



— BUREAU OF —
RECLAMATION

Colorado River Basin Lake Powell & Lake Mead Operations Post-2026

The meeting will begin at 12:00 pm Mountain Time on August 21

La interpretación en vivo será disponible en español. Live interpretation will be available in Spanish.

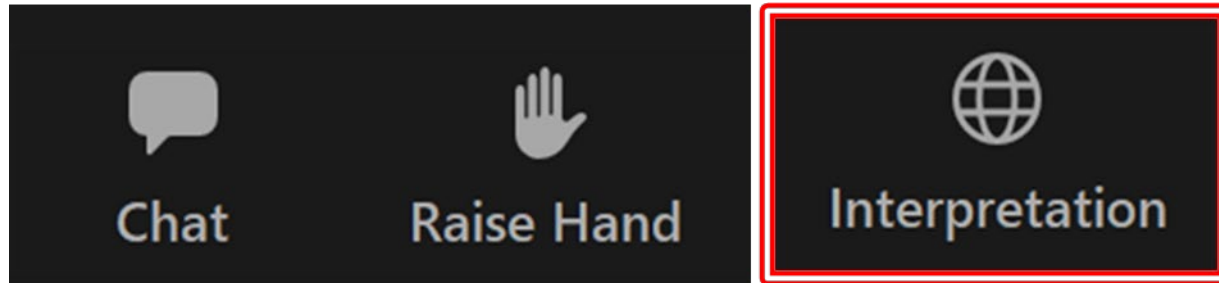
Dial In: (720) 707-2699; Webinar ID: 836 0426 6001

