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 September 24 – October 21, 2025.

Purpose

Informational

Detailed Report

Develop Post-2026 Guidelines and Negotiate Implementation Agreements: Provide input that shapes U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) selected alternative

Colorado River Basin States (Basin States) Meetings

The Basin States are meeting frequently in an effort to reach consensus on an alternative for Post-2026 operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead by the Interior Department's deadline of November 11, 2025. The Interior Department and Reclamation support the Basin States' effort to reach a consensus alternative that may be incorporated into the Post-2026 Guidelines. The Basin States have not yet reached agreement on the key operational elements of the Post-2026 Guidelines including criteria for releases from Lake Powell, Lower Basin reduction triggers, storage in Lake Mead, and whether and under what conditions the Upper Basin will reduce water uses. Metropolitan staff participates in these meetings as advisors to California's principal representative in the Basin States negotiations, JB Hamby, in his role as Chair of the Colorado River Board of California.

Develop Post-2026 Guidelines and Negotiate Implementation Agreements: Negotiate implementation agreements that protect and benefit Metropolitan's interests

Lower Basin Meetings

California, Arizona, and Nevada are working together to reach a Lower Basin consensus regarding operational elements of Lake Mead for the Post-2026 Guidelines including Lower Basin water use reductions; storage of conserved water (like Intentionally Created Surplus [ICS]), including augmentation water that may be exchanged with interstate partners; and how any surpluses would be allocated. Metropolitan staff participates in these meetings along with representatives of other Lower Basin contractors and states.

California 440 Meetings

California, Arizona, and Nevada have tentatively agreed to reduce Lower Basin water use by 1.5 million acre-feet (maf) under most system conditions to address evaporation and other system losses—often referred to as the structural deficit. The 1.5 maf of reductions includes 250,000 acre-feet (af) that is contingent on Mexico's participation at past levels. California's share of the 1.5 maf would be 440,000 af (440). The California contractors have started meeting to develop commitments to meet California's 440. Metropolitan is working with the other contractors to develop principles for sharing California's Colorado River reductions in the Post-2026 Guidelines. The agencies have agreed to develop a proposal for sharing reduction by this November. Staff will provide updates and receive board direction on the process as it moves forward.

Lake Powell Elevation 3,500 feet

Reclamation has started monthly meetings with the Basin States because the September 24-Montlh Study showed the potential for Lake Powell elevations to go below elevation 3,500 feet by August 2026 in driest 10 percent of traces. Section 6(E) of the 2024 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision (SEIS) provides that the Secretary will "begin planning to reduce releases, as needed, to not less than 6.0 maf from Lake Powell in the Water Year to maintain elevation of 3,500 feet." The SEIS specifies "Reclamation will consider all tools that are available" to maintain Lake Powell elevation above 3,500 feet. Reclamation is required to coordinate any additional operating decisions with the Basin States, Tribes, Mexico, and certain contractors, including Metropolitan.

Reclamation is also considering adjusting monthly releases at Glen Canyon Dam to address the 24-Month Study forecast that Lake Powell will fall below elevation 3,525 feet, the elevation identified for protection in the 2019 Drought Contingency Plan, Drought Response Operations Agreement. That agreement is among the Upper Division States through the Upper Colorado River Commission and the Interior Department.

For context to understand the risk of Reclamation taking actions to protect Glen Canyon Dam infrastructure through any combination of adjustments to monthly releases from Lake Powell, additional releases from Colorado River Storage Project initial reservoirs above Lake Powell, and reduced releases to the Lower Basin, it is relevant to compare the upcoming year's forecasted runoff with the water year (WY) that ended in September. In the minimum probable (driest 10 percent) forecast for the September 24-Month Study, inflows into Lake Powell would be 42 percent of average in WY 2026. In WY 2025, inflows into Lake Powell were 49 percent of average even though snowpack was 85 percent of average. If Reclamation reduces Lake Powell releases, it could result in Lake Mead elevations declining below 1,035 feet which would reduce Hoover power generation, and elevation 1,025 feet, the elevation below ICS cannot be taken under the current guidelines. If inflow is in the driest range in WY 2026, it will also put pressure for water users in the Lower Basin to commit to additional reductions in the near term.

Alamo and New River Applications

The Alamo River and New River are located in the Imperial Valley and flow into the Salton Sea. These two rivers carry agricultural runoff from farms that have been irrigated with Imperial Irrigation District's (IID) allocation of Colorado River water. In the 1980's the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) found that IID was making unreasonable use of its water supplies causing excess runoff and flooding at the Salton Sea. The rivers continued to carry high volumes of water even after Metropolitan funded conservation efforts in IID starting in 1988.

By the late 1990s, California was facing pressure from the Basin States to reduce Colorado River water use to the State's 4.4 maf entitlement. California was using as much as 800,000 af more. Metropolitan anticipated the potential for the Alamo and New River flows to be recycled and reused to offset the Colorado River reductions. It filed water rights applications for up to 908,400 af per year of unappropriated water in the two rivers.

Approval of the Quantification Settlement Agreement in 2003 set a cap on IID's water use and provided funding to implement further on-farm and system conservation efforts. The state also enacted legislation making protection of the Salton Sea a state obligation and relieving the agricultural water agencies of responsibility for maintaining the elevation and salinity levels. In recent years, the river flows have fallen below 900,000 af and are expected to continue to decline. Also, the California Natural Resources Agency has constructed wetland and shallow water habitats using the flows at the river outlets to provide refuges for fish and birds.

Metropolitan has maintained its water rights applications on the two rivers over the past two decades. This year, staff at the State Board requested that Metropolitan withdraw the applications or appear at an administrative hearing to support the applications. Metropolitan staff concluded that the applications should be withdrawn after consideration of the high cost of treating the water for reuse and the limited supply available given the Natural Resources Agency's use of the rivers for its Salton Sea Management Program.

On September 23, Colorado River Resources staff advised the joint meeting of the One Water and Adaptation Committee and Subcommittee on Imported Water that the applications would be withdrawn, but discussions to make use of this supply would continue with IID and Coachella Valley Water District. The applications were cancelled effective October 15, 2025.