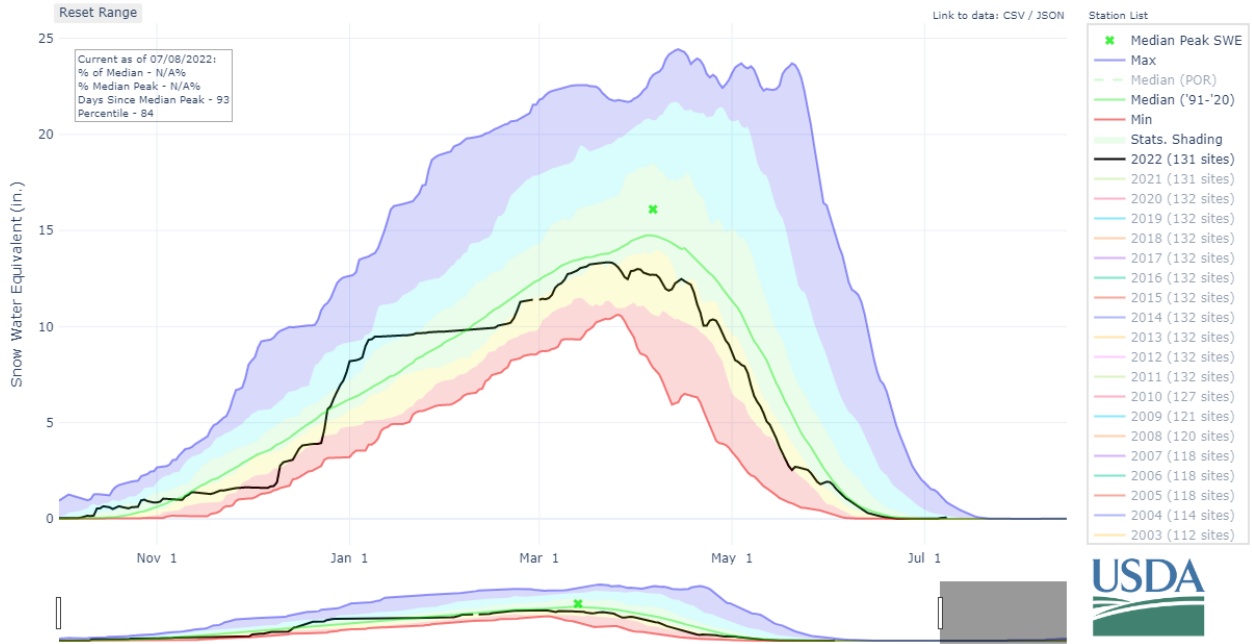
Prepared by NOAA, Colorado Basin River Forecast Center  
Salt Lake City, Utah, www.cbrfc.noaa.gov

