



Subcommittee on Imported Water

# Report on Bureau of Reclamation's Water Year 2026 Drought Response Operations

Item 3c

April 28, 2026

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# Item 3c Report on Bureau of Reclamation's WY 2026 Drought Response Operations

## Subject

Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) Drought Response Operations Plan (DROP) to protect Glen Canyon Dam infrastructure through WY 2026

## Purpose

Provide update on Reclamation's proposed action to increase releases from Flaming Gorge and reduce Lake Powell releases

## Next Steps

Monitor Reclamation's final action on WY 2026 DROP

# Overview

## KEY CONTEXT

The 2019 Drought Response Operations Agreement (DROA) expired December 31, 2025 — its authority over Upper Initial Unit releases is **disputed**.

## Current Situation

### Drought Emergency

Historic drought and record-low snowpack threaten Lake Powell's minimum power pool elevation (3,490 ft).

### Reclamation's Action

Invoking Section 6(E) of the 2024 SEIS ROD to reduce WY 2026 Powell release 7.48 → 6.0 MAF, plus Flaming Gorge release of 660,000 AF–1 MAF.

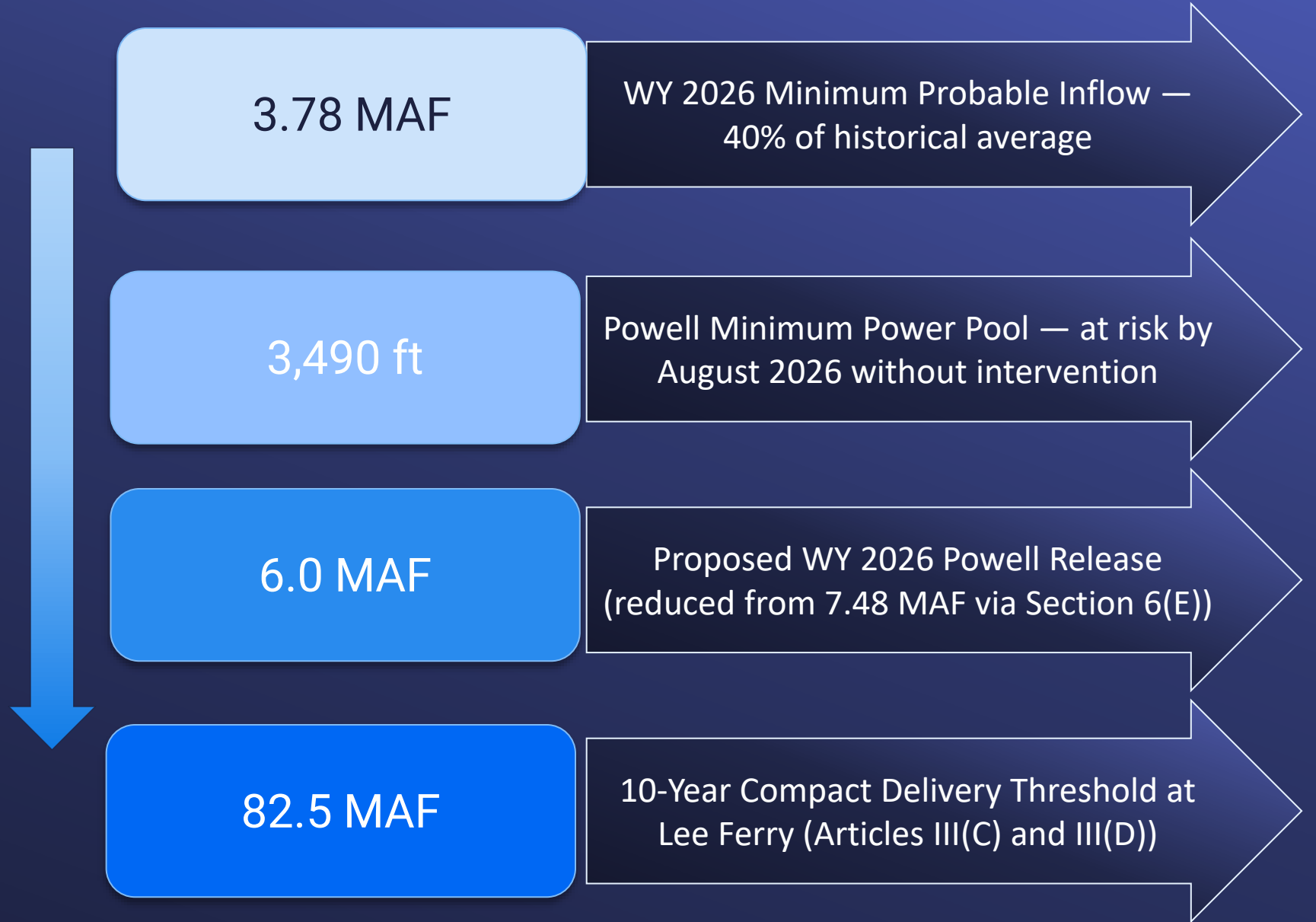
### Compact Compliance Risk

Lower Basin states acknowledge the need for action but raised Compact concerns — a 6.0 MAF release will likely cause a deficiency under Articles III(C) and III(D).

### Final Decision Imminent

Reclamation's final Drought Response Operations Plan decision is expected the week of **April 28, 2026**.

# Key Numbers



# Current Colorado River System Conditions

## MIN PROBABLE FORECAST

# 2.77 MAF

29% of 30-yr average  
Actual runoff known end of June


Most Probable Inflow = median forecast scenario. Min Probable = lower-bound planning threshold.

# April 2026 Basin Conditions

 WY 2026 · MOST PROBABLE INFLOW



# 3.78 MAF

40% of average — a critically dry water year placing significant strain on Colorado River system storage.

 RUNOFF TIMING

# ~4 wks early

Record-breaking March heat triggered runoff nearly a month ahead of schedule, compressing the snowmelt window.

 LAKE POWELL · AUG 2026  CRITICAL

# 3,490 ft

24-Month Study projects Powell could fall to minimum power pool by August without upstream intervention.

 FLAMING GORGE · UPPER INITIAL UNIT

# ~3.1 MAF

83% full

Largest UIU (83% full) Reclamation can use for supplemental releases above Lake Powell for protection.

# Drought Response Operations Plan

## Reclamation's Proposed Actions

No releases from Blue Mesa/Aspinall Unit or Navajo Reservoir due to low water levels and existing storage contract limitations (disputed by Lower Basin)



Flaming Gorge releases: 660,000 AF to 1.0 MAF from April 2026 through April 2027, under the 2019 DROA framework

Lake Powell release reduction:  
7.48 MAF → 6.0 MAF for WY 2026



Combined effect projected to raise Powell elevation approximately 54 feet – reaching at least 3,500 ft by April 2027

# Lower Basin States' Comment Letter on DROA



**Colorado River Basin States Representatives of  
Arizona, California, and Nevada**

- Principal objection: DROA is inapplicable — expired December 31, 2025; DROA improperly treats it as governing authority for proposed UIU releases.
- Poor basin hydrology has been apparent for months. Lower Basin States urge Reclamation to expedite UIU releases without delay.
- Lower Basin States object to the 6.0 MAF Powell release and reserve all rights relating to the resulting Compact deficiency under Articles III(C) and III(D).

Key Actions & Timeline

# Next Steps

The DROP actions will not affect MWD's 2026 deliveries or ICS access

