

One Water and Adaptation Committee

Update on Basin States Discussions Regarding Post-2026 Operational Guidelines

Item 6a July 7, 2025

Subject

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

Item 7a Update on Basin States Discussions Regarding Post-2026 Operational Guidelines

Purpose

Update on Basin States discussion regarding development of Post-2026 Operational Guidelines

Next Steps

Continue efforts to seek a consensus among Basin States that protects Metropolitan's Colorado River interests

Status of Basin States Discussions

March 2024

Lower Basin and Upper Basin submit separate alternatives

Now

Basin States explore Supply-Driven alternative

Biden Administration Alternatives Report issued - includes neither Basin's alternative



U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Post-2026 NEPA Timeline



Supply-Driven Alternative v. Current Ops

Lake Powell releases based on:

- Average of three previous years' hydrology
- Forecasts and reservoir elevations

Upper Basin uses limited by:

- Fixed percentage of natural flow
- Colorado River Compact

Lower Basin and Upper Basin involvement:

- "Divorce" of basins
- Coordinated operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead

Without a Basins States Consensus

The Secretary of Interior would use unilateral authority to operate Lake Powell and Lake Mead if the Basin States don't reach consensus

Potential Risks and Uncertainties

- Operations could default to something like the 1970 Long Range Operating Criteria – 8.23 maf fixed annual Powell releases
- Lake Powell more likely to fall below the infrastructure protection elevation, leading to risk of reduced releases to Lower Basin
- Releases from Lake Powell likely to fall below volume required by Colorado River Compact, increasing interstate litigation risk
- Reaching new shortage sharing agreement with Mexico becomes more difficult

Projected Water Year Flows Below Compact Requirements 10-yr Aggregate: Lees Ferry Gage + Paria River Gage

Forecasted Powell Release vs. Compact Requirements

The Central Arizona Project shared a similar graphic at a recent Arizona Reconsultation Committee. Sometime during WY 2027, releases from Lake Powell are forecast to fall short of the 82.5 maf/10-year average.



