Reclamation announces 2024 operating conditions for Lake Powell and Lake Mead

Significant improvements for Lake Mead due to its improved hydraulics, ongoing conservation efforts. Operations under the Updated Near-Term Guidelines (UNTG) show, analysis of Colorado River-based water conservation agreement.

For February 8, 2023

The Bureau of Reclamation today released the Colorado River Basin Water Year 2023 Guidelines Report, which determines the water allocation at the four outlet diversions of Lake Powell and Lake Mead. These operating conditions, which are based on existing agreements under the 2007 guidelines and recent drought conditions, will be in effect through the 2024 water year. Reclamation is currently analyzing the consensus-based “latest update-2018” Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead.

The long-term guidelines, informally referred to as the “2007 Guidelines” or “2007 Interim Guidelines,” as well as the annual water allocations for the upcoming 2024 water year, are based on the “2007 Guidelines” as a starting point. In addition, Reclamation is currently analyzing the consensus-based “late update-2018” Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead.

Reclamation is committed to an inclusive and transparent process that informs meaningful Reclamation as well as collaborative efforts to conduct the planning, development, and agreement-making processes for the next generation of guidelines for the Colorado River Basin.

Reclamation is also working with multiple states, tribes, and stakeholders on the identification, development, and evaluation of water conservation actions, including the restoration and enhancement of beneficial water uses such as irrigation, habitat, human needs, and environmental flows.

Lake Mead remains at historically low levels, with challenging conditions persisting in this ongoing drought crisis and in anticipation of critical decisions on the next generation of guidelines. The basin-wide drought contingency plan (DCP) and other agreements under the 2007 guidelines and recent drought conditions are ongoing. Lake Powell and Lake Mead are critical water storage facilities that provide water and power for a large portion of the Western United States.

Lake Powell is the primary reservoir for water storage and conveyance, desalination and dam safety. The Inflation Reduction Act is investing an additional $4.6 billion to the Colorado River Basin to address the historic drought.

President Biden’s historic Investing in America agenda, above-normal inflows in the lower basin below Hoover Dam, and conservation in the Basin.

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Lake Mead – the two largest reservoirs in the United States and the two largest storage units in the Colorado River system – have the time to focus on the long-term sustainability solutions needed in the Colorado River Basin. However, Lake Powell and Lake Mead are critical water storage facilities that provide water and power for a large portion of the Western United States.

Lake Mead’s current elevation is 1,066 feet, about 31 feet below the Historic Low Elevation Alert (HLEA) of 1,097 feet, which is based on a 7.48 maf release from Lake Powell in water year 2024 without the potential for a mid-year adjustment in April 2024. Under the most probable scenario, and with a 2-foot deficit, the Lake Mead operational elevation for the 2024 water year is estimated to be 1,066.4 feet.

The above-average precipitation this year raises a nice start, and in concert with the hard work from system conservation, we have the opportunity to address the Colorado River Basin’s water scarcity and water deliveries.

As part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s centerpiece for climate, the Development of Near- and Long-Term Guidelines.

Reclamation is committed to leading inclusive and transparent efforts to develop the next-generation framework for managing the river system.”

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Until the updated near-term guidelines are finalized, the approach for 2024 will follow the Long-Term Guidelines as a starting point.

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