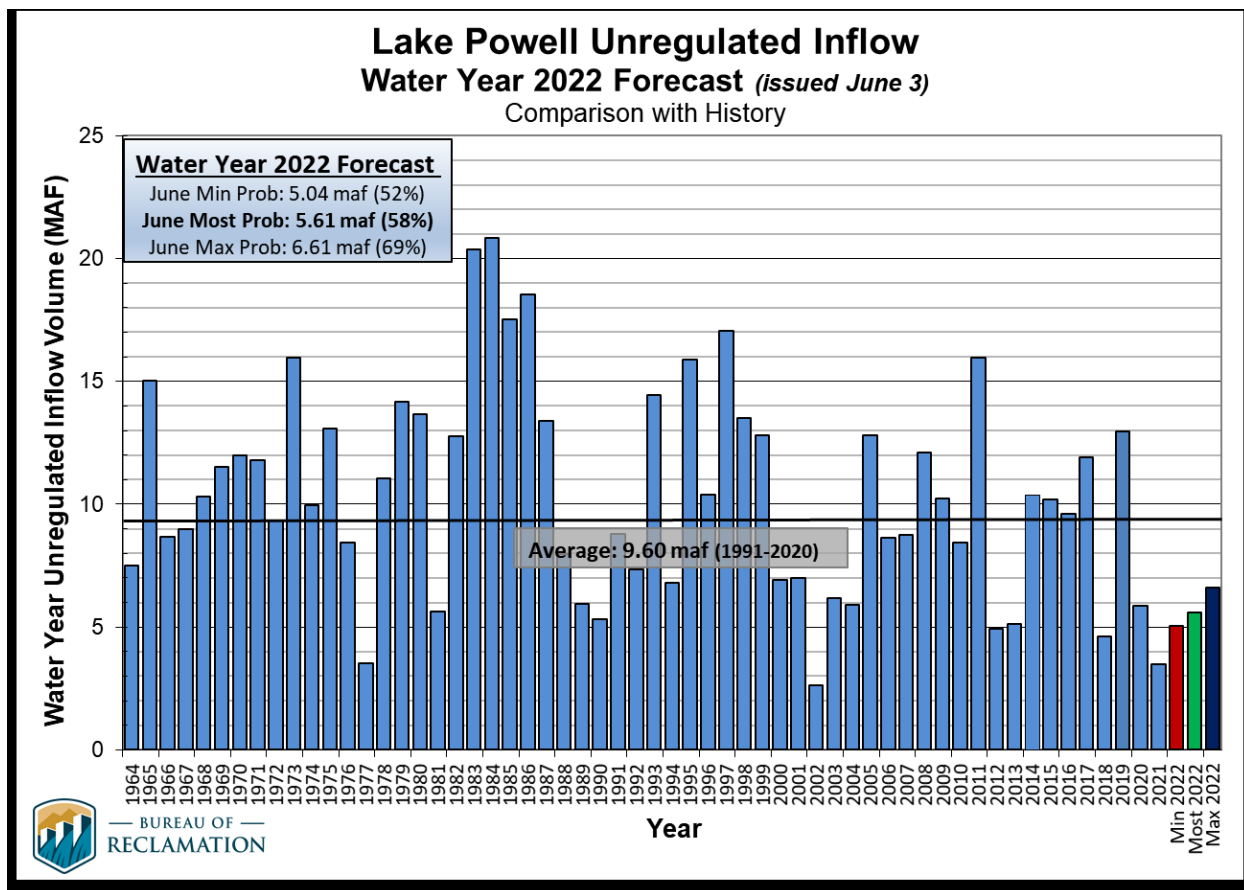
**Month to Date Precipitation - July 07 2022**



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

**SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT IN UPPER COLORADO REGION**





Lake Powell released 8.23 MAF in WY 2021 and was scheduled to release 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 Measures to Protect Lake Powell

Lake Powell elevation declined slightly below 3525’ from mid-March through mid-May. This temporary and relatively small decline was anticipated, as Lake Powell typically drops to its lowest elevation of the water year in March and April just prior to spring runoff.

Proactive measures taken pursuant to the Drought Response Operations Agreement have reduced the magnitude and duration of the Spring 2022 decline in Lake Powell. Additional



measures recently finalized are meant to protect critical elevations at Lake Powell over the course of the next year.

The Upper Colorado River Commission approved the 2022 Drought Response Operations Plan in late April. The Plan was then approved and finalized by the Department of Interior in early May. The 2022 Plan calls for 500,000 acre-feet of water to be released from Flaming Gorge from May 2022 through April 2023. This is in addition to the 161,000 acre-feet of water previously released pursuant to the imminent need provision of the Drought Response Operations Agreement, for a total of 661,000 acre-feet of water provided from Upper Basin reservoirs to protect Lake Powell.

In May the Secretary of Interior also proposed a reduction in the WY 2022 annual release from Lake Powell from 7.48 to 7.0 million acre-feet. After receiving input from the Basin States, the Assistant Secretary confirmed her intention to take this action and to do so in a way that is operationally neutral and will not create adverse impacts to the Upper or Lower Basins. This action will work in concert with the Drought Response Operations Plan to protect critical elevations at Lake Powell over the course of the next year.

In June the Commissioner of Reclamation announced a directive for the Basin States to reach agreement within 60 days to reduce water use in the basin by 2 - 4 million acre-feet over the next year to provide additional protection of critical elevations in Lake Powell and Lake Mead. Basin State principals are in ongoing discussions about how to achieve these reductions. Staff will provide updates to the Board as discussions progress.

### **3. Demand Management**

The three other Upper Division States continue their Demand Management feasibility investigations while also recognizing that implementation of the DROA and other drought response measures have 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. Staff will provide updates on progress of other states' feasibility investigations as information becomes available.

