



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: May 17, 2023

SUBJECT: Agenda Item 16: Colorado River - Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

This is an informational item with no board action requested.

Background

On October 28, 2022, The Bureau of Reclamation published a Notice of Intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). This purpose of the SEIS is to adjust the current operating guidelines for Glen Canyon and Hoover Dams and to provide options for the Bureau of Reclamation to adapt to potentially dry years in the next few water years.

On January 30, 2023, the states of Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming jointly submitted the Consensus-Based Modeling Alternative (CBMA) to the Bureau of Reclamation. The CBMA was intended to serve as a framework for Reclamation to analyze in its SEIS process.

Key components of the CBMA include:

- Assessment of evaporation and transit losses in the Lower Basin States in the amount of 1.5 million acre-feet each year.
- Additional shortages at higher Mead elevations for Lower Basin States.
- Upper Basin contributions include recognition of hydrologic shortages that Upper Basin water users routinely face, and additional voluntary conservation measures as possible, subject to approval by the Upper Division States and fully voluntary participation by water users.

On January 31, California provided to the Bureau of Reclamation an alternative proposal in response to the SEIS. California's proposal differs from the six-state CBMA in several ways and calls for higher reservoir releases and much lower levels of conservation, to be achieved on a priority basis.

Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

On April 11, 2023, the Bureau of Reclamation released the [Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement](#) (DSEIS). The DSEIS includes three alternatives, described below:

- No Action Alternative: Continuation of the 2007 Guidelines as written.



- Lower Basin reductions continue to include shortages as determined by the 2007 Interim Guidelines and additional contributions as determined by the 2019 Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan.
- No additional conservation action or reservoir operational changes to protect critical reservoir elevations.
- **Action Alternative 1:**
 - In addition to reductions under the 2007 Interim Guidelines and the 2019 Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan, additional reductions in Lower Basin State water deliveries distributed based on priority are contemplated, beginning in 2024. Reductions would be borne entirely by junior contractors.
 - These additional reductions begin at Mead elevation <1,090’.
 - Total Lower Basin reductions are capped at 2.083 million acre-feet in 2024.
 - In 2025-2026, additional reductions increase at Mead elevation <1,040’, up to 4.0 million acre-feet of reductions at Mead elevation 950’.
 - Lake Powell operations modified to create the Lower Elevation Release tier (as opposed to “Balancing Tier”) at elevation 3,500 - 3575’, with the initial release set at 6.0 million acre-feet and adjusted in April based on the End-of-Water Year projection, for a release of up to 8.23 million acre-feet.
- **Action Alternative 2:**
 - In addition to the reductions under the 2007 Interim Guidelines and the 2019 Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan, additional Lower Basin reductions are contemplated in the same volume and elevation triggers as in Alternative 1 but are distributed based on a pro-rata additional reduction to each contractor. For example, a reduction of 1 million acre-feet would be distributed as a 13% reduction for every contractor.
 - Lake Powell operations modified consistent with Action Alternative 1.

The DSEIS does include and model potential contributions from Upper Basin reservoirs through the Drought Response Operations Agreement in Alternative 2, and states that any such contributions would occur consistent with the DROA and Framework agreements, which remain in place and are not modified by this DSEIS.

The DSEIS does not identify a preferred alternative.

Commissioner Mitchell and staff continue to review the DSEIS to fully understand potential impacts to Colorado’s significant interests in the Colorado River. Public input is requested at the [Engage CWCB page](#). Input from across the state will help inform potential state comments on the DSEIS. Comments are due to Reclamation on May 30, 2023.

