



● Colorado River Management Report

Summary

This report provides a summary of activities related to management of Metropolitan's Colorado River resources for the month of August 2023.

Purpose

Informational

Detailed Report

Post-2026 Operational Guidelines Environmental Impact Statement Scoping Comments

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) initiated the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process to develop the Post-2026 Operational Guidelines that will be used to manage operations of the Colorado River System reservoirs after the current Guidelines expire in 2025. Since June, Reclamation has been receiving public comments on the Purpose and Need and scope of the EIS. These elements of the EIS will determine what can be considered in the Action Alternatives, which will determine the eventual final agency action.

Metropolitan submitted a Scoping Comment letter jointly with the Southern Nevada Water Authority and Central Arizona Water Conservation District (or CAP) stating support for the letters submitted by the Colorado River Basin States and Lower Division States, and also asked that the scope of the EIS and proposed federal action:

- Ensure sufficient water for public health, safety and welfare.
- Protect existing Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS).
- Provide for continued incentives to add conserved water to Lake Mead.
- Address the imbalance between supplies and demands in the Colorado River Basin.
- Include a framework that incentivizes voluntary conservation, augmentation, and exchange.

Many other Scoping Comment letters were submitted by Colorado River Basin States, irrigation districts, Tribes and NGOs. Reclamation will consider the comments received and prepare a scoping report, which will determine what elements will be considered for analysis in the EIS.

Metropolitan staff will continue to work with Colorado River Basin States, Colorado River contractors in California, Tribes and NGO partners throughout the process to develop Alternatives for the EIS.

Reclamation Issues August 24-Month Study

The August 24-Month Study projections of January 1 reservoir elevations are used to set the operating tiers and to project annual release volumes from Lake Powell to Lake Mead. The August 2023 24-Month study projects that on January 1, 2024, Lake Powell elevation to be less than 3,575 feet and at or above 3,525 feet and the Lake Mead elevation to be at or above 1,025 feet. These elevations mean that in water year (WY) 2024 Lake Powell will be operating in the Mid-Elevation Release Tier and the water year release volume from Lake Powell will be 7.48 million acre-feet. Additionally, the Lake Mead elevation is forecast to be below 1,075 feet and above 1,050 feet, triggering a Level 1 Shortage Condition in the Lower Basin and Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) contributions. This is an improvement over last year's determination, which was a Level 2 Lower Basin Shortage. California does not take shortages and does not owe any DCP contributions at the forecasted Lake Mead elevations.

Board Report (Colorado River Management Report)

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Drought Mitigation Funding Update

Reclamation sent a letter to Lower Basin Colorado River contract and entitlement holders requesting proposals for long-term durable system efficiency improvement projects that result in water conservation benefitting the lower Colorado River System and its water users. The deadline for responses was moved to August 18. This is the next phase of the Lower Colorado River Conservation Program (using “Bucket 2” IRA funds) intended to provide new opportunities to fund system conservation and efficiencies in the Lower Basin that lead to durable long-term solutions for the Colorado River System that results in additional volumes of water remaining in Lake Mead.

After receiving input from the Board and member agencies, Metropolitan submitted a confidential proposal to Reclamation that emphasized benefits for disadvantaged communities, including turf replacement programs, groundwater storage programs, and an increase in funding for Local Resources Projects. Reclamation received several proposals from agencies in Arizona, Nevada, and California and will be evaluating them and some of them may be revised before they are ultimately approved. Staff will keep the Board apprized as this proposal moves through the process.