

Colorado River Storage Project Flaming Gorge Working Group Meeting Minutes August 18, 2026

Participation

This meeting was held Tuesday, August 18, 2026, starting at noon MT, in Vernal, UT and virtually via Microsoft Teams. Attendees are listed on the last page.

Purpose of Meeting

The purpose of these working group meetings is to inform the public and other interested parties on Reclamation's current and future operational plans and to gather input from the public and interested parties regarding resources associated with the dam [Flaming Gorge].

Introductions – Alex Pivarnik (Bureau of Reclamation)

This is the third Flaming Gorge Working Group meeting this year. The Flaming Gorge Working Group meeting is an important step in developing and communicating the Flaming Gorge Operations Plan.

Green River Research and Endangered Fish – Tildon Jones (Recovery)

Tildon started with a background on the listed fish, the threats to those species, the Recovery Program, and the native fish lifecycle in comparison to idealized flow and river temperatures.

The Recovery Program's 2026 request for moderately dry or drier classification prioritized 1) the smallmouth bass (SMB) flow spike, 2) the Colorado pikeminnow (CPM) base flow, and 3) the Larval Trigger Study Plan (LTSP).

In chronological order,

LTSP

The LTSP is intended to shift flows from the Yampa peak to being timed based on the presence of Razorback Sucker, with the intent to push larvae into wetlands. Razorback Sucker larvae were observed April 28th (earliest on record). Releases were requested to follow an average scenario and started May 4th at 1 week duration of approx. 8,600 cfs. Peak observed at the Jensen of approx. 10,900 cfs on May 8th. Wetlands filled during the spring were Stewart Lake, Stirrup, Johnson Bottom, and Old Charley Wash.

SMB Flow Spike

There are three invasive fish species that Recovery focuses on, with SMB being one of the highest concerns. SMB have better reproductive success in average to drier years. The SMB flow spike request focuses on temperature and flow. The SMB flow spike consists of 72 hours of Flaming Gorge release at power plant capacity. Flow spike was completed on June 8-11th, which was earlier than average.

CPM Base Flow

The CPM base flows are intended to improve survival and recruitment of young CPM by targeting flows at Jensen, based on hydrologic classification, through the end of September. On average CPM emerge on July 3rd, but larvae were observed on June 17th this year. Releases started around June 23rd. Target at Jensen of 2,000- 2,600 cfs. Currently collecting data on results.

Questions

During LTSP section, there was a question on comparison of results from previous years. Tildon responded with it is a dry year, but the results are impressive for the hydrology that has been observed.

During LTSP section, there was a question on if nonnative fish can come from the wetland. Tildon responded that nonnative fish are screened out and not released back to the river when draining the wetland.

During LTSP section, there was a question on using hatchery fish for less cost. Tildon responded that the LTSP experiment is the last step to completing the lifecycle of the native fish population so that they can survive without the need for continuous fish stocking.

During LTSP section, there was a question about maturity rate. Tildon responded that has been observed that Razorback Suckers return to spawning bars for breeding in around 4-6 years.

During SMB section, there was a question about mortality rate of juvenile smallmouth bass. Tildon responded that there is significant mortality of young bass and eggs when nests are flushed downstream due to the experiment.

Question on what was Recovery “flows” or what was DROA flows or if these releases are used in conjunction with each other. Tildon responded that they are used in conjunction with each other, but believes Reclamation plans to continue DROA releases into the fall and winter.

Question on if there are fluctuations limits at the Jensen. Amanda Becker responded that all power schedules are monitored to limit fluctuation at the Jensen from the Flaming Gorge release.

Current and Forecasted Hydrology – Cal Rockey (Colorado Basin River Forecast Center)

The antecedent soil conditions, from fall 2025, can be an indicator of runoff efficiency in the spring. The Green and Yampa were both below normal this fall, with conditions in the 70-90% range for most of the Basins. Fall soil moisture conditions are similar to last year. Usually, there would not be much change in the soil moisture conditions over the winter, but due to extremely warm conditions, both Basins have seen rain instead of snow accumulation, even at higher elevations.

Water Year (WY) 2026 precipitation in the Upper Green is 95% of average and 98% of average above Fontenelle for year to date. The Yampa Basin is at 78% of average. These conditions look better than they actually are, as so much has fallen as rain rather than building snowpack.

Temperatures have been above normal. Record high temperatures observed in December and March.

Modeled snowpack conditions in early January were at or above median in the Upper Green, but accumulation stalled after that and stayed below record after for much of the winter.

The Yampa's snowpack has been below median for the year and below record starting in February.

Table 1. April-July Observed Volume in thousand acre-ft (kaf) / percent of 1991-2020 Average (Presented by Cal Rockey, CBRFC)

	2026 April- July Observed
Fontenelle	318 / 43%
Flaming Gorge	328 / 34%
Yampa- Deerlodge	326 / 27%

The peak flow for the Yampa was much below average (4,110 cfs, 32% of average). Peak occurred on 5/20/2026.

