December 24-Month Study
Date: December 15, 2025

From: River Operations Group, Salt Lake City
To: All Colorado River Annual Operating Plan (AOP) Recipients

Current Reservoir Status

	November Inflow (unregulated) (acre-feet)	Percent of Average (percent)	December 14, Midnight Elevation (feet)	December 14, Midnight Reservoir Storage (acre-feet)
Fontenelle	37,097	89%	6486.19	193,977
Flaming Gorge	41,916	85%	6022.46	2,994,430
Blue Mesa	30,260	102%	7466.54	408,520
Navajo	31,719	119%	6033.2	991,004
Powell	373,684	89%	3541.88	6,568,099

Expected Operations

The operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead in the December 2025 24-Month Study is pursuant to the December 2007 Record of Decision on Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the Coordinated Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead (Interim Guidelines),[1] the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Near-term Colorado River Operations Record of Decision (2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD),[2] and reflects the 2025 Annual Operating Plan (AOP) and draft 2026 AOP. Pursuant to the Interim Guidelines, the August 2024 24-Month Study projections of the January 1, 2025, system storage and reservoir water surface elevations set the operational tier for the coordinated operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead during 2025.

The August 2024 24-Month Study projected the January 1, 2025, Lake Mead elevation to be below 1,075 feet and above 1,050 feet. Consistent with Section 2.D.1 of the Interim Guidelines, a Shortage Condition consistent with Section 2.D.1.a will govern the operation of Lake Mead for calendar year (CY) 2025. In addition, Section III.B of Exhibit 1 to the Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) Agreement will also govern the operation of Lake Mead for CY 2025. Lower Basin projections for Lake Mead take into consideration additional conservation efforts under the LC Conservation Program.

[1] For modeling purposes, simulated years beyond 2026 assume a continuation of the 2007 Interim Guidelines including the 2024 Supplement to the 2007 Interim Guidelines (no additional SEIS conservation is assumed to occur after 2026), the 2019 Colorado River Basin Drought Contingency Plans, and Minute 323 including the Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan. With the exception of certain provisions related to Intentionally Created Surplus recovery and Upper Basin demand management, operations under these agreements are in effect through 2026. Reclamation initiated the process to develop operations for post-2026 in June 2023, and the modeling assumptions described here are subject to change.

[2] 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD is available online at: https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/documents/NearTermColoradoRiverOperations/20240507-Near-termColoradoRiverOperations-SEIS-RecordofDecision-signed_508.pdf.

The August 2025 24-Month Study projected the January 1, 2026, Lake Powell elevation to be less than 3,575 feet and at or above 3,525 feet and the Lake Mead elevation to be at or above 1,025 feet. Consistent with Section 6.C.1 of the Interim Guidelines, and Section 6.E of the 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD, the operational tier for Lake Powell in water year (WY) 2026 is the Mid-Elevation Release Tier and the water year release volume from Lake Powell is projected to be 7.48 million acre feet (maf). To protect a target elevation at Lake Powell of 3,525 feet, adjustments to Glen Canyon Dam monthly volume releases have been incorporated into the December 2025 24-Month Study and include an adjusted monthly release volume pattern for Glen Canyon Dam that will hold back a total of 0.598 maf in Lake Powell from December 2025 through April 2026[3]. That same amount of water (0.598 maf) will be released later in the water year. Given the hydrologic variability of the Colorado River System, the actual WY 2026 operations, and being consistent with Section 6.E of the 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD, the projected release from Lake Powell in WY 2026 may be less than 7.48 maf. Consistent with Section 6.E of the 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD, Reclamation will consider all tools that are available during the interim period to avoid Lake Powell elevation declining below 3,500 feet.

The August 2025 24-Month Study projected the January 1, 2026, Lake Mead elevation to be below 1,075 feet and above 1,050 feet. Consistent with Section 2.D.1 of the Interim Guidelines, a Shortage Condition consistent with Section 2.D.1.a will govern the operation of Lake Mead for CY 2026. In addition, Section III.B of Exhibit 1 to the Lower Basin DCP Agreement will also govern the operation of Lake Mead for CY 2026. Lower Basin projections for Lake Mead take into consideration additional conservation efforts under the LC Conservation Program.

The 2026 operational tier determinations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead will be documented in the 2026 AOP, which is currently in development.

Current runoff projections into Lake Powell are provided by the National Weather Service's Colorado Basin River Forecast Center. The observed unregulated inflow into Lake Powell for the month of November was 0.374 maf or 89% of the 30-year average from 1991 to 2020. The December 2025 unregulated inflow forecast for Lake Powell is 0.265 maf or 83% of the 30-year average. The 2026 April through July unregulated inflow forecast for Lake Powell is 4.20 maf or 66% of average. The WY 2026 unregulated inflow forecast for Lake Powell is 7.04 maf or 73% of average.

