

Contingency planning on the Colorado River

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — New Mexico Interstate Stream Colorado River Bureau Chief Kevin Flanagan gave an interesting presentation Monday on planning efforts underway in the Upper Colorado River Basin to try to prepare for worst case drought scenarios on the big river. The work being coordinated among the states of the Upper Colorado River Basin (Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah) is aimed at preventing Lake Powell, the Upper Basin's largest storage reservoir, from dropping so low that it would be unable to generate electricity, and would be at risk of failing to be able to deliver enough water downstream to the states of the Lower Basin (California, Nevada and Arizona) to meet our obligations under the Colorado River Compact.

Between now and 2026, Bureau of Reclamation modeling suggests a one in five chance of Powell hitting a danger point that would restrict power generation and downstream delivery obligations, Flanagan told the commission. To try to head off that problem, Flanagan said, Upper Basin states are looking at a number of possible actions:

- cloud seeding to increase water supplies
- changes in the operation of upstream reservoirs, including Navajo in New Mexico and, more importantly, Flaming Gorge in Wyoming, to move water downstream into Lake Powell to prevent the big reservoir from dropping
- "Demand management" – payments to farmers, for example, to fallow land