



One Water & Stewardship Committee

Report on the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Development of the Post-2026 Colorado River Operational Guidelines

Item 6b

March 11, 2024

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Report on the
U.S. Bureau of
Reclamation's
development of
post-2026 Colorado
River reservoir
operations guidelines

Subject

The Lower Basin Alternative for Post-2026 operations of Colorado River System reservoirs

Purpose

California, Arizona and Nevada developed a proposal for operation of the Colorado River System reservoirs to be analyzed as part of the Bureau of Reclamation's Post-2026 Operational Guidelines Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Next Steps

The Colorado River Basin States will continue efforts to develop a consensus alternative before Reclamation issues a draft EIS, expected in December 2024

Post-2026 Operational Guidelines

- The Interior Department's Scoping Report anticipates the Post-2026 Operational Guidelines will address:
 - Lower Basin water use provisions
 - Coordinated operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead
 - Storage and delivery of conserved water (e.g., Intentionally Created Surplus)



Basin States have made efforts in collaboration on Post-2026 Operational Guidelines, but no consensus yet

Scoping Comment Letters:

- Joint 7-States
- Lower Basin
- Upper Basin
- Metropolitan SNWA Central Arizona Project

Alternative Development:

- Lower Basin Alternative
- Upper Basin Alternative
- Other stakeholder alternatives

Still Potential for a Seven Basin States consensus preferred alternative



Collaboration & Consensus Building

Arizona, California, and Nevada's agreement to jointly propose the Lower Basin Alternative reflects the Lower Division's pivot from the high-profile disagreement early in 2023 to consensus on the path forward for operations of the Colorado River system reservoirs. Metropolitan shares the Lower Division States' commitment to working with the Upper Division States, Tribes, Mexico and NGOs to reach a consensus alternative.

Lower Basin Alternative - Key Concepts

The Alternative is designed to address impacts of drought and climate change through a holistic and sustainable approach to the coordinated operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead that improves predictability for water users



Addresses the structural deficit in the Lower Basin



Operates the reservoirs based on system contents rather than elevations at Lake Powell and Lake Mead



Shares water use reductions broadly



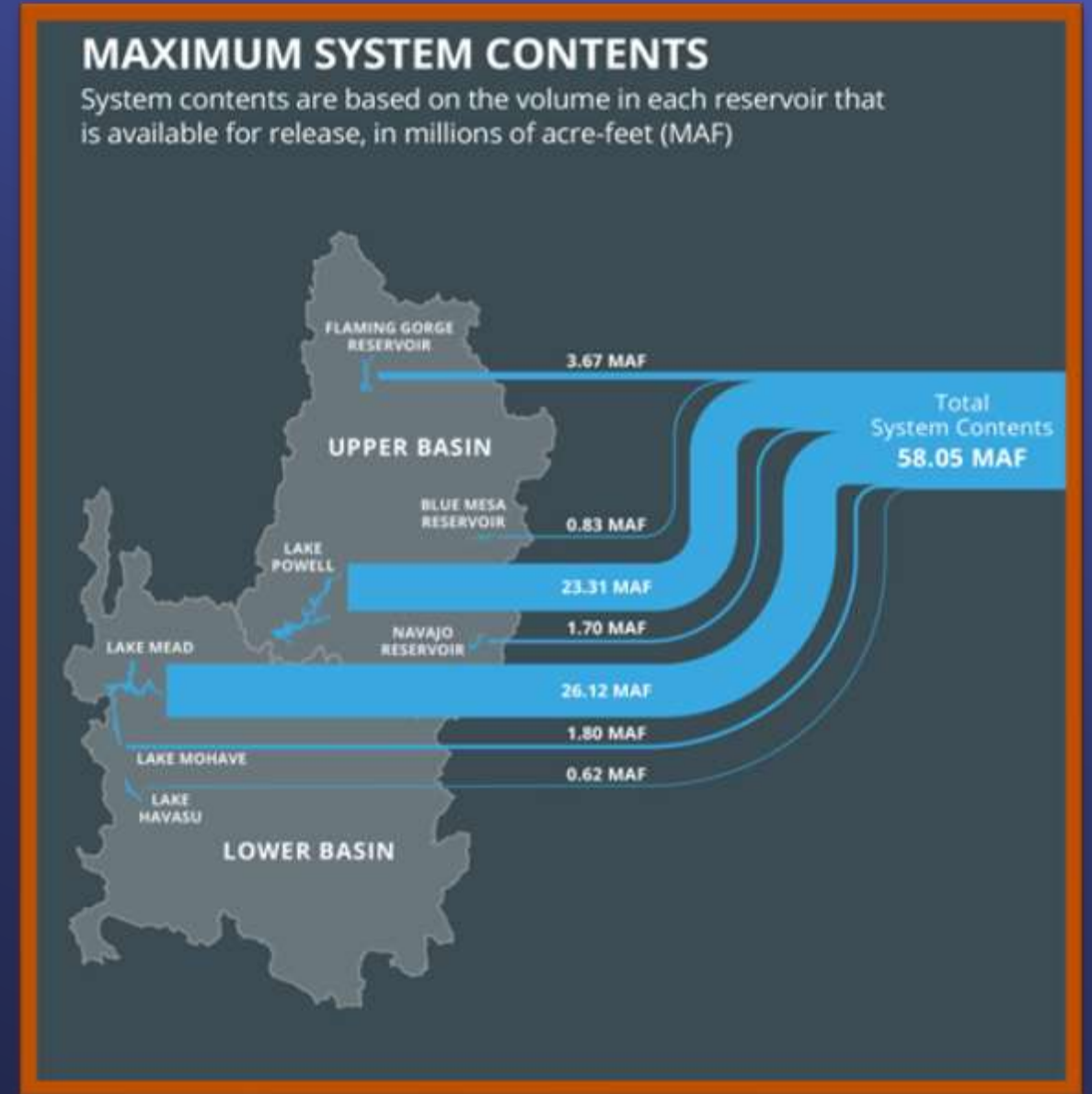
Includes provisions for storage and delivery of stored water