References

The 2025 Annual Operating Plan is available online at:
https://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/rsvrs/ops/aop/AOP25.pdf.
The draft 2026 Annual Operating Plan is available online at:
https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/AOP2026/AOP26_draft.pdf.
The Interim Guidelines are available online at:
https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/programs/strategies/RecordofDecision.pdf.
The Colorado River Drought Contingency Plans are available online at:
https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/dcp/finaldocs.html.
The Upper Basin Hydrology Summary is available online at:
https://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/studies/24Month_12_ucb.pdf.

[3] Consistent with the Drought Response Operating Agreement and Framework.

Information on the LCB Conservation Program is available online at:
https://www.usbr.gov/lc/LCBConservation.html.
Information on the 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD is available online at:
https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/interimguidelines/seis/index.html.
Information on reservoir inflow observations and forecasts is available online at:
https://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/product/hydrofcst/hydrofcst.php..

Fontenelle Reservoir

As of December 03, 2025, the Fontenelle Reservoir pool elevation is 6486.95 feet, which amounts to 59 percent of live storage capacity. Inflows for the month of November totaled approximately 37,097 acre-feet (af) or 89 percent of average.

The current release rate is 800 cfs. This release is expected to remain constant throughout the winter base flow period, pending significant hydrologic changes or emergencies. The winter base flow is typically from mid-November to mid-March, pending icing conditions on the Green River downstream of the dam this coming spring.

The December final forecast for unregulated inflows into Fontenelle for the next three months projects below average conditions. December, January, and February Most Probable inflow volumes amount to 28,000 af (88 percent of average), 23,000 af (76 percent of average), and 21,000 af (74 percent of average), respectively.

Flaming Gorge Reservoir

As of December 03, 2025, the Flaming Gorge Reservoir pool elevation is 6022.49 feet, which amounts to 82 percent of live storage capacity. Inflows for the month of November totaled approximately 41,916 acre-feet (af) or 85 percent of average.

Flaming Gorge Dam operations are in a moderately dry hydrologic classification for the month of December and are projected to remain in the moderately dry classification through the remainder of the base flow period. The current average daily release is 800 cfs but may vary to meet the 1,100-1,500 cfs target in Reach 2, measured at the Jensen USGS Gage. This data is considered the most likely scenario given the current forecast, is general, and is subject to changing conditions.

The December unregulated inflow forecast into Flaming Gorge for the next three months projects below average conditions. December, January, and February forecasted unregulated inflow volumes are 28,000 af (85 percent of average), 30,000 af (74 percent of average), and 34,000 af (75 percent of average), respectively.

Aspinall Unit Reservoirs

As of December 4, 2025, releases from Crystal Dam is approximately 370 cfs. Flows of the Gunnison River in the Black Canyon are being maintained at about 350 cfs while the Gunnison Tunnel is no longer diverting flows. Flows in the Whitewater Reach of the Gunnison River are about 950 cfs.

The unregulated inflow volume in November to Blue Mesa was approximately 30,000 af (102 percent of average). Unregulated Inflow volumes forecasted for Blue Mesa for the next three months (December, January, and February) are projected to be: 22,000 af (87 percent of average), 18,000 af (76 percent of average), and 17,000 af (76 percent of average), respectively.

The forecasted 2026 water year unregulated inflow volume to Blue Mesa is projected to be 715,000 af (79 percent of average). The water supply period (April-July) for 2026 is forecasted currently for an unregulated inflow volume of to be 475,000 af of unregulated inflow (73 percent of average).

The Aspinall Unit Operations Group is an open public forum for information exchange between Reclamation and the stakeholders of the Aspinall Unit. The public is encouraged to attend and comment on the operations and plans presented by Reclamation at these meetings. Meeting notes from past working Group meetings are posted on the Operations Group webpage. For more information on this group and these meetings please contact Reece Carpenter in the Western Colorado Area office at (970) 248-0637.

The next Operations Group meeting will be held on January 22, 2026, and the in-person meeting location is to be determined. the specific date and location TBD. There will be a hybrid/call-in option. Contact Reece Carpenter in the Western Colorado Area office at (970) 248-0637 for more information regarding this Operation Group meeting.

Navajo Reservoir

On December 3, 2025, the daily average release rate from Navajo Dam was 300 cfs. The water surface elevation was 6033.15 feet above sea level. At this elevation the live storage is 0.991 maf (60 percent of live storage capacity). Diversions to Cutter Reservoir for the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project (NIIP) and the Navajo Gallup Water Supply Project (NGWSP) were 0 cfs. The San Juan-Chama project was diverting 0 cfs from the basin above Navajo Reservoir.

