



One Water and Adaptation Committee

# Update on Basin States Discussions Regarding Post-2026 Operational Guidelines

Item 6d

October 13, 2025

# Item 6d Update on Basin States Discussions Regarding Post-2026 Operational Guidelines

## Subject

Development of the Post-2026 Operational Guidelines for Lake Powell and Lake Mead

## Purpose

Update on the Bureau of Reclamation's Post-2026 Operational Guidelines environmental impact statement and related Basin States discussions

## Next Steps

Give regular updates to Board and receive Board direction on Post-2026 Basin States discussions

# Context for Post-2026 Operating Guidelines



Expiring in 2026:

2007 Interim Guidelines  
2019 Drought Contingency Plan  
Treaty Minute 323



Bureau of Reclamation conducting  
Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)



Colorado River Basin States working to  
develop consensus on operational  
elements of post-2026 guidelines



# Why This Matters for Metropolitan

- Ensuring sufficient releases from Lake Powell
- Protecting Lake Mead – deliveries, hydropower generation, and Hoover Dam infrastructure
- Determining California's share of Lower Basin reductions

# Bureau of Reclamation's Timeline



# Alternatives to be Analyzed in Draft EIS

Federal Authorities

Federal Contingencies

Cooperative Conservation

Basin Hybrid

No Action



# Key Operational Elements Being Addressed



Lake Powell releases



Shortages in Lower Basin



Storage in Lake Mead and  
possibly Lake Powell



Mexico parity in sharing  
surpluses and shortages

“What we’re hearing from our counterparts is they may be unwilling to reduce their uses in some dry years. It appears they believe that this gap should somehow be filled by the Upper Basin water, using any means necessary.” **Becky Mitchell, Colorado’s Rep**

"This is a moment that demands urgency, collaboration, and transparency. We remain committed to working with Basin states, tribes, Mexico, and stakeholders to ensure a sustainable and resilient future for the Colorado River system“ **Interior Department Statement**

“Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and New Mexico have not agreed, nor have they proposed, any mandatory, certain and verifiable reductions in their water use. Not. One. Single. Gallon. Instead, they propose that water-use reductions needed to save the Colorado River come solely from Arizona, California and Nevada.” **Tom Buschatzke, Arizona’s Representative**

## Current Consensus Efforts: Public Remarks



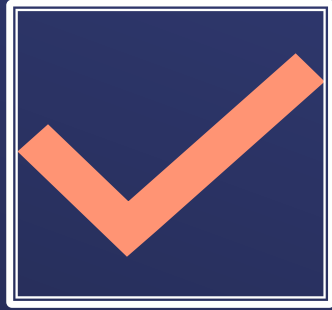
*The 1922 Colorado  
River Compact is  
Now the Obvious  
Elephant in the  
Negotiating Room*

By Eric Kuhn, Anne  
Castle, John Fleck,  
Kathryn Sorensen,  
Jack Schmidt, and  
Katherine Tara

## From Recent White Paper

- “Reclamation could reduce releases from Powell to protect the 3500-ft reservoir elevation...**likely trigger[ing] the dreaded 1922 Colorado River Compact tripwire**”
- “The Lower Division states are likely to litigate if the 10-yr average wire is tripped”
- “[T]here is a very real chance that the 10-yr running average will be 82.78 MAF, just a hair above the tripwire, one year from now”
- “If Reclamation exercises its authority to reduce Lake Powell deliveries to as low as 6 MAF, the tripwire is triggered even earlier.”

# Diverging Pathways



## 7-States Consensus

Predictable Lake Powell releases

Certainty regarding Lower Basin  
shortages

Storage in Lake Mead

Improved position for securing new  
treaty minute with Mexico



## Without Consensus

Risk of federal unilateral action

Reclamation may default to 1970 Long  
Range Operating Criteria for Powell  
operations

Significantly increased litigation risk

# California Interests



---

Protect California's priority re: 1968 Colorado River Basin Project Act

---

Ensure Compact/Colorado River Storage Project Act-compliant Powell releases or some reasonable alternative that provides certainty

---

Address structural deficit and Lower Basin reductions fairly

---

Strengthen intra-California coordination

# Next Steps

Update and receive board direction throughout the process

Continue Basin  
States negotiations



Provide input to  
Reclamation on  
alternatives



Prepare for both  
consensus and  
unilateral federal  
actions