For technical support, please contact Megan Stone: megan.stone@aeacom.com

Public Webinar
August 21, 2026

Live Spanish Interpretation

La interpretación en vivo esta disponible en español



Live language interpretation is available in Spanish



Zoom Etiquette



Presentation is being recorded



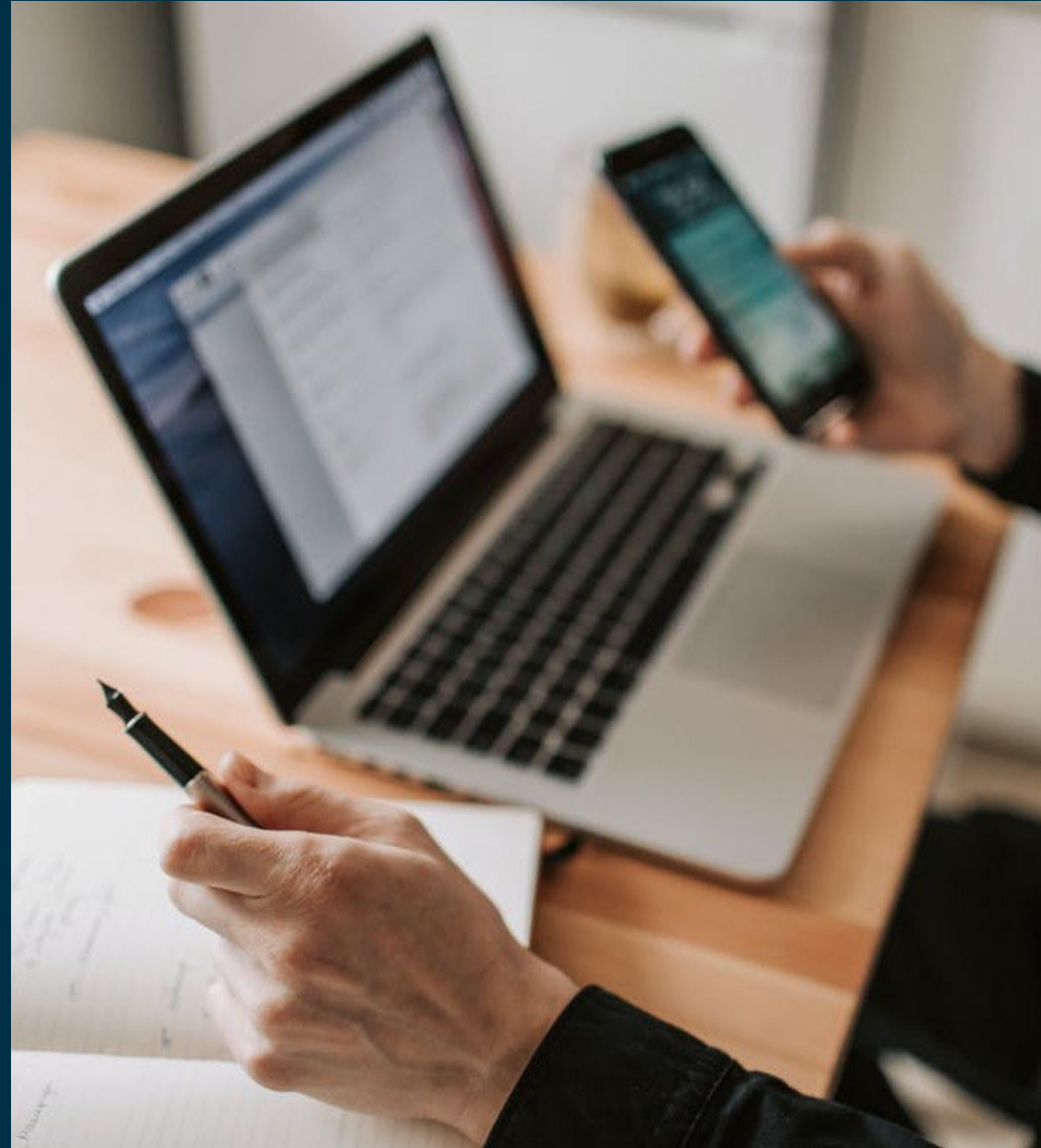
Microphones are muted



Chat feature will be used to share key details for your reference



Submit questions after the presentations via the question and answer feature





— BUREAU OF —
RECLAMATION

Welcome



Public Webinar Agenda

- Overview of the Post-2026 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process
- Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
 - Preferred Alternative
- Record of Decision (2027-2036)
- 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines
- Q&A



Overview of Post-2026 NEPA Process

- Process was intended to develop long-term successor operating guidelines for Lake Powell and Lake Mead to replace existing agreements expiring in 2026
- Kicked off in 2022 with pre-scoping and formally initiated in June 2023 with Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS
- Extensive stakeholder engagement occurred throughout the process, with particular focus on developing a range of alternatives over a 2 ½-year period
- Developed and evaluated 6 alternatives that capture a broad range of operational concepts and potential environmental impacts, but did not reach consensus on long-term operations
- Process concludes with publication of the Final EIS in July 2026, the issuance of the Record of Decision (ROD) in August 2026 adopting the Preferred Alternative's "Decision Framework" and the issuance of the first set of guidelines, the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines, pursuant to the ROD



Post-2026 Milestones

- June 2022: “Pre-Scoping” Federal Register Notice
