



[Home](#) ■ Interior Department Finalizes Plans For 2027-20...

Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations

Share

Secretary Burgum signs 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines and Record of Decision

08/21/2026

Last edited 08/21/2026

Contact Information Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov

WASHINGTON — The Department of the Interior issued the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines and the Record of Decision for the Post-2026 Colorado River Operations Final EIS, establishing a 10-year Decision Framework with a broad operational range that will be used to develop future operational guidelines for Lake Powell and Lake Mead. Together these decisions provide for reliable operations of the Colorado River system, delivery of vital water supplies, and protect critical federal infrastructure while preserving the flexibility necessary to respond to Basin states' voluntary actions, consensus recommendations and the continued prolonged drought. The combined contents of Lake Powell and Lake Mead have not been this low since before Lake Powell began filling following the closure of the gates at Glen Canyon Dam in 1963, with both Lake Powell and Lake Mead hitting record lows the last few weeks.

"We are grateful for the Seven Basin States, the thirty Basin Tribes, Mexico, and many other basin stakeholders who have provided the feedback and voluntary arrangements necessary for the development of the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines," **said Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum**. "Forty million people, millions of acres of farmland and ranchland, industries that power the American West, and some of our nation's fastest growing metropolitan areas depend on the Colorado River."

The 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines respond to hydrologic conditions and provide flexible tools to protect critical infrastructure at Glen Canyon Dam and Hoover Dam. They were developed after extensive engagement with the seven Basin States and incorporate concepts from proposals from both the Upper and Lower Basins and Basin tribes.

These 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines:

- Provide objective criteria to determine releases from Lake Powell based on actual hydrology and maintaining a minimum elevation of 3,510 feet to support continued operational reliability at Glen Canyon Dam.
- Provides for reductions in deliveries of Colorado River water among the Lower Basin States of 1.25 million acre-feet in each year of the next two years. If the Lower Basin States implement their proposed sharing agreement, the reduction per State would be:
 - Arizona: 760,000 acre-feet
 - California: 440,000 acre-feet
 - Nevada: 50,000 acre-feet
- Provide for Lower Basin States to voluntarily conserve and store at least 700,000 acre-feet of water over the two-year period to protect the system, in addition to the 1.25 million acre-feet per year of reductions.
- Provide for the Upper Basin States to enter into an agreement, in consultation with Lower Basin States and Basin tribes, using the Secretary's authorities to operate the Colorado River Storage Project Upper Initial Units (i.e. Aspinall (CO), Flaming Gorge (UT/WY) and Navajo (CO/NM) Reservoirs) to help protect Glen Canyon Dam infrastructure.
- Provide tools and flexibility in the Lower Basin to respond to drought conditions by allowing water users to store water.
- Provides for a Federally managed pool to help meet tribal firming obligations and provide limited offsetting to reduce tribal impacts.
- Provide elevation triggers for coordination and consultations to determine additional actions, if necessary, to minimize operational risks to infrastructure, and manage risks to the urban, agricultural, and natural systems that rely on the Colorado River.

Reclamation also released today the [August 2026 24-Month Study](#), determining the 2027 operations based on the new guidelines. Lake Powell will begin the October 1 water year between elevations 3,540 and 3,510 feet, placing operations in the Lower Elevation Infrastructure Protection Range with an expected water year release between 6.0 and 7.0 million acre-feet. Reclamation will begin the water year with lower releases between 6.0 and 7.0 million acre-feet in order to attempt to maintain an elevation of 3,510 feet or higher and will adjust releases through April to continue to maintain elevation 3,510 feet. The water year 2027 release volume will be determined in April. For Lake Mead, water deliveries to the Lower Basin States will be reduced by 1.25 million-acre feet for calendar year 2027.

The Decision Framework establishes an operational range that provides the flexibility to develop specific operating guidelines within the 10-year period while preserving the opportunity for Colorado River Basin negotiations to continue and, if successful, be incorporated into years three or four or longer for future operational guidelines. Operational elements include enhanced coordinated reservoir operations and expanded opportunities for the storage and delivery of conserved water in system reservoirs and other flexible water management tools. The Decision Framework prioritizes consensus agreements, voluntary actions, and a commitment to coordination and consultation throughout the period of adoption.