Establishes releases from Lake Powell that are adaptable to a broad range of hydrologies and respond to “hydrologic shortages”

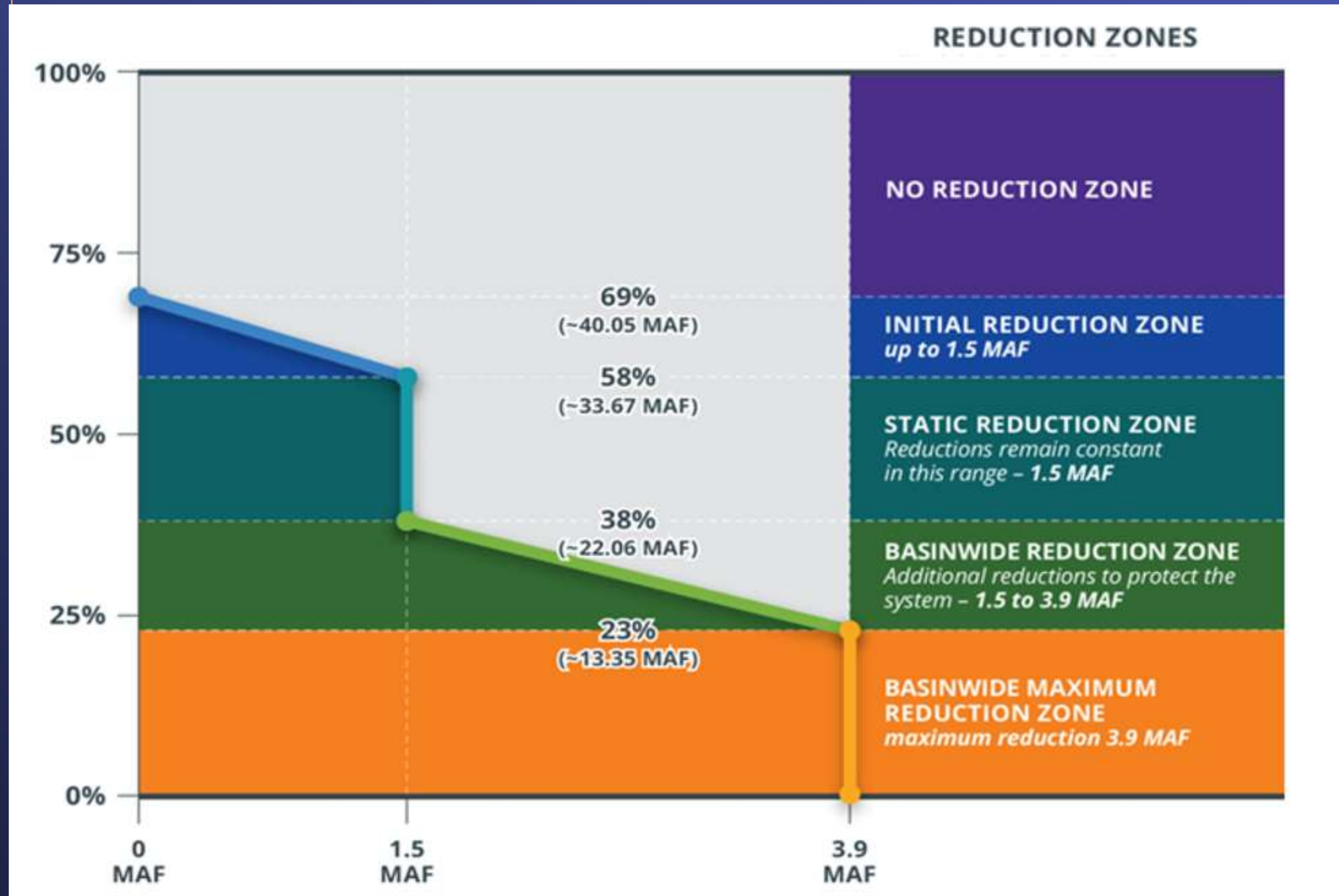
Total System Contents

- Shifts away from reliance on forecasts and elevations in Lake Powell and Lake Mead to determine reservoir releases and Lower Basin shortages
- “Total system contents” includes the contents of seven Colorado River System reservoirs: Flaming Gorge, Blue Mesa, Navajo, Powell, Mead, Mohave, and Havasu
- Provides a more holistic and sustainable approach to Colorado River reservoir operations



Lower Basin Alternative

Lower Basin Reductions & Basinwide Reductions at Lowest Conditions



Lower Basin Alternative

Lake Powell Release Regime – Upper Basin System Contents

Lake Powell Operational Tiers												
BOWY CRSP Live Capacity (%)	Operational Tier	CRSP Live Storage Volume (MAF)										
100	Equalization Release (release between 8.5 and 11.0 MAF*)	29.51										
80	Hydrologic Shortage-Based Release Regime <table><tr><td>UB Depletions* (3-yr Avg) (MAF)</td><td>Release (MAF)</td></tr><tr><td>< 3.80</td><td>7.0</td></tr><tr><td>3.81 - 4.30</td><td>7.5</td></tr><tr><td>4.31 - 4.80</td><td>8.0</td></tr><tr><td>> 4.80</td><td>8.5</td></tr></table> <small>*Includes net reservoir evaporation from Colorado River mainstem reservoirs.</small>	UB Depletions* (3-yr Avg) (MAF)	Release (MAF)	< 3.80	7.0	3.81 - 4.30	7.5	4.31 - 4.80	8.0	> 4.80	8.5	23.61
