

Don't count on Lake Mead going dry

To the editor:

Having performed research as a hydrologist and water resource engineer on the Colorado River for the past 15 years, I was disappointed to see that simplistic research was being presented as possible climate change scenarios in the Colorado River basin ("Study gives 50-50 odds Lake Mead will dry up by 2021," Wednesday Review-Journal).

I agree that climate change will have dramatic effects in the Southwest. There is, however, a large amount of research that still highlights the large amount of uncertainty in the precipitation estimates for the Colorado River basin from climate change models. The notation that Lake Mead has a 50 percent chance of being dry by year 2021 is based on gross assumptions that are unlikely to occur in the next 15 years and assume that society will not adapt to climate change.

First, an assumption was made that no shortages would be declared on the Colorado River under low reservoir conditions. This is in opposition to the shortage criteria that the basin states recently established in the "Final Environmental Impact Statement: Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead."

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, in conjunction with the basin states, developed detailed criteria that will prevent Lake Mead from being dry in the near future.

These criteria were ignored in the results that had Lake Mead dry in 2021.

Second, the complexity of how Lake Powell and Lake Mead are operated was ignored, and the two reservoirs were modeled as a single reservoir. There are coordinated operating rules between these two reservoirs that satisfy "Law of the River" requirements and optimal operation of the system.

These rules also lessen the chances that either reservoir will become dry.

We are all aware that water is a tremendous challenge for the Southwest and sustainable solutions will need to be developed. These solutions will be developed through cooperation among the stakeholders and the use of the latest scientific information that reflects the complexity of the Colorado River basin.

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It's science

To the editor:

I want to thank the Review-Journal for putting my mind at ease. Your Thursday editorial "Lake Mead dry as a bone?" made me realize that all our fears about a possible severe water shortage in coming years are just a myth. I now feel so relieved that I can trust the unbiased R-J editorial board over a group of trained scientists and experts who warn us that Lake Mead could dry up as a water source in 15 years.

I guess we can all ignore that 70-feet deep white ring around the lake and get back to watering our lawns seven days a week. After reading your editorial, I feel so much better.

Nolan Dalla

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