



“Voice of the Western Slope since 1953”
A coalition of counties, communities, businesses & individuals
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U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Attn: BCOO-1000
P.O. Box 61470
Boulder City, NV 89006

RE: Draft EIS Comments regarding Post-2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Lake Powell and Lake Mead

Dear Acting Commissioner Cameron:

Please accept the comments of **CLUB 20** in response to Reclamation’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Post-2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Lake Powell and Lake Mead.

CLUB 20 is a coalition of counties, municipalities, businesses, tribes, and individuals advocating for the economic vitality and natural resource sustainability of the 22 counties of Western Colorado. Reliable access to Colorado River water is foundational to the agricultural, municipal, industrial, and environmental sustainability of our region.

Like many Upper Basin communities and water users, we seek operational guidelines that restore system balance and provide long-term security for water users across the basin. Unfortunately, the 2007 Interim Operating Guidelines and subsequent emergency actions perpetuated structural imbalances and overuse instead of promoting lasting stability. Given climate-driven aridification and declining average flows, bold but lawful structural reforms are now required.

We believe that necessary reforms must be implemented in a manner consistent with the 1922 Colorado River Compact, the 1948 Upper Colorado River Basin Compact, and the broader Law of the River.

With this belief in mind, we support and agree with the comments and specific recommendations submitted by the **Colorado River Water Conservation District**. We strongly urge Reclamation to incorporate their suggestions for further analysis and revisions during the development of the Final EIS.

Additionally, CLUB 20 emphasizes the following points as essential to developing operating guidelines that achieve a long-term balance between supply and demand across the Colorado River Basin:

Reclamation Must Prioritize Hydrologic Reality Over Predictability

The DEIS places undue emphasis on “predictability” for water users. Predictability cannot be achieved under future hydrologic conditions unless demands are permanently adjusted to align with reduced supply.

Flows in the Colorado River have declined approximately 20% over the past two decades, and reservoir elevations remain critically low. The DEIS’ focus on predictability disproportionately favors Lower Basin

users who rely on reservoir releases, while Upper Basin communities live with hydrologic variability and limited storage buffering.

The proposed federal action must focus on restoring long-term structural balance across the basin and performing under all ranges of hydrology, including critically dry conditions.

The Final EIS Must Evaluate and Adjust the Scale of Upper Basin Conservation

Several alternatives rely on assumed Upper Basin conservation volumes of up to 500,000 acre-feet annually. However, the DEIS does not adequately analyze the reasonably foreseeable environmental and socioeconomic impacts required to achieve conservation at that scale.

In Upper Basin communities, conservation at these levels would likely require significant and sustained reductions in irrigated acreage and municipal uses, along with decreased economic activity.

Such reductions would have direct and potentially permanent impacts on:

- Agricultural economies and employment
- Rural tax bases and county revenues
- Habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species
- Community stability and small business viability

These impacts must be analyzed programmatically and cumulatively under NEPA. Furthermore, the modeled conservation volumes exceed demonstrated program performance to date. The Final EIS should evaluate alternative outcomes utilizing real-world conservation achievements rather than aspirational assumptions.

Upper Basin Shortages Must Be Explicitly Disclosed

The DEIS repeatedly quantifies Lower Basin shortages in the main body of the document while relegating Upper Basin shortages to Appendix I.

Failure to clearly disclose these shortages in the main body of the EIS creates a misleading narrative regarding risk distribution across basins. Transparent disclosure is essential for informed public review.

Lower Basin Water Use Must Account for System Losses

Approximately 1.5 million acre-feet annually represents system losses, including evaporation and transit losses. These losses are an integral part of Lower Basin consumptive use and should not be classified as “shortages.”

Failure to account for these losses contributed to storage decline under the 2007 Interim Guidelines. No basin or contractor should be permitted to deplete water beyond legal apportionments unless Lake Powell is in full or flood-control conditions.

Lower Basin conservation water must be subject to realistic, recurring evaporation and transit loss accounting. One-time assessments are insufficient.

At Least One Alternative Must Perform Under Critically Dry Hydrology — and Hydrology Must Drive Post-2026 Operations

None of the DEIS alternatives perform^s adequately under critically dry hydrology. Given declining natural flows at Lees Ferry and current reservoir elevations, at least one alternative must achieve performance metrics at least 90% of the time under critically dry conditions.

Operating regimes based solely on comparative reservoir elevations have failed to protect storage at Lake Powell. The Draft EIS must model realistic operations and their effects instead of allowing reservoirs to drop below critical elevations. This transparency is essential for the public to evaluate likely operational outcomes.

Interbasin Transactions Must Not Be Allowed

The interstate compacts were designed to provide legal certainty and prevent interstate water marketing across basins. Interstate marketing mechanisms threaten Upper Basin water security, economic stability, and legal clarity.

Colorado law reflects a long-standing public policy limiting interstate export of waters of the state. CLUB 20 will not support any mechanism authorizing interstate or interbasin water marketing between the Upper and Lower Colorado River Basins.

Alternatives Must Contain Clearly Defined and Modeled Actions

The Basic Coordination Alternative includes non-specific actions above Lake Powell (i.e., in the Upper Basin) regarding additional reductions for infrastructure protection without clearly defining or modeling those triggers.

These additional and unspecified actions must be disclosed and modeled to allow decision-makers and the public to fully understand and assess their impacts.

Similarly, the Supply Driven Alternative includes undefined “Gap Water,” with modeling assumptions that do not clearly exclude Lower Basin system losses. The concept of “Gap Water” must be fully defined, including disclosure regarding frequency and magnitude.

Upper Basin Conservation Water and CRSP Upper Initial Units Water Must Remain in Lake Powell

If Upper Basin conservation is included, conserved water must be operationally neutral with respect to Lake Powell releases and Lower Basin shortage determinations. Conserved water should only be

released at the direction of the Upper Colorado River Commission for Compact compliance or meaningful reservoir recovery.

Releases from CRSP Upper Initial Units for infrastructure protection must remain operationally neutral and retained in Lake Powell until sufficient system recovery occurs. Repeated modeled releases raise feasibility and NEPA concerns that must be analyzed in detail.

Conclusion

Upper Basin communities bear hydrologic variability at the source of the Colorado River system. Western Colorado's economies, agricultural base, infrastructure, and public services depend on legally consistent and hydrologically realistic operations.

CLUB 20 respectfully urges Reclamation to revise the DEIS to:

- Restore structural supply-demand balance;
- Fully analyze Upper Basin conservation impacts;
- Properly account for Lower Basin system losses;
- Ensure transparency in modeling;
- Include alternatives that perform under critically dry hydrology; and
- Honor the compacts and federal law.

Thank you for your full and fair consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Wade Haerle
Executive Director
CLUB 20