Releases from Navajo Dam are made for authorized purposes of the Navajo Unit and are pursuant to the Record of Decision for the Navajo Reservoir Operations. Releases target the San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program's (SJRIP) recommended downstream baseflow range of 500 cfs to 1,000 cfs through the critical habitat reach of the San Juan River (Farmington, NM to Lake Powell).

Navajo was at 6033.12 ft of pool elevation and 0.990 maf of live storage by the end of November, which was 60 percent of average for the end of the month. The release averaged 438 cfs and totaled 26.0 kaf, which was 94 percent of average for the month. Preliminary modified unregulated inflow (MUI) into Navajo was 32 kaf, which was 119 percent of average for the month. Calculated evaporation for the month was 0.7 kaf. NIIP diverted a total of 0 kaf. Navajo had a net storage change of -4.0 kaf during the last month.

The most probable MUI forecast for December, January, February is 20 kaf (97 percent of average), 18 kaf (90 percent of average), and 23 kaf (85 percent of average), respectively.

Reclamation conducts Public Operations Meetings three times per year to gather input for determining upcoming operations for Navajo Reservoir. Input from individuals, organizations, and agencies along with other factors such as weather, water rights, endangered species requirements, flood control, hydro power, recreation, fish and wildlife management, and reservoir levels, will be considered in the development of these reservoir operation plans. In addition, the meetings are used to coordinate activities and exchange information among agencies, water users, and other interested parties concerning the San Juan River and Navajo Reservoir. The next meeting will be held virtually on January 27th at 1-3pm.

Glen Canyon Dam / Lake Powell

Current Status
The unregulated inflow volume to Lake Powell during November was 374 thousand acre-feet (kaf) (89 percent of average). The release volume from Glen Canyon Dam in November was 500 kaf. The end of November elevation and storage of Lake Powell were 3,543.26 feet (156.7 feet from full pool) and 6.66 million acre-feet (maf) (29 percent of live capacity), respectively.

Current Operations
The operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead in the December 2025 24-Month Study is pursuant to the December 2007 Record of Decision on Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the Coordinated Operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead (Interim Guidelines), the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Near-term Colorado River Operations Record of Decision (2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD),[4] and reflects the 2025 Annual Operating Plan (AOP).

The August 2025 24-Month Study projected the January 1, 2026, Lake Powell elevation to be less than 3,575 feet and at or above 3,525 feet and the Lake Mead elevation to be at or above 1,025 feet. Consistent with Section 6.C.1 of the Interim Guidelines, and Section 6.E of the 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD, the operational tier for Lake Powell in WY 2026 is the Mid-Elevation Release Tier and the water year release volume from Lake Powell is projected to be 7.48 maf. To protect a target elevation at Lake Powell of 3,525 feet, adjustments to Glen Canyon Dam monthly volume releases have been incorporated into the November 2025 24-Month Study and include an adjusted monthly release volume pattern for Glen Canyon Dam that will hold back a total of 0.598 maf in Lake Powell from December 2025 through April 2026. That same amount of water (0.598 maf) will be released later in the water year. Given the hydrologic variability of the Colorado River System, the actual water year 2026 operations, and being consistent with Section 6.E of the 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD, the projected release from Lake Powell in water year 2026 may be less than 7.48 maf.

On May 9, 2024, Reclamation published the 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD, which included modifications to Sections 2, 6, and 7 of the 2007 Interim Guidelines. The current 24-Month Study reflects these modifications in modeled operations.

On July 3, 2024, Reclamation signed the Glen Canyon Dam Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision (2024 LTEMP SEIS ROD[5]). The 2024 LTEMP SEIS ROD analyzed flow options to disrupt smallmouth bass and other warm water invasive non-native fish from establishing below Glen Canyon Dam by interrupting spawning and species expansion. Reclamation initiated these flows on August 3, 2025 and returned to normal operations on October 21, 2025.

---

[4] 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS ROD is available online at: https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/documents/NearTermColoradoRiverOperations/20240507-Near-termColoradoRiverOperations-SEIS-RecordofDecision-signed_508.pdf.

[5] 2024 LTEMP SEIS ROD is available online at: https://www.usbr.gov/uc/DocLibrary/EnvironmentalImpactStatements/GlenCanyonDamLong-TermExperimentalManagementPlan/20240703-GCDLTEMP-FinalSEIS-RecordofDecision-508-AMWD.pdf

The anticipated monthly release volume for December is 500,000 acre-feet, or the volume necessary to release the water year volume of 7.48 million are-feet. The January volume is anticipated to be 625,000 acre-feet and the hourly pattern will be confirmed with a subsequent directive toward the end of November.