- June 2023: Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS formally initiating the Post-2026 process
- October 2023: Scoping Summary Report and Federal Register Notice identifying the Proposed Federal Action and Purpose & Need
- January 2025: Released Alternatives Report
- January 2026: Published Draft EIS
- July 2026: Published Final EIS
- August 2026: Adopted ROD and issued 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines pursuant to the ROD



Final EIS

- **Published on July 31, 2026**

- Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register
- Available on Reclamation's website: <https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/final-eis/>

- **Notable changes from the Draft EIS**

- Identification and analysis of the Preferred Alternative
- Added emphasis on the first decade of potential resource impacts to align with the key period of performance of the Preferred Alternative
- Inclusion of quantitative analysis of hydropower economic rates and recreation visitation
- Revised initial reservoir condition assumptions in modeling to reflect the "Dry" initial condition assumptions only
- Added Supporting Appendices:
 - Appendix P: Tribal Consultation and Coordination Efforts
 - Appendix Q: Federal Register Notices
 - Appendix R: Response to Public Comment
 - Appendix S: Additional Description of Alternatives
 - Appendix T: Preliminary Description and Analysis of Anticipated Operating Guidelines for 2027 and 2028



Final EIS – Contents

- Executive Summary
- Volume I – Main Body
 - Chapter 1 - Purpose and Need
 - Chapter 2 - Description of Alternatives
 - Chapter 3 - Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences
 - Chapter 4 - Consultation and Coordination
- Volume II – Supporting Appendices
 - 20 Appendices (A-T)
- Volume III – Resource Analysis Technical Appendices
 - 17 Appendices (TA-3 - TA-19)
- Volume IV – Preparers, References, Glossary, and Index



