



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
125 South State Street, Room 8100
Salt Lake City, UT 84138-1102



IN REPLY REFER TO:

UC-445
2.2.4.21

Memorandum

To: Camille Calimlim Touton
Commissioner

Through: David M. Palumbo
Deputy Commissioner, Operations

From: Wayne G. Pullan
Regional Director

Subject: Recommendation to approve 2023 Drought Response Operations Plan

This memorandum recommends that Reclamation approve the 2023 Drought Response Operations Plan (2023 Plan) (attached). The 2023 Plan has been prepared by the Upper Colorado Basin Region of Reclamation, the Upper Division States, and the Upper Colorado River Commission (collectively the “DROA Parties”) pursuant to the Drought Response Operating Agreement (DROA), a component of the 2019 Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan authorized by the Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan Authorization Act, Pub. L. No. 116-14, 113 Stat. 850 (Apr. 16, 2019).

The Upper Division States and the Upper Colorado River Commission have approved and forwarded the 2023 Plan for Reclamation’s consideration and approval. The Region recommends approval of the 2023 Plan for the reasons described below.

Summary of operations under the 2023 Plan

The DROA Parties considered operational adjustments at Glen Canyon Dam and numerous potential release and recovery scenarios for each Upstream Initial Unit (Flaming Gorge, Aspinall, and Navajo). The 2023 Plan includes the following key operational elements:

1. Recovery of past DROA releases; anticipate full recovery of DROA release volumes at Flaming Gorge and Blue Mesa through the term of the 2023 Plan.
2. No additional DROA actions are anticipated during the 2023 Plan; the DROA Parties will continue monitoring hydrological conditions and, if needed, will make adjustments,

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first at Glen Canyon Dam, and then at the upstream Initial Units (Flaming Gorge, Aspinall, and Navajo).

Development of the 2023 Plan

Reclamation staff have been working with the DROA Parties to develop the 2023 Plan since late 2022. Lake Powell remained below DROA’s “Target Elevation” of 3,525 ft until runoff from improved hydrology began in spring 2023. The 2023 Plan involved drafting two components: (1) a Framework document (Framework) that contains provisions the DROA Parties use to develop yearly Plans (and remains relatively unchanged from 2022); and (2) the 2023 attachments to this Framework (2023 Attachments) to identify the specific operations for the 2023 DROA year (May 1, 2023 – April 30, 2024).

Consistency with Initial Unit Operations

Any operation under DROA must be consistent with the authorities and flexibilities that govern the Initial Units at issue.¹ The 2023 Plan complies with the project-specific criteria for each Initial Unit including, but not limited to, applicable Records of Decision, Biological Opinions, contracts, and authorized purposes. In addition to the substantive project-specific authorities at each Initial Unit, development of the 2023 Plan worked within the processes that determine Initial Unit operations.

Consultation, Coordination & Outreach

DROA requires consultation, coordination, and outreach with entities in the Colorado River Basin. The DROA Parties consulted with the Governor’s Representatives of the Lower Division States, the Upper Colorado River Basin Tribes, other Tribes throughout the Colorado River Basin, federal agencies, water users and non-governmental organizations as required by the DROA.

Recovery of past DROA releases

The 2023 Plan focuses on recovery of past DROA releases in 2021 and 2022 from Flaming Gorge and Blue Mesa. The Region anticipates full recovery of DROA release volumes at Flaming Gorge and Blue Mesa through the term of the 2023 Plan.

Recommendation

Reclamation recommends that the Department approve the 2023 Plan as transmitted by the Upper Division States and the Upper Colorado River Commission.

¹The 2023 Plan does not address “emergency action” operations under DROA, and the Department “retains all applicable authority to make releases from [Colorado River Storage Project Act] Initial Units and perform subsequent recovery of storage operations if actual hydrology or actual operating experience demonstrate an imminent need to protect the Target Elevation at Lake Powell.”

Implementation

If the Department approves the 2023 Plan, Reclamation will perform the following to implement the 2023 Plan's operations:

- Inform the DROA Parties of the Department's approval;
- Inform entities that participated in development of the 2023 Plan and post the approved 2023 Plan to Reclamation's DROA website; and
- Inform the operators of the affected Initial Units so that implementation of the 2023 Plan can begin.

Concurrence

Camille Calimlim Touton
Commissioner

cc: UC-100 (WPullan), UC-110 (DPicard), UC-111 (KGrantz), UC-445 (VDeppe),
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