In the near term, the August precipitation is above average for the Green River basin, but below average for the Yampa River basin.

Temperatures are expected to continue to be above average with below average chances for precipitation over the next two weeks.

Questions

A question was asked about if the Yampa River would be dry without releases from Recovery's storage in upper reservoirs. Cal Rockey confirmed that to be correct. Tildon added the Recovery hydrologist has been watching the situation closely and rationed the storage to last through the summer.

A question was asked about what El Nino would bring this winter. Cal responded that El Nino patterns are not correlated with a large runoff volume on the Green River. Brenda Alcorn offered to provide additional information that she can share after the meeting to those that request it.

Flaming Gorge Reservoir Operations – Amanda Becker (Bureau of Reclamation),

Amanda reviewed Flaming Gorge operations, starting with a background of the project. Amanda reviewed the geographic scope and where much of the compliance is measured.

Amanda reviewed April-July hydrology, confirming the Upper Green was in the Dry Classification and the Yampa River was in the dry condition.

Amanda reviewed the Average classification scenario that was presented in the spring meetings and how that related to the observed operations, as per already discussed by Tildon. She continued to discuss current operations for the CPM summer baseflows, which are currently being completed with some fluctuations. Autumn/Winter base flow operations expect to release approx. 2,150 cfs. Releases during the Transition Period (March-April) are modeled to be consistent with preceding base flow period.

Amanda also made everyone aware of the upcoming Utah Fish Monitoring patterns and monitoring the CBRFC's website for release pattern changes.

Amanda reviewed observed DROA operations to date. Observed DROA releases (April-July) have been 308 kaf to date.

Questions/Comments

Questions:

Question on DROA and Lake Powell releases. Alex Pivarnik responded that Lake Powell releases are on track with the DROA plan and expected to be 6.0 million acre-feet (maf) for the water year, which is a reduction of approx. 1.48 maf.

Question on the range of DROA releases of 660 kaf – 1.0 maf and are we officially using the full range. Alex Pivarnik responded that we are still using a range of releases and will use the flexibility under the Record of Decision for Flaming Gorge for the remaining DROA releases.

Question on DROA recovery and when would that occur. Val Deppe confirmed that there is a stipulation in the DROA agreement for recovery, but there is not a specified timeframe on the recovery of DROA releases.

Question on if DROA is possible for next year. Val Deppe responded that it is too early to know what the hydrology will be next year and there is no guarantee that there will not be DROA releases in the future.

Comments:

There were discussions on DROA agreement definitions of recovery of DROA releases.

There were discussions about Flaming Gorge reservoir elevations and the marina effects. Negative effects are felt by the reduced water elevation. Each foot in elevation reduced has substantial impact on local business.

Comments on DROA agreements and the request that only one DROA release occur before release recovery be achieved.

Comments on the impacts of the spring peak operations on properties along the river.

Next Meeting

March 2027.

Attendees

- Bryant, Becki M
- Joe B (Unverified)
- John Walrath (Unverified)
- Troy Thompson (Unverified)
- Clegg, Kevin - FS, UT (External)
- Baxter, Rick J
- Amy Haas (Unverified)
- Bonomo, Cherette - FS, UT (External)
- Lucerne Valley Marina (Unverified)
- Natalie Boren (Unverified)
- Rowland, Ryan C
- Bryan Seppie (External)
- Maksimowski, Ferdinand (External)
- woody bair - flaming gorge resort (Unverified)
- Callister, Kathleen E
- Gibney, Nicole (Nicki)
- Bryan Engelbert (Unverified)
- Andy Colosimo (External)
- Garner, Ally (Lummis)
- Fryer, Derek (External)
- Luke, Ryan E
- Henrie, Gary S
- Lucerne Valley Marina (Unverified)
- Todea, Nathaniel
- Cat McClure (External)
- Cunningham, Colleen, OSE
- Joe B (Unverified)
- Ashley Nielson
- Lucerne Valley Marina (Unverified)
- Emily Young
- John Rauch
- Joe Duncan - WY SEO (Unverified)
- Chris Brown, Wyoming (Unverified)
- Bowman, Julia, OSE
- Hines, Brian A
- Wy SEO, Mel Fegler (Unverified)
- Suman Chitrakar, WY SEO (Unverified)
- Layne (Unverified)
- Bryan Engelbert (Unverified)

- Walker, Alexander E
- Roger Pearson
- Traci (Unverified)
- Wendy Crowther (External)
- Stahli, Julie W
- Matt Lucas (Unverified)
- Lucerne Valley Marina
- Traci (Unverified)
- Andy Matz
- Hedges, Rachel
- Stephanie (Unverified)
- Alcorn, Brenda - CBRFC
- Becker, Amanda – USBR
- Rockey, Cal- CBRFC
- Callahan, Mike - USBR
- Deppe, Val - USBR
- Detlor, Jordan - UDWR
- Jones, Tildon - Recovery Program
- Tony Valdez
- Jen Valdez
- T. Wright Dickinson
- Pivarnik, Alex - USBR