Preferred Alternative - Overview

- The Preferred Alternative is a 10-year **decision framework** through 2036 that establishes
 - **Operational principles** (Section 2.4.2.2),
 - **Operational sideboards** (key thresholds and ranges for the operational elements that comprise each alternative) (Section 2.4.2.3), and
 - **A process** that would govern development and issuance of operating guidelines (the objective criteria that determine the operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead each year) (Section 2.4.2.4)
- The framework does not establish specific operating guidelines; rather, it provides the structure within which operating guidelines would be developed, reviewed, and periodically updated
- Operating guidelines would cover anticipated 2-year intervals (unless consensus-based agreements provide for a longer duration)
 - Final EIS provides analysis of preliminary operating guidelines anticipated for first interval in Appendix T
- The **operational sideboards** are a critical component of the Preferred Alternative because they
 - Create boundaries for the development of each set of operating guidelines
 - Enable the Final EIS to analyze potential impacts of the Preferred Alternative decision framework
 - Provide a basis for environmental compliance for the duration of the decision framework



Preferred Alternative – Rationale

- **Unprecedented conditions require flexibility**
 - Historically low reservoir elevations and uncertain future hydrology have increased risks to the Colorado River System and critical infrastructure
- **Predictability and structure remain essential**
 - Basin water users need a transparent, structured process of making future operational decisions
- **Consensus remains the goal**
 - Extensive engagement with Basin States, Basin Tribes, and other interested parties did not result in consensus on long-term operations.
 - The Framework preserves the opportunity to incorporate future consensus-based agreements.
- **Balance flexibility with certainty**
 - Provides a defined process and operational boundaries while allowing future guidelines to respond to changing hydrology and Basin circumstances.
- **Learn and adjust over time**
 - The 10-year Framework provides an opportunity to gain operational experience and use that experience to inform future operating and water management decisions.



How the Preferred Alternative Was Analyzed

- Unlike other alternatives, the Preferred Alternative does not prescribe future operations, it establishes a framework for subsequent decision-making
- Sideboards define the range of potential operations
 - Operational sideboards establish the boundaries within which future operating guidelines may be developed
- **“Representative Preferred Alternative”** provides a basis for analysis
 - A set of modeling assumptions designed to capture the range of operating guidelines that may be adopted for each interval during the 10-year framework
- Modeling assumptions are not future operating decisions
 - The modeling assumptions are not prescribed guidelines and do not limit future agreements, nor do they preclude or predetermine future operating decisions
 - Actual operations will be determined through the operating guidelines developed through the Decision Framework
- Provides environmental analysis for future decisions
 - Analysis demonstrates that the operational sideboards appropriately balance tradeoffs among resources and provides the environmental compliance to operate in accordance with the operational principles given future hydrologic uncertainty



Representative Preferred Alternative: Summary of Sideboards and Operational Elements

Adapted from Final EIS Section 2.5

Preferred Alternative (Including Representation of Operational Elements)	The Preferred Alternative is a multi-year decision framework that establishes the process and criteria that would govern development and adoption of operating guidelines through 2036. The decision framework is anticipated to be implemented in two-year operating intervals, unless consensus-based agreements provide for a longer duration. Unlike other alternatives, the operating guidelines for each interval are not specified in this Final EIS, and each set of guidelines would be developed based on operational principles and fit within the framework's defined operational sideboards (thresholds and ranges for operational elements). The sideboards provide a basis for assumptions included in the Representative Preferred Alternative summarized in this table, which captures the range of operating guidelines that may be adopted during each interval. Lake Powell releases range from 5.0 maf to 12.0 maf depending primarily on Lake Powell elevation. Lower Basin shortages up to 3.6 maf (including assumptions about reductions to Mexico) are distributed using a combination of LB Priority (up to 1.5 maf, 2027-2028) and priority.				
	Shortage Guidelines to Reduce Deliveries from Lake Mead ^{3, 4}	Coordinated Reservoir Operations (Lake Powell and Lake Mead)	Storage and Delivery of Conserved System and Non-system Water ³	Surplus Guidelines to Increase Deliveries/ Releases from Lake Mead ³	Additional Activities Above Lake Powell
	- Shortages up to 3.6 maf (including assumptions about reductions to Mexico) - In 2027-2028, shortages up to 1.5 maf are distributed based on the distribution developed by the Lower Division States and shortages exceeding 1.5 maf are distributed based on priority (Approach 1 of the Supply Driven Alternative) - After 2028, shortages are distributed based on priority, unless agreements are reached - Consultation to determine additional reductions if projected Lake Mead elevation is less than 1,000 feet	- Lake Powell releases determined based on Lake Powell elevation unless equalization releases are required - Releases range from 5.0 to 12.0 maf, unless more is required for equalization releases - Consultation to determine additional actions if projected Lake Powell elevation is less than 3,500 feet	- Storage up to 7.0 maf in Lake Mead with additional 1.0 maf Federally Managed Water Resources Pool; included for purposes of determining Lower Basin surplus and Shortage Conditions, as well as equalization releases from Lake Powell - Storage up to 3.0 maf at Lake Powell; included for purposes of determining Lake Powell releases - Existing ICS converted to new mechanism immediately - Expanded flexibilities: interstate exchanges within each basin, new tribal mechanism	Surplus determinations based on Lake Mead elevation at or above 1,165 feet, 70R (spill avoidance strategy) or Flood Control conditions	- Potential maximum use of CRSP Upper Initial Units within their respective RODs to release additional water if needed to protect critical infrastructure at Glen Canyon Dam contingent on hydrologic conditions - Trigger additional releases when projected Lake Powell elevation is less than 3,525 feet - Voluntary Upper Basin contributions up to 200 kaf per year subject to hydrologic conditions