UB Depletions* (3-yr Avg) (MAF)	Release (MAF)											
< 3.80	7.0											
3.81 - 4.30	7.5											
4.31 - 4.80	8.0											
> 4.80	8.5											
30	Reduced Release Ramp (release between 6.0 and 7.0 MAF)	8.85										
20	Static Release (release no more than 6.0 MAF)	5.90										
0		0.00										

April Adjustment Release

*Flood control operations occur when Powell elevation is greater than 3,700-ft.
April Adjustment Release: Reservoirs balance when Mead's forecasted EOWY elevation is less than 1,000-ft while Powell's forecasted EOWY elevation is greater than 3,510-ft. Releases from Powell are constrained between 6.0 MAF and 11.0 MAF. The balancing determination is made each April and lasts through September.

Mexico's Participation

- Any participation by Mexico will be determined in a separate process between the US and Mexico through the International Boundary and Water Commission
- The Lower Basin Alternative includes assumptions regarding participation by Mexico in reductions; surplus deliveries; and the conservation, augmentation, and storage program commensurate with prior Treaty Minutes

Lower Basin Alternative

Share of Static Reduction

When total system contents reach 58% full then the Lower Basin and Mexico share the 1.5 maf Static Reduction in the volumes described in the table. The Lower Basin Alternative shares reductions in a way that honors California's senior rights.

