

Reclamation Announces 2020 Colorado River Operating Conditions

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For Release: August 15, 2019



Lake Mead

BOULDER CITY, NEV. – The Bureau of Reclamation today released its Colorado River Basin August 2019 24-Month Study, which sets the annual operations for Lake Mead and Lake Powell in 2020. Based on projections in the 24-Month Study, Lake Mead will operate in the Normal or ICS Surplus Condition in Calendar Year 2020 and Lake Powell will operate in the Upper Elevation Balancing Tier in Water Year 2020 (October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020).

The Upper Basin experienced above average snowpack, and runoff was

145% of average this past spring, raising Lake Powell's elevation by more than 50 feet since early April. Total Colorado River system storage today is 55% of capacity, up from 49% at this time last year. In addition, critical drought contingency plans adopted by the seven Basin States, federal government and Mexico earlier this year are now in place to reduce risks to the system.

"While we appreciate this year's above average snowpack, one good year doesn't mean the drought is over. We must remain vigilant," said Commissioner Brenda Burman. "I applaud everyone who came together this year to get the drought contingency plans done. The additional actions under the contingency plans will help ensure the reliability of the Colorado River system for the 40 million people dependent upon it."

The August 2019 24-Month Study projects Lake Mead's January 1, 2020, elevation to be 1,089.4 feet, about 14 feet above the Lower Basin shortage determination trigger of 1,075 feet. Lake Powell's January 1, 2020, elevation is projected to be 3,618.6 feet — 81 feet below full. Because Lake Mead is projected to begin the year below the drought contingency plans threshold of 1,090 feet, Arizona, Nevada and Mexico will make water savings contributions to Lake Mead in 2020.

Despite the above average 2019 snowpack, the Colorado River Basin continues to experience its worst 20-year drought on record, dating back to 2000. This 20-year period is also one of the driest in the 1,200-year paleo record. The August 2019 24-Month Study can be found at <https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/24mo.pdf>.

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Relevant Link:

[August 2019 24-Month Study](#)