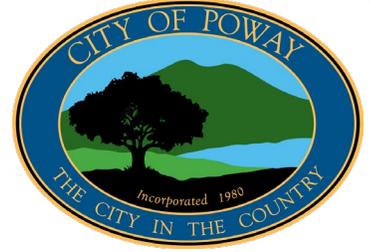


STEVE VAUS, Mayor
PETER DE HOFF, Deputy Mayor
JENNY MAEDA, Councilmember
CHRISTOPHER J. PIKUS, Councilmember

CITY OF POWAY



March 2, 2026

United States Bureau of Reclamation
Ms. Carly Jerla, P.E.
Program Manager—Post-2026 Guidelines
Crbpost2026@usbr.gov

(Via Electronic Mail)

SUBJECT: COMMENT LETTER FROM CITY OF POWAY ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT, POST-2026 OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES AND STRATEGIES FOR LAKE POWELL AND LAKE MEAD

Dear Ms. Jerla:

The City of Poway appreciates the opportunity to provide this Comment letter in response to the January 16 publication of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Post-2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Lake Powell and Lake Mead for the development of the post-2026 guidelines (Draft EIS). This action comes as the guidelines that managed the river for the past 20 years, the 2007 Interim Guidelines ended in 2025, though they still influence operations through the end of this year. We understand the goal is to produce a Final EIS this summer followed by a record of decision (ROD) to provide new operational guidelines by October 1, the start of the water year. We also understand the challenging conditions under which the new guidelines are being developed given the uncertainty caused by climate change and the historically low runoff affecting the Colorado River system. The City of Poway offers these comments to support the efforts of the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) toward developing guidelines that provide fair and balanced policies to ensure the river continues to serve all users basin-wide, including tribes and Mexico.

As a member agency of the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA), we agree with points made in the Water Authority comment letter, starting with our support for the ongoing effort among the Basin states to achieve a consensus proposal for the river's operation, including management of the two reservoirs critical to California's water supply, Lakes Powell and Mead. We also support the Lower Basin's proposal to reduce annual usage by 1.5 million acre-feet (MAF) as a first step, along with a commitment from other Basin states to similarly support the river.

Steps Taken in the San Diego Region

Through the efforts of the Water Authority, our agency, and all communities within the region, the San Diego region has focused on decades-long investments in conservation, generation of new supplies, and long-term storage, reducing the region's annual demands on the river by 40 percent over the last three decades. Our regional investments contribute to California's ability to live within the 4.4 MAF apportionment.

The Cost to Invest in Resiliency

These investments in water generation and conservation were not made lightly. Building resiliency while reducing water use comes with a cost, which has direct impacts on water affordability. However, these investments highlight the steps our region has taken over the last 30 years, recognizing that such long-term planning in the wake of the uncertainty of a changing climate and over 20 years of drought conditions was essential to support our region and the river system.

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Addressing the Need for System Flexibility

As Reclamation moves toward developing the Final EIS and ROD, the preferred alternative should include flexible strategies, most notably interstate and intrastate transfers and exchanges. These water transactions will enable Basin water users to adapt to evolving hydrologic and operational conditions. Such a framework can accommodate future needs and growth in the Basin by allowing water to move within and across state lines to reach communities where it is needed most.

The region's seawater desalination source can provide a drought-proof water supply in support of such water transactions and serve as one component of a solution for the river's long-term resiliency. Toward that end, the preferred alternative identified in the Final EIS should address the importance of seawater desalination as a mechanism that can provide for transfers and exchanges, effectively serving as an imported water supply into the Basin. Further, the preferred alternative should specifically acknowledge the San Diego region's investment in the Carlsbad Desalination Plant and incorporate the plant as a current tool that can address water needs in areas facing water scarcity.

Process Ahead

The City of Poway understands this is a challenging process to arrive at a balanced policy that ensures the river continues to meet the needs of the 40 million people, two countries, 30 tribes, and seven states that depend on it. We urge you to work toward a Final EIS that allows for flexibility while ensuring other management strategies provide a balanced basin-wide approach to the river's long-term sustainability.

We thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to your response to our comments.

Sincerely,



Steve Vaus
Mayor

E-copy: Chris Hazeltine, City Manager
Eric Heidemann, Public Works Director
Dan Denham, General Manager, SDCWA
Meena Westford, Director of Imported Water, SDCWA
Alexi Schnell, Colorado River Manager, SDCWA