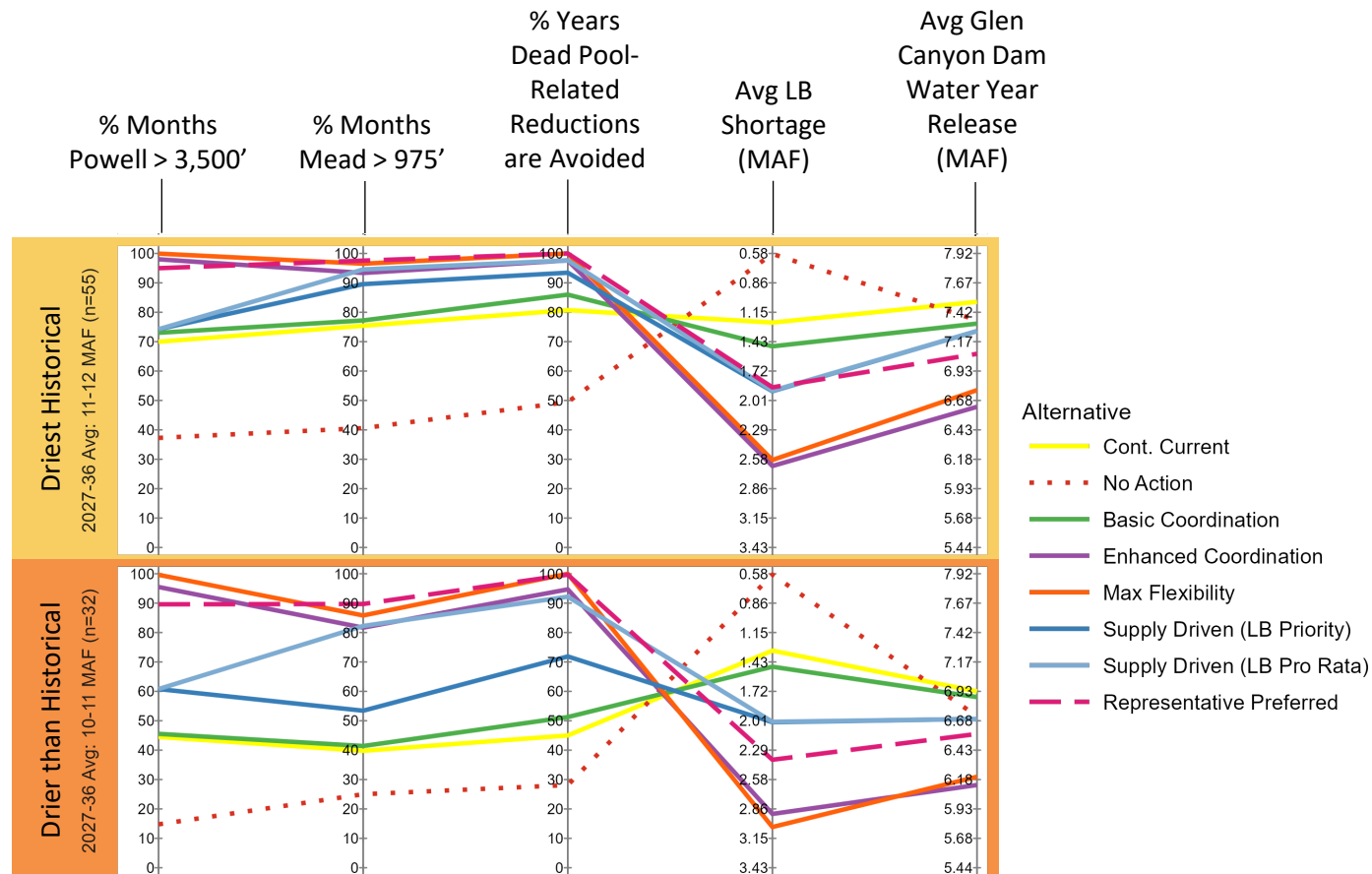
Summary of Other Final EIS Alternatives

Alternative	Description
No Action	- Required by NEPA, signifies a return to annual decision-making absent objective criteria, a mode of operation purposefully avoided since the late 1990s - Does not represent a continuation of current operations
Basic Coordination	Designed to be implementable without agreements among Basin water users regarding distributions of lower Colorado River mainstream shortages, storage and delivery of conserved water from system reservoirs, or other voluntary agreements
Enhanced Coordination	- Designed to protect critical infrastructure while benefitting key resources (such as environmental, hydropower, and recreation) through an approach to distributing storage between Lake Powell and Lake Mead that enhances the reservoirs' abilities to support the Basin - Developed in close coordination based on proposals and concepts from specific Basin Tribes, federal agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and representing principles put forth by the Western Area Power Administration), and other stakeholders
Maximum Operational Flexibility	- Incorporates proactive responses, targeted reservoir management strategies, and innovative and flexible tools to address an increasingly variable set of future hydrologic conditions - Informed by a proposal submitted by a consortium of conservation organizations
Supply Driven	- Provides a Lake Powell operation based solely on historical natural flow - Incorporates concepts from the separate proposals submitted by the Upper Division and Lower Division States, as well as ideas emerging from discussions with the Basin States during spring 2025



Performance of Final EIS Alternatives: Key Tradeoffs

Key Performance Tradeoffs in Different Hydrologic Conditions Adapted from Final EIS Figure 2-3



- A key performance tradeoff exists between the percent of time in which critical reservoir elevations and dead pool-related reductions are avoided (first three axes from left) and average shortage (fourth axis from left).
- Under hydrologic conditions similar to the Driest Historical 10-year period (2012-2021), the alternatives demonstrate different potentially reasonable ways to balance reservoir protection and delivery reductions.
- Under hydrologic conditions Drier than Historical, there is a significant increase in the volume of reductions needed to achieve adequate reservoir protection.
- The Preferred Alternative, as analyzed in the Representative Preferred Alternative, appropriately balances the inherent system tradeoffs: it is a practical approach to robust protection of critical infrastructure while considering adverse impacts to water users and avoiding unnecessary impacts to other resources.



Record of Decision

- Adopts the 2027-2036 Decision Framework based on the Preferred Alternative analyzed in the Final EIS
- Decision comes at a time when:
 - Unprecedented multi-decadal drought persists
 - System storage is at record lows
 - Existing agreements are expiring, new operating criteria must be in place by October 1, 2026
 - Basin-wide consensus on long-term operations has not been reached
- Provides the structure and sideboards within which operating guidelines will be developed, reviewed and periodically updated through 2036 to allow for consensus and voluntary actions
- Designed to accommodate future agreements and supports the Department's commitment to consensus-based operations



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

Record of Decision

Decision Framework for Colorado River Guidelines:
Coordinated Operations
of Lake Powell and Lake Mead (2027–2036)

August 2026

Recommending Official:

David M. Palumbo
Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Bureau of Reclamation

08-21-2026

Date

Approved:

Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior

August 21st, 2026

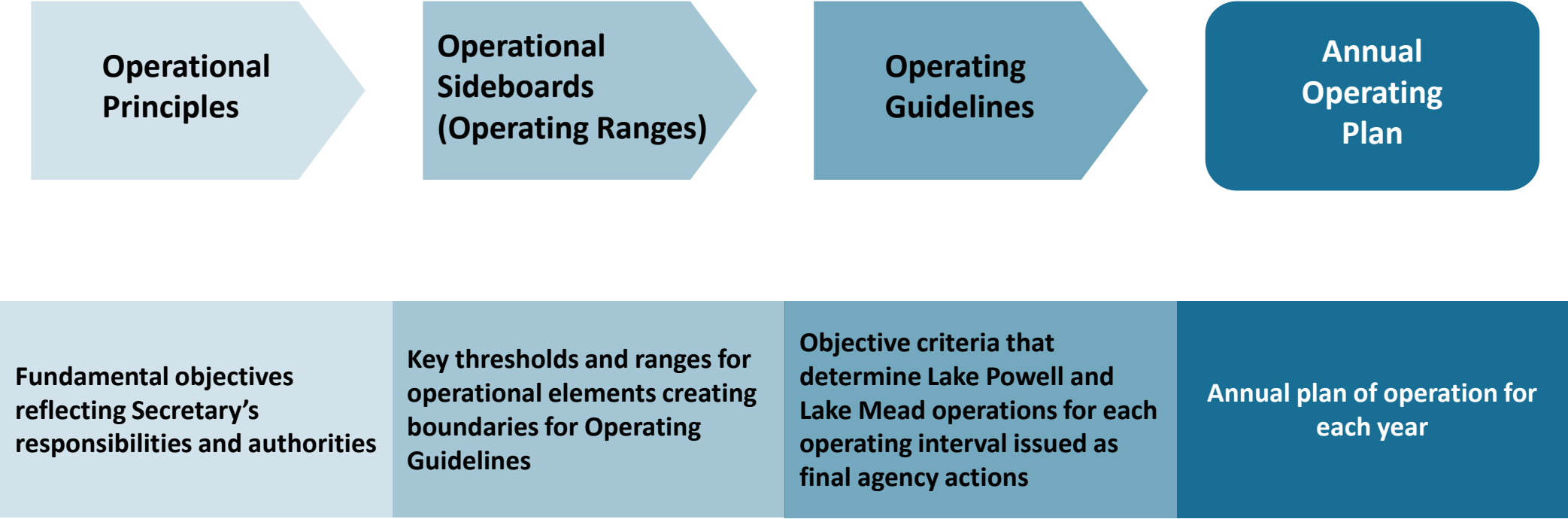
Date

Decision Framework – Overview

- Establishes a broad operational range that provides the flexibility to develop specific operating guidelines within the 10-year period
- The Operational Principles, Sideboards and Process will remain constant through 2036, unless modified through future Federal action and appropriate environmental compliance
- Maintains flexibility to adapt operating guidelines in response to new information, voluntary actions, changing conditions and future consensus recommendations
- Prioritizes consensus agreements, voluntary actions, and a commitment to consultation throughout the period of adoption



Decision Framework



Decision Framework

Operational Principles

1. Operations should be responsive to hydrology
2. Critical federal infrastructure must be protected through practical and deliberate operations
3. Operating Guidelines should implement the Long-Range Operating Criteria while also providing directions to address extraordinary circumstances
4. Operating Guidelines should prioritize consensus-based recommendations



Decision Framework

Operational Sideboards

Operational Element	Range/Threshold
Lower Basin Shortage Guidelines	- A potential maximum of up to 3.0 maf, as needed, after appropriate consultation, to provide protection of critical infrastructure at Hoover Dam in dry hydrologic conditions, <i>as described in ROD Section 10.6, Incorporation of Consensus Recommendations and Consultation.</i> - Consultation will occur if the projected Lake Mead elevation is < 1,000 feet to determine potential additional reductions to Lower Basin water deliveries, <i>as described in ROD Section 10.7, Extraordinary Circumstances.</i> - The allocation of shortages will be based on applicable law, including the Consolidated Decree. Deviation from applicable law will occur only if water entitlement holders have reached voluntary arrangements.
Coordinated Reservoir Operations	5.0 maf to 12.0 maf Lake Powell water year releases to provide protection for critical infrastructure at Glen Canyon Dam, while meeting other operational objectives consistent with applicable Federal law, and sufficiently high releases necessary to prevent spill avoidance releases. - Consultation will occur if the projected Lake Powell elevation is < 3,500 feet to determine potential additional actions, <i>as described in ROD Section 10.7, Extraordinary Circumstances.</i>
Storage and Delivery of Conserved System and Non-system Water	- Lake Powell: up to 3.0 maf - Lake Mead: up to 8.0 maf (supports existing ICS, new ICS-type program, conservation pools and exchange mechanisms)
Lower Basin Surplus Guidelines	Up to 500 kaf in addition to any available surplus nearing or during flood control releases.
Additional Activities Above Lake Powell	- Potential for maximum use of CRSP Upper Initial Units within their respective RODs to release additional water if needed to protect critical infrastructure - Voluntary Upper Basin contributions up to 200 kaf/year subject to hydrologic conditions

Decision Framework

Process for Developing Operating Guidelines

- Each set of Operating Guidelines will consist of reviews, consultations with key stakeholders and agencies, and opportunities for consensus building
- The Secretary will issue these Operating Guidelines as final agency actions, published in the Federal Register and will provide the opportunity for comment on the draft Operating Guidelines.
- Reclamation will coordinate and consult with the seven Basin States throughout the interval as well as with Basin Tribes and partner agencies, Mexico, and other interested parties during key operational milestones.

