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‘Posturing doesn’t fill the taps’: Open frustration as Colorado River deadline fails to produce 7-state agreement

LAS VEGAS ([KLAS](#)) — Failed again. That’s the assessment of John Entsminger, Southern Nevada’s top water leader, as states that rely on the Colorado River for water appeared nowhere near an agreement that the federal government expects on Feb. 14.

After staring down the deadline without significant movement toward a solution, the seven states that rely on the river — Nevada, Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming — now face a very real future of the federal government dictating how states will allocate water. U.S. Department of Interior leaders have been honest: none of the states will be happy.

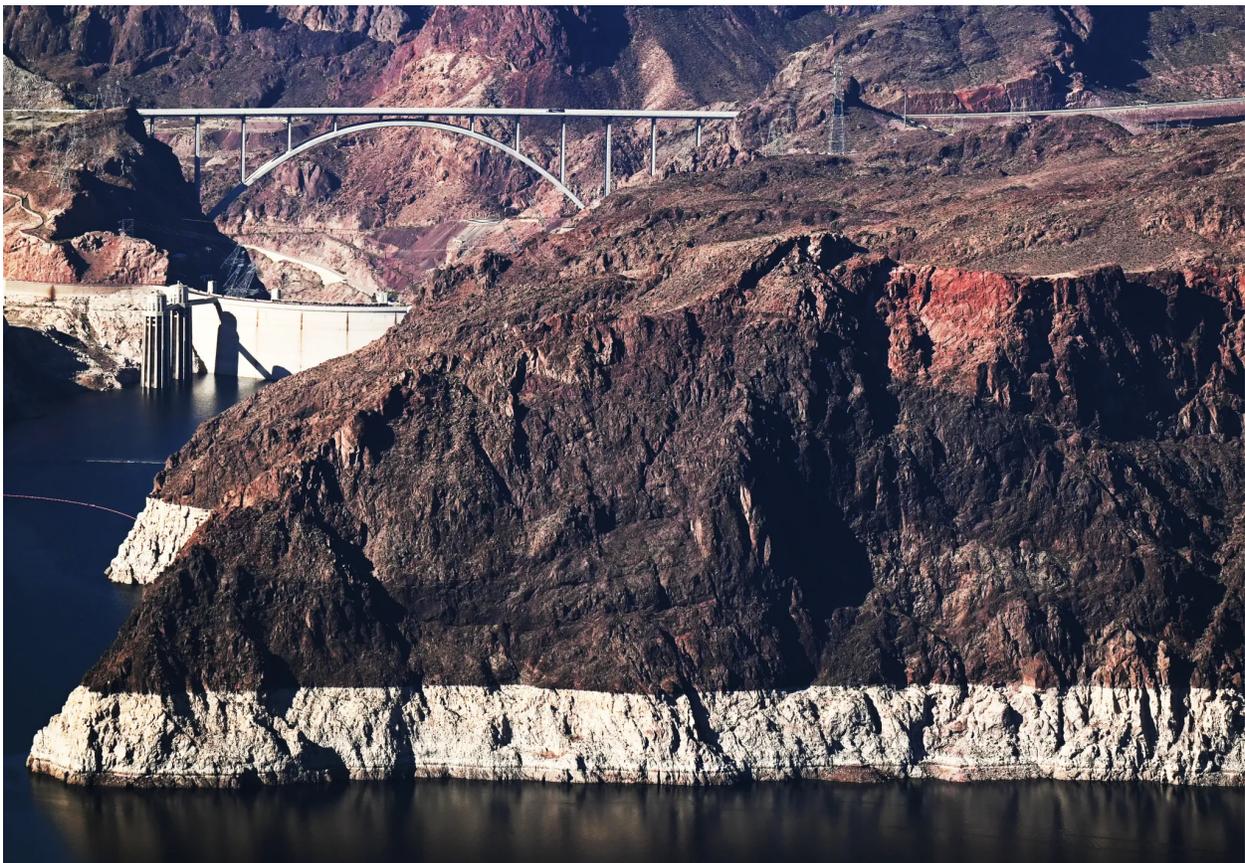


Photo caption: A low water ring is seen around Hoover Dam on April 16, 2023, in Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Nevada. The flight for aerial photography was provided by LightHawk. (Photo by RJ Sangosti/MediaNews Group/The Denver Post via Getty Images)

For Entsminger, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, it's about more than another missed deadline. In strong statements issued Friday, he criticized the current situation and admitted his own frustration with other states that refuse to move.

"The river doesn't care about legal interpretations, political comfort zones, or arguments about why a state can't do more to conserve," Entsminger said.

"Posturing doesn't fill the taps. While I will continue to work with my Colorado River counterparts in hopes of finding a workable solution to this crisis, we must also prepare to fight for our water supply if it comes to that. As the Battle Born state's representatives on the Colorado River, Governor Lombardo and I are prepared to do whatever is necessary to protect Nevada's residents," Entsminger said.



Photo caption: John Entsminger, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority.

