



Colorado River Resources

• Colorado River Management Report

Summary

This report provides a summary of activities related to management of Metropolitan's Colorado River resources for March 23, 2026–April 20, 2026.

Purpose

Informational

Detailed Report

Bureau of Reclamation – April 24-Month Study

The Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) April 24-Month Study shows that inflow conditions into Lake Powell are critically low and represent the most pressing near-term risk to the system since the drought started in 2000. This study finds and forecasts:

- March observed unregulated inflow was 350,000 acre-feet (AF) –59 percent of the 30-year average
- April 2026 forecast: 550,000 AF – 61 percent of average
- April–July 2026 runoff season forecast: 1.40 million AF (MAF) – 22 percent of average
- WY 2026 total unregulated inflow forecast: 3.87 MAF – 40 percent of average

The April–July forecast is particularly alarming, representing roughly one-fifth of normal snowmelt-driven inflow during the peak runoff season.

The April 24- Month Study projects a steep and sustained decline in Lake Powell storage throughout Water Year (WY) 2026. The study incorporates an adjusted monthly release pattern that held back 598,000 AF of planned releases from Glen Canyon Dam for the period of December 2025 through April 2026 to protect the 3,525-foot target elevation. Lake Powell is projected to fall below the 3,500-foot infrastructure protection floor by August 2026 and reaching a low point of approximately 3,455 feet by March 2027 without any additional actions. This trajectory underscores the urgency of the 2024 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement Section 6(E) consultation process currently underway to keep Powell above 3,500 feet.

Lake Mead is forecasted to remain near the 1,050-foot range through the remainder of calendar year 2026, but declines steeply through WY 2027. As Mead approaches the 1,035-foot range, the study projects only 29 percent of generating units available from April 2026 through November 2027, with capacity dropping to approximately 380 megawatts (MW), compared to over 1,300 MW at higher lake levels.

Bureau of Reclamation – Draft Drought Response Operations Plan

Reclamation announced a set of near-term drought response actions on April 18 in response to continued deterioration in hydrologic conditions across the Colorado River Basin, including historically low snowpack and projected inflows to Lake Powell at approximately 29 percent of average. System storage is currently estimated at

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approximately 36 percent of capacity, and Reclamation has indicated that without intervention, Lake Powell could fall below the minimum power pool level later this year.

To address these risks, Reclamation is proposing two primary operational actions. First, increase releases from Flaming Gorge Reservoir into Lake Powell of between 660,000 AF to 1.0 MAF by April 2027. Second, a reduction in releases from Lake Powell to Lake Mead from the planned 7.48 MAF to 6.0 MAF for WY 2026, a decrease of approximately 1.48 MAF from prior operating assumptions. These actions are intended to stabilize Lake Powell elevations and protect infrastructure at Glen Canyon Dam.

Reclamation has acknowledged that reducing releases from Lake Powell will accelerate declines at Lake Mead, increasing the likelihood of deeper shortage conditions in the Lower Basin and reducing hydropower generation at Hoover Dam.

Develop Post-2026 Guidelines and Negotiate Implementation Agreements: Provide Input that Shapes Reclamation's Selected Alternative

Since the federal deadline for a basin states consensus passed on February 14, parties within Arizona were working to reach internal alignment. Over the past week, the Lower Basin states have reengaged and begun advancing discussions on options for near-term operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead. These discussions have focused on Lake Powell releases, operations of the Upper Initial Units, Lower Basin reductions, and Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS).

These discussions are occurring under compressed timelines. Operations beginning October 1, 2026, will be governed by the post-2026 guidelines, and as a result, any agreement among the Lower Basin states would need to be reached within a matter of weeks to be reflected in the federal Record of Decision. While a number of important implementation details remain under active negotiation, the Lower Basin states have made meaningful progress toward a shared understanding of what near-term operations could look like. This includes discussion of options for making reductions of 1.5 MAF, and additional amounts when needed.

Despite this progress, significant issues remain unresolved. In particular, there is not yet agreement on how Lower Basin reductions would be implemented across users or provisions for storage of new ICS-like water. As a result, the Lower Basin states have not finalized a proposed agreement, but discussions are ongoing with the goal of identifying a viable path forward in advance of federal decision-making on post-2026 operations.