Month and Operating Year (Anticipated)	Activity
August preceding Operating Year 1 of Operating Guidelines	• Issue Operating Guidelines for upcoming 2 years • Determine operations for Operating Year 1
August of Operating Year 1	• Determine operations for Operating Year 2
October of Operating Year 2	• Conduct review of current Operating Guidelines and develop considerations for the next set of Operating Guidelines
November of Operating Year 2	• Incorporate considerations from review of current Operating Guidelines into ongoing coordination and consultations on Operating Guidelines for upcoming interval
November – March of Operating Year 2	• Develop draft Operating Guidelines, applying operational principles and sideboards • Determine approach to applicable environmental compliance for draft Operating Guidelines
March of Operating Year 2	• Provide draft Operating Guidelines for upcoming interval
May 1 of Operating Year 2	• Consensus recommendations on upcoming Operating Guidelines due
May-June of Operating Year 2	• Finalize Operating Guidelines, perform analysis, perform necessary consultations
June of Operating Year 2	• Identify and announce upcoming Operating Guidelines to be adopted • Initial AOP consultation on next year's operations (per upcoming Operating Guidelines)
July of Operating Year 2	• Finalize environmental compliance, as appropriate, for checks on upcoming Operating Guidelines
August 1 of Operating Year 2	• Issue upcoming Operating Guidelines and as final agency action and publish in the Federal Register
August 15 of Operating Year 2	• Determine operations for Operating Year 3

Decision Framework

Consensus Recommendations and Consultation

- The Department will consult with the Basin States, Basin Tribes, Mexico, other Federal agencies and other interested stakeholders throughout the guideline development process.
- Consensus recommendations that are consistent with applicable law and the Decision Framework may be incorporated, in whole or in part, into subsequent Operating Guidelines.
- In the absence of consensus recommendations, the Secretary will determine the Operating Guidelines consistent with the operational principles, sideboards and applicable law, and the modeling assumptions contained in the Final EIS shall not preclude or predetermine such determinations.
- The Decision Framework establishes consultation thresholds associated with critical reservoir elevations. When projected reservoir conditions approach or fall below the consultation thresholds identified in the operational sideboards, the Secretary will coordinate and consult with the Basin States, Basin Tribes and other affected parties, as appropriate, regarding additional operational actions that may be appropriate to reduce risks



2027-2028 Operating Guidelines

- Department issued the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines as the final agency action pursuant to the ROD
- Designed to provide certainty for Lower Basin water use for the next 2 years and establishes a Lake Powell operation that's both protective and flexible to respond to rapidly changing hydrologic conditions
- Consists of objective criteria for Lake Powell operations, incorporation of the utilization of the Colorado River Storage Project Upper Initial Units (specific reservoirs above Lake Powell), and Lake Mead operations



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

Operating Guidelines

Colorado River Guidelines for Coordinated Operations of Lake Powell
and Lake Mead
Operating Years 2027 and 2028

August 2026

Recommending Official:

David M. Palumbo
Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Bureau of Reclamation

08-21-2026

Date

Approved:

Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior

August 21st, 2026

Date

Summary of the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines

Operational Element	Summary of Operations
Operation of Lake Powell	• Three elevation ranges (Upper Elevation Range, Mid-Elevation Range, Low Elevation Infrastructure Protection Range) with corresponding annual release volumes between 6.0 maf and 8.23 maf; the initial annual release volume will be chosen such that Lake Powell is projected to stay above 3,510 ft • After consultation, release may be adjusted down to a minimum of 5.0 maf, in combination with releases from CRSP Upper Initial Units to protect elevation 3,500 ft (subject to hydrologic conditions). • Releases may be adjusted upward, provided Lake Powell stays above 3,510 ft, and may exceed 8.23 maf if Lake Powell is projected to end the year above 3,565 ft
Drought Operations of CRSP Upper Initial Units	• Additional releases made from the CRSP Upper Initial Units (subject to hydrologic conditions) if Lake Powell release is < 7.0 maf • Releases determined using a process agreed to by Department and Upper Basin States that expressly includes consultation requirements with the Lower Basin States
Operation of Lake Mead	Lower Basin Shortage • Consistent with the proposal from the Lower Basin States, 1.25 maf reductions in 2027 and 2028 with consultation for additional actions if Lake Mead is projected to fall below 1,010 ft
	System Conservation • Consistent with the proposal from the Lower Basin States, a minimum of 700 kaf of system conservation in Lake Mead through 2028
	Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS) • Consistent with the proposal from the Lower Basin States, expanded accumulation limits, extended delivery access, and system assessments. Limitation of cumulative ICS delivery to maximum of 800 kaf through 2028. • Delivery of ICS below Mead elevation 1,025 ft requires consultation with the Secretary and no ICS may be delivered below Lake Mead elevation 1,000 ft
	Federally Managed Water Resources Pool • Consistent with proposal from the Lower Basin States and incorporating input from Lower Basin Tribes, created to meet Federal firming or other Federal obligations pursuant to Congressionally authorized Indian water rights settlements and to provide limited Tribal shortage offsets up to 25% of reduced entitlements • Maximum accumulation limit of 450 kaf



Lake Powell & Lake Mead Operational Diagram from the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines¹

Lake Powell		
Elevation (feet)	Operation According to the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines	Live Storage (maf)
3,700	Consult on releases consistent with Section 602(a) storage requirement contained in the Colorado River Basin Project Act.	23.31
3,665	-----	18.20
Upper Elevation Range		
Release between 7.50 maf and 8.23 maf.		
3,565	-----	8.15
Mid-Elevation Range		
Release between 7.00 maf to 8.00 maf.		
3,540	-----	6.45
Low Elevation Infrastructure Protection Range		
Release between 6.00 maf and 7.00 maf to maintain elevation 3,510 ft.		
3,510		4.70
3,500	-----	4.22
Extraordinary Circumstances		
Consult regarding potential actions to further protect critical Glen Canyon Dam infrastructure.		
3,490		3.74
3,370		0

Lake Mead		
Elevation (feet)	Operation According to the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines	Live Storage (maf)
1,220	Consult regarding the potential to increase apportionment above 6.25 maf.	26.18
1,125	-----	14.14
Shortage Condition Determination and Lower Basin Reductions		
Apportion 6.25 maf to the Lower Division States.		
1,010	-----	5.05
Consult to consider potential actions throughout the Basin to respond to and address hydrologic and operational conditions.		
950		2.01
895		0

¹ Lake Powell and Lake Mead operational determinations will be documented in the draft 2027 AOP.



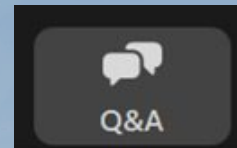
Operational Determinations for 2027

- The August 24-Month Study was released on August 21 and sets 2027 operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead in accordance with the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines
- **Lake Powell**
 - October 1 starting elevation: projected between 3,510 feet and 3,540 feet
 - This places Lake Powell in the Lower Elevation Infrastructure Protection Range
 - Initial Water Year 2027 release: 6.0 to 7.0 maf
 - Reclamation will begin with lower releases to attempt to maintain Lake Powell at or above 3,510 feet
 - Releases will be adjusted through April based on changing conditions
 - Final Water Year 2027 release will be determined in April
- **Lake Mead**
 - Water deliveries to the Lower Basin States will be reduced by 1.25 maf in Calendar Year 2027
 - Additional water will be conserved in 2026, 2027, and 2028
 - ICS may be created pending completion of forthcoming implementing agreements and delivered consistent with the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines
 - Water may be delivered for tribal firming or other Federal delivery obligations to Tribes and to provide limited offsetting of Tribal shortages, subject to availability and ICS delivery limitations
- The August 24-Month Study is posted here: <https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/riverops/24ms-projections.html>



Q&A

- Please click the Q&A button in Zoom
- Type your question
- Click send
- Question will be responded to live or via Q&A feature



zm Question and Answer

✕

🔗

Welcome to Q&A

Questions you ask will show up here. Only host and panelists will be able to see all questions.

Type your question here...

☐ Send anonymously

Cancel Send

👤 Who can see your questions?



— BUREAU OF —
RECLAMATION