At the end of 2026, agreements will expire. The modifications to the century-year-old "Law of the River" govern how the river is managed as it flows from the Colorado Rockies and a sprawling upper basin that covers about 113,000 square miles in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, continuing down through Lake Powell, the

Grand Canyon, Lake Mead, Lake Mohave and on to canals and pipelines in Arizona and California before crossing into Mexico and the Gulf of California.

Without new agreements in place, the states will lose control of decisions on a water supply for more than 40 million people.

Entsminger's statement didn't hold back, expressing his frustration:

The seven Colorado River Basin states have failed to reach an agreement to collectively protect our respective communities and economies in the face of almost certain reductions to our use of the river. As I talk with people throughout Southern Nevada, I hear their frustration that years of negotiations have yielded almost no headway in finding a path through these turbulent waters. As someone who has spent countless nights and weekends away from my family trying to craft a reasonable, mutually acceptable solution only to be confronted by the same tired rhetoric and entrenched positions, I share that frustration.

The hard truth is that Nevada cannot solve the Colorado River's problems on our own. We receive only 1.8 percent of the river's flows, so from a hydrological perspective we're little more than a rounding error. The actions we have taken over the past two-plus decades are less about raising Lake Mead's elevation than they are about protecting ourselves if things go from bad to worse. Every sector of our community has made investments and sacrifices, all in the name of preparing ourselves for a potentially significant curtailment of our already-small water supply. The result of our collective efforts is a sizable water "savings account" that can help us weather the reductions. With the states' refusal to compromise, the severity of those reductions will likely be in the hands of federal government officials or judges, but the savings that our community has built will provide protection for our most critical water needs.

He also expressed gratitude for the public's response to conservation and recycling efforts.

"Thanks to your continued efforts to manage our water responsibly, we have the high ground. While I hope it doesn't come to a fight, we are prepared to go the distance to protect the community you call home," the statement said.

Southern Nevada entered 2026 under [Tier 1 water shortage restrictions](#). A 7% reduction in the state's allocation doesn't present an overwhelming challenge, but projections for 2027 show that Lake Mead could drop significantly.

The rules around water shortages, state allocations, decisions about lake levels and more are all part of the agreements that expire in about 10 months, and the massive preliminary plan released by the federal government to replace those agreements is still being interpreted.



Photo caption: In this aerial photo, a bathtub ring of light minerals show the high water mark on the shore of Lake Mead along the border of Nevada and Arizona, Monday, March 6, 2023, near Boulder City, Nev. (AP Photo/John Locher,File)

8 News Now will continue covering this story as it develops today. We have reached out to conservation leaders and we are monitoring what's happening elsewhere ahead of Saturday's deadline.

Saturday's deadline was set after a 7-state agreement [never came in early November](#). Conservationists were sounding the alarm that the need for a solution was urgent long before that.

Gov. Lombardo, Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs and California Gov. Gavin Newsom released a joint statement, saying the stakes couldn't be higher for their states. They noted that about three-quarters of the population, employment, and agricultural crop sales of the Colorado River Basin comes from the lower basin states.

"The Colorado River is essential to our communities and economies, and our states have conserved large volumes of water in recent years to stabilize the basin's water supplies for years to come. To secure a seven-state agreement for post-2026 management of the river, Arizona has offered to reduce its Colorado River allocation by 27%, California by 10%, and Nevada by nearly 17%. Our stance remains firm and fair: all seven basin states must share in the responsibility of conservation. Our shared success hinges on compromise, and we have offered significant flexibility, allowing

states without robust conservation programs time to gradually develop these programs in ways that work in each state,” the joint statement said.

“Our future management of the Colorado River must be built on a foundation of shared contribution and innovation, with all Colorado River water users stretching to conserve water. Our commitment to a collaborative outcome is unwavering, and we will continue to pursue a negotiated resolution while protecting our water users,” the governors said.

Kyle Roerink, executive director of the Great Basin Water Network, cited the reasons behind the freeze in negotiations.

“The states cannot find consensus because there are differing interpretations under the laws they guide the river,” Roerink said. “But, maybe more importantly and simply, there are differing opinions on how much water remains for states to develop. It might be hard for citizens to believe, but there are some leaders who think more water can be taken out of the river system for sprawl, mines, farms, oil, and so much more. The laws of the river are complicated, but the laws of nature are easy to understand. Some negotiators are not able to figure out how to do more with less.”

In Colorado this week, the city of [Aurora picked the site for its largest reservoir yet](#), even as questions remained if it will ever fill up.

In Arizona, Republican Congressman Juan Ciscomani said, “Arizona’s water is non-negotiable,” in a statement posted on X.

“I’m leading a majority of our House delegation to oppose a proposal that would drastically cut Arizona’s Colorado River supply while sparing others. Nearly 6 million Arizonans rely on the Central Arizona Project. Reductions must be shared,” the post said.

In November, John Weisheit, conservation director of Living Rivers, said it was time for the federal government to take control of the situation, and now it appears that’s exactly what will happen. Even then, officials at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation have to take an honest look at the river.

He has observed decisions on the river going back to the 1970s. He remembers Reclamation employees laughing when they were told in 2005 that their reservoirs were going dry.

“Whatever they come up with, it isn’t going to work,” Weisheit said, noting that the upper basin states have to participate in real efforts to conserve water.