



THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Board Report

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 April 20, 2026 – May 14, 2026.

Purpose

Informational

Detailed Report

Lower Division States May 1 Proposal

The Lower Division States submitted a proposal to the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) on May 1, outlining a framework for short-term operations of the Colorado River system for calendar years 2026 through 2028. The proposal is intended to provide interim operational stability while longer-term post-2026 operating guidelines continue to be developed.

The proposal includes coordinated operational measures for Lake Powell, Lake Mead, and the Bureau of Reclamation's three Colorado River Storage Project Upper Initial Units (UIUs) that are reservoirs upstream of Lake Powell. The Lower Division States propose that Reclamation release at least 1.0 million acre-feet (MAF) of additional water from the UIUs into Lake Powell through April 2027, with corresponding adjustments to Lake Powell releases if those volumes are not achieved. The proposal also recommends modifications to UIU operating targets to prioritize movement of water to Lake Powell and ultimately Lake Mead during critically dry conditions.

For Lake Powell operations, the proposal contemplates maintaining a 6.0 MAF release in water year 2026, the lowest release amount since Lake Powell was initially filled, with potential additional releases if reservoir elevations improve. For water year 2027, Lake Powell releases would depend on reservoir elevations at the beginning of the water year, with scheduled releases of either 7.0 or 8.0 MAF. The proposal includes iterative operational adjustments during the year to avoid Lake Powell declining below the minimum power associated with Glen Canyon Dam infrastructure risks. In addition, the proposal requests that Interior develop a long-term plan to address operational and structural risks at Glen Canyon Dam.

The proposal includes Lower Basin reductions totaling 1.25 MAF annually in 2027 and 2028, allocated among Arizona (760 TAF), California (440 TAF), and Nevada (50 TAF). The proposal allows reductions to be satisfied through reduced water orders and/or the use of Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS), subject to certain limitations. The proposal also contemplates consultation regarding additional protective actions if Lake Mead projections decline below an elevation of 1,010 feet.

The proposal would extend and modify the existing ICS framework through 2028, including new evaporation and system assessments on ICS balances, increased state storage limits, and additional flexibility for ICS withdrawals at lower Lake Mead elevations. The proposal also establishes a new Lower Basin Offset Pool intended to provide flexibility to conserve water early to avoid future mandatory reductions beyond 1.25 MAF.

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In addition, the proposal establishes a separate Tribal Firming and Offset Pool intended to support federal tribal trust responsibilities in Arizona. The proposal also includes provisions addressing interstate exchanges of augmented water, operational flexibility for additional UIU releases, and federal investment in Colorado River system infrastructure improvements.

The proposal is preliminary in nature and includes reservation of rights and non-waiver language. Discussions among the Lower Division States and Reclamation remain ongoing.

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

Staff also participated in recent meetings and briefings regarding Reclamation's anticipated approach to development of a preferred alternative for the post-2026 operational guidelines. In those discussions, Reclamation indicated that it is proceeding on an accelerated schedule, with consultations on a preferred alternative expected to begin in mid-May, publication of a Final Environmental Impact Statement anticipated in late June, and issuance of a Record of Decision currently anticipated by late July.

Reclamation also indicated that it anticipates adopting operational guidelines for 2027 and 2028 in connection with the Record of Decision later this summer and is continuing to review recent proposals submitted by the Upper and Lower Basin States for possible incorporation into those near-term operations.

Based on the discussions, Reclamation appears to be considering a framework that would allow operational determinations to be revisited periodically as hydrologic conditions evolve and additional consensus-based agreements are developed. Discussions generally focused on coordinated operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead, Lower Basin shortage and surplus operations, storage and delivery of ICS, and potential operational actions above Lake Powell.

Staff will continue to participate in development of the post-2026 operational guidelines and advocate for Metropolitan's Colorado River interests throughout the process.