In addition to daily scheduled fluctuations for power generation, the instantaneous releases from Glen Canyon Dam may also fluctuate to provide 40 megawatts (MW) of system regulation. These instantaneous release adjustments stabilize the electrical generation and transmission system and translate to a range of about 1,300 cfs above or below the hourly scheduled release rate. Under normal system conditions, fluctuations for regulation are typically short lived and generally balance out over the hour with minimal or no noticeable impacts on downstream river flow conditions.

Releases from Glen Canyon Dam can also fluctuate beyond scheduled releases when called upon to respond to unscheduled power outages or power system emergencies. Depending on the severity of the system emergency, the response from Glen Canyon Dam can be significant, within the full range of the operating capacity of the power plant for as long as is necessary to maintain balance in the transmission system. Glen Canyon Dam currently maintains 30 MW (approximately 1,300 cfs) of generation capacity in reserve in order to respond to a system emergency even when generation rates are already high. System emergencies occur infrequently and typically require small responses from Glen Canyon Dam. However, these responses can have a noticeable impact on the river downstream of Glen Canyon Dam.

Inflow Forecasts and Model Projections

The forecast for water year 2026 unregulated inflow to Lake Powell, issued on December 1, 2025, by the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center, projects that the most probable (median) unregulated inflow volume in water year 2026 will be 7.04 maf (73 percent of average).

In addition to the December 2025 24-Month Study based on the Most Probable inflow scenario, Reclamation has conducted runs to determine a possible range of reservoir elevations. The 24-Month Study minimum, most, and maximum probable scenarios were used to determine the range of probable outcomes. The probable minimum and probable maximum model runs are conducted simultaneously in January, April, August, and October, or when necessary to incorporate changing conditions. The probable minimum inflow scenario reflects a dry hydrologic condition which statistically would be exceeded 90 percent of the time. The most probable inflow scenario reflects a median hydrologic condition which statistically would be exceeded 50 percent of the time. The probable maximum inflow scenario reflects a wet hydrologic condition which statistically would be exceeded 10 percent of the time. There is approximately an 80 percent probability that a future elevation will fall inside the range of the minimum and maximum inflow scenarios. Additionally, there are possible inflow scenarios that would result in reservoir elevations falling outside the ranges indicated in these reports.

The December forecast for water year 2026 ranges from a minimum probable of 4.24 maf (44 percent of average) to a maximum probable of 14.8 maf (154 percent of average) with the most probable forecast for water year 2026 of 7.04 maf (73 percent of average). There is a 10 percent chance that inflows could be higher than the current maximum probable forecast and a 10 percent chance that inflows could be lower than the minimum probable forecast.

Based on the current forecast of 7.04 maf unregulated inflow for water year 2026, the December 24-Month Study projects Lake Powell elevation will end water year 2026 near 3,526.40 feet with approximately 5.63 maf in storage (24 percent of capacity). Projections of end of water year 2026 elevation using the December minimum and November maximum inflow forecast results from the 24-Month Study model run are 3,492.54 feet and 3,610.90 feet, respectively. The annual release volume from Lake Powell during water year 2026 is 7.48 maf under the Mid-Elevation Release Tier as determined under Section 6.C.1 of the Interim Guidelines as determined by the Department of the Interior as described above.

Upper Colorado River Basin Hydrology

Upper Colorado River Basin regularly experiences significant year to year hydrologic variability. The 30-year average was updated in October 2022 from 1981 through 2010 to 1991 through 2020. Shifting the period of record decreased the average unregulated inflow 1.20 maf. The period 2000-2022 is the lowest 23-year period since the closure of Glen Canyon Dam in 1963, with an average unregulated inflow of 8.29 maf, or 93 percent of the 30-year average (1991-2020). (For comparison, the 1991-2020 total water year average is 9.60 maf.) The unregulated inflow during the 2000-2022 period ranged from a low of 2.64 maf (28 percent of average) in water year 2002 to a high of 15.97 maf (166 percent of average) in water year 2011. In water year 2021 unregulated inflow volume to Lake Powell was 3.50 maf (36 percent of average), the second driest year on record above 2002. Under the current most probable forecast, the total water year 2026 unregulated inflow to Lake Powell is projected to be 7.04 maf (73 percent of average).

At the beginning of water year 2026, total system storage in the Colorado River Basin was 21.8 maf (37 percent of 58.48 maf total system capacity). This is a decrease of 3.35 maf over the total storage at the beginning of water year 2025 when total system storage was 25.15 maf (43 percent of capacity). Since the beginning of water year 2000, total Colorado Basin storage has experienced year to year increases and decreases in response to wet and dry hydrology, ranging from a high of 94 percent of capacity at the beginning of 2000 to the beginning of water year 2023 with 19.55 maf (33 percent of capacity).