The Decision Framework anticipates operating guidelines in two-year periods and can be scaled longer depending on evolving Basin circumstances. This mechanism leaves room for the Basin States, tribes and stakeholders to adjust these parameters with their own voluntary actions and consensus whenever such agreements are reached.

"These decisions provide a water management strategy for Basin stakeholders to respond to the prolonged drought by incorporating flexible tools and voluntary actions while leaving room for consensus agreements," **said Assistant Secretary — Water and Science Andrea Travnicsek**. "The Department and Reclamation will continue to work with all Basin stakeholders to identify areas to maximize efforts throughout the Basin to modernize infrastructure, develop conservation programs, and identify innovative approaches to deliver water under changing conditions".

Since the beginning of the Trump administration, President Trump has made delivering water to people a high priority. The administration has demonstrated a commitment to improving and enhancing water supply within the Colorado River Basin through investments in water storage, distribution, treatment, and improving water efficiency. Specifically in the Lower Basin investments **over \$3 billion** have been made since January 2025.

In April 2026, the Secretary asked for feedback from the seven Basin States on potential water supply and conservation projects throughout the Colorado River Basin during a time of shortage. The administration continues to review the submittals and will work with the Basin States and Basin Tribes to identify opportunities to use available Working Families Tax Cuts funds, and other federal cost-share programs related to water storage and expansion and optimization; desalination and advanced water treatment; and water movement, exchanges and infrastructure.

Background

The [NEPA process](#) was initiated in June 2023. Over this three-year period the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Reclamation engaged extensively with Basin stakeholders and that input is reflected in the alternatives analyzed in the Final EIS and the Preferred Alternative of a Decision Framework that would guide future operational guidelines, released on July 31, 2026. The 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines and ROD released today further incorporate extensive feedback from Basin stakeholders. The Final EIS, ROD and 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines are available on [Reclamation's website](#).

For the past 26 years, the Colorado River Basin has been experiencing an unprecedented multidecadal drought, resulting in historically low runoff and reservoir levels. Conditions worsened during 2026, driven in part by the lowest observed snowpack on record during the winter of 2025-2026.

A separate binational process addressing water deliveries to Mexico is nearing completion and the Department is committed to continued collaboration with Mexico. The Department will conduct all necessary and appropriate discussions regarding post-2026 operations and implementation of the 1944 Water Treaty with Mexico through the International Boundary and Water Commission in consultation with the Department of State.

The Colorado River provides water for more than 40 million people and generates hydropower for seven states. It serves as a vital resource for 30 tribes and two Mexican states, sustaining 5.5 million acres of farmland and agricultural communities throughout the West, while also supporting critical ecosystems and protecting endangered species.

###

PRESS RELEASE



07/31/2026

[Reclamation Publishes Final Environmental Impact Statement for Future Colorado River Operations](#)

The Bureau of Reclamation has released the Final Environmental Impact Statement, which designates a preferred course of action for future management of Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The preferred alternative establishes an adaptive decision framework to be used to develop operating guidelines designed to ensure reliable operations in the Colorado River Basin while maintaining the flexibility to respond to changing conditions over a 10-year period through 2036. The framework also preserves the opportunity for the Basin to continue working towards consensus agreements, and if successful, be incorporated into future operations.

Read more

PRESS RELEASE



06/25/2026

[Interior Releases First-Ever Interagency Recreation Visitation Report and Announces Nationwide...](#)

The Department of the Interior today announced the release of the Interagency Recreation Visitation Data Report, the first unified compilation of recreation visitation estimates across all federal land and water management agencies, as directed by the EXPLORE Act. The landmark report provides a comprehensive, standardized view of how millions of people experience outdoor recreation across hundreds of millions of acres of federally managed public lands and waters.

Read more

PRESS RELEASE



03/17/2026

[Interior Announces \\$889 Million Investment in Western Water Infrastructure Through President...](#)

The Department of the Interior today announced \$889 million in investments for critical water infrastructure projects across the West made possible by President Donald J. Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Read more

Was this page helpful?



Yes



No

Submit

[Return to top](#)

About DOI

Accessibility

Contact Us

Copyright

Disclaimer

Information Quality

Office of Civil Rights

Privacy Policy

Site Map

Budget & Performance

Cummings Act Notices

FOIA

Hearings and Appeals Case Inventories

Inspector General

No Fear Act reports

Vulnerability Disclosure Policy

