



● 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 October 2023.

Purpose

Informational

Detailed Report

2007 Interim Guidelines Revised Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) Update

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) issued a revised draft SEIS that analyzes the Lower Basin States' proposal to conserve 3 million acre-feet (maf) of water through 2026 and includes the improvements in hydrology and reservoir elevations since the wet winter in 2022-23. In April, Reclamation temporarily withdrew the draft SEIS in order to conduct this additional analysis. The revised draft SEIS shows that the improved hydrology since the fall of 2022 reduced the risk of Lake Powell and Lake Mead reaching critical elevations from over 50 percent to less than 10 percent. Analysis of the Lower Basin States' proposal showed that it performed well in comparison to Alternative Action 1 and 2 that were analyzed in the April draft SEIS. Action Alternative 1 assumes reductions by priority and Alternative Action 2 assumes pro-rata reductions to Lower Basin contractors. Following the 45-day public comment period on the revised draft SEIS, Reclamation anticipates issuing a final SEIS and Record of Decision next year. Comments on the revised draft SEIS are due December 11, 2023. Metropolitan staff is working with its partners on the Colorado River to prepare and submit comments on the document.

Post-2026 Operational Guidelines Environmental Impact Statement Scoping Comment Report

Reclamation issued the report on the purpose, need, and scope of the proposed federal action to develop the Post-2026 Operational Guidelines for the Colorado River reservoirs. The proposed federal action is needed because the 2007 Interim Guidelines expire in 2026 and experience has demonstrated that further reductions are needed to sufficiently reduced risk to the system. Reclamation also included in the need for the proposed federal action that low runoff conditions in the future could exacerbate the supply and demand imbalance, and the need to innovate and expand conservation.

The purpose of the proposed federal action is to provide:

- Colorado River water users a greater degree of predictability regarding annual water releases, given the anticipated increasing risk of low runoff and low reservoir conditions.
- Additional mechanisms for the conservation, storage, and delivery of water supplies in the Colorado River reservoirs.
- New or enhanced opportunities for Basin Tribes to benefit from their water rights.
- Flexibility to build resilience and accommodate future needs and growth that are supported by Colorado River water supplies, including the integration of unquantified tribal water rights once they are resolved.

Based on the input received during the public comment period, Reclamation anticipates that the Post-2026 Operational Guidelines will do the following:

- Identify when releases from Lake Mead will be greater than, equal to, or less than 7.5 maf, as established in Supreme Court decree in *Arizona v. California*.
- Provide for coordinated operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead, especially under low reservoir conditions.

Board Report (Colorado River Management Report)

- Include provisions for storage and delivery of conserved water in Lake Mead and/or Lake Powell.

In June, Metropolitan submitted joint scoping comments with Southern Nevada Water Authority and Central Arizona Water Conservation District requesting that the Post-2026 Operational Guidelines to protect Intentionally Created Surplus stored in Lake Mead, include opportunities to augment and exchange water and provide for storage and delivery of health and human safety water. The published scope, purpose and need specifically address storage of conserved water, including storage and exchange of non-system water. But this report did not include provisions for health and human safety water.

The next steps in this process are to develop alternatives that Reclamation will analyze in the draft SEIS. In a joint scoping comment letter submitted in June, the seven Colorado River Basin States confirmed their intent to develop a consensus alternative. Other stakeholders may also develop alternatives. Reclamation will begin analyzing the alternatives in the spring 2024.

Salinity Control Forum

Staff attended a meeting of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which marked the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Forum in 1973. The Forum heard an update on progress toward implementing new language in the 2023 federal Farm Bill to reduce the state cost-share requirement from 30 percent to roughly 15 percent for salinity control funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which would reduce the existing Salinity Control Program (Program) funding deficit. The language has strong support in the U.S. Senate. The Executive Director of the Forum is currently seeking a sponsor for the language in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Reclamation gave an update on its Request for Information (RFI) from private industry representatives to solicit new alternatives for the long-term replacement of the Paradox Valley Unit (PVU), a deep-injection groundwater well used to dispose of brine extracted from the Dolores River, a tributary to the Colorado River. Reclamation issued this RFI in summer 2023, and received two statements in response, each proposing possible alternatives for brine disposal. Both proposals resembled alternatives already considered in the 2020 PVU Environmental Impact Statement. Reclamation also reported that the existing PVU continues to operate at two-thirds capacity and within acceptable well pressure and seismicity parameters. The PVU has injected approximately 41,000 tons of salt into deep groundwater in 2023, to date.

The Forum approved the Final 2023 Review of Water Quality Standards for Salinity in the Colorado River System (Triennial Review) in which the Forum communicates every three years to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state water quality agencies an assessment of the sufficiency of existing water quality criteria for salinity on the Lower Colorado River, along with estimates of projected damages in the Lower Basin resulting from salinity in the river.

The Forum also heard updates from key federal agencies involved in the Program, including USBR, NRCS, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Geological Survey. Aaron Mead, an Engineer in Metropolitan's Imported Supply Unit, was appointed Chair of the Forum Work Group, the technical body that informs and supports the Forum's decision-making efforts.