	Reduction acre-feet/year	% of State's Basic Apportionment
Arizona	760,000	27.1%
California	440,000	10.0%
Nevada	50,000	16.7%
Mexico	250,000	16.7%
Total	1,500,000	16.7%

Lower Basin Alternative

Augmentation & Conservation

The Lower Basin Alternative proposes a new program to incentivize conservation and augmentation by allowing storage for future delivery or to meet reduction requirements

Storage of Augmentation & Conservation

- The Lower Basin Alternative includes:
 - Potential range of 5 – 10 maf of total storage for water either conserved or augmented in the Lower Basin and Mexico
 - Stored water will provide flexibility in managing reductions, including allowing for the “pre-conservation” of reductions so that water stored in a previous year could be delivered to offset reduction volumes
 - Entitlement holders eligible to participate

Accounting & Delivery of Stored Water



Limits delivery of stored water so that a state's total annual delivery doesn't exceed its basic apportionment in years when Lower Basin reductions are in place, with a few exceptions



Specifies that the volume of water stored should be subtracted from the total system contents before reductions are calculated so as not to diminish the volume of reduction that would otherwise occur absent the stored water

Lower Basin Alternative vs. Upper Division State Alternative

Addresses the structural deficit in the Lower Basin

Operates reservoirs based on system contents

Shares water use reductions broadly

Includes provisions for storage and delivery of stored water

Establishes releases from Lake Powell that are adaptable and respond to “hydrologic shortages”

Assumes Mexico’s participation consistent with past Treaty Minutes

Includes Lower Basin reductions that address structural deficit

Operates Lake Powell and Lake Mead separately - does not use system contents

Assumes water use reductions only in Lower Basin

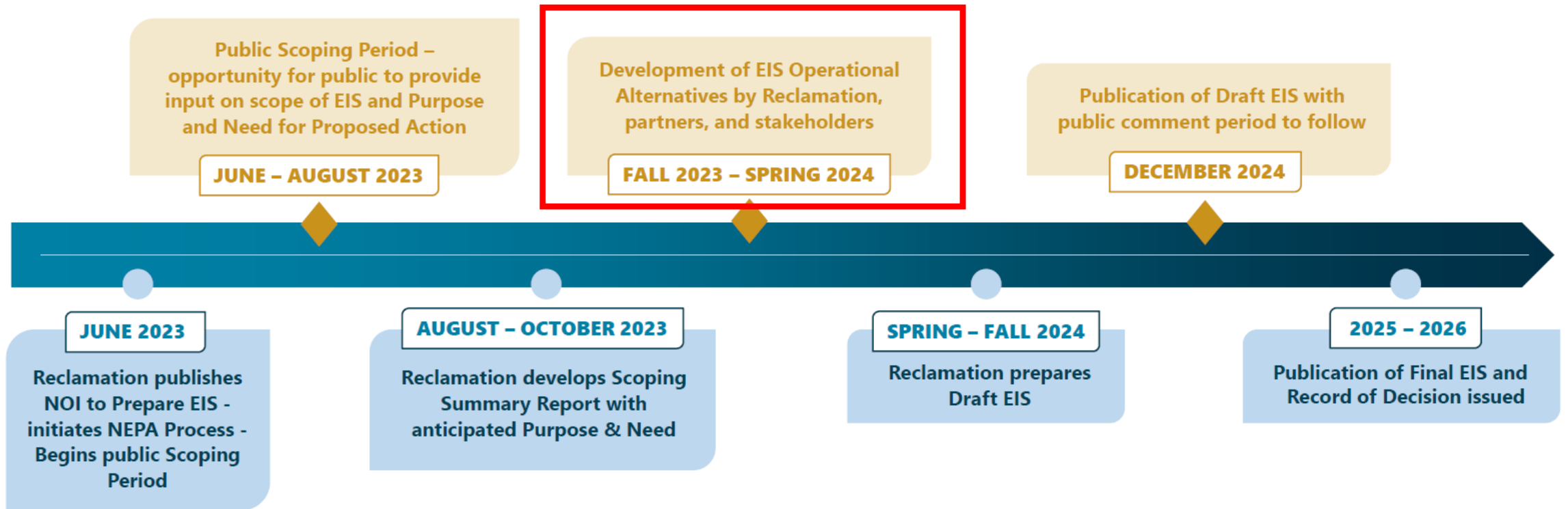
Silent on storage and delivery of stored water

Sets Lake Powell releases based on Powell elevations and Lower Basin water use

Silent on Mexico – both on Upper Basin share of Treaty deliveries and Mexico’s participation

Reclamation's EIS Schedule

Post-2026 Milestone Schedule



Lower Basin Alternative

Next Steps

