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 August 2026.

Purpose

Informational

Detailed Report

U.S. Department of the Interior Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations

The U.S. Department of the Interior (Interior) issued the post-2026 Record of Decision and the 2027–2028 Operating Guidelines on August 21. This is a major milestone, but it does not complete the work needed to implement operations beginning in 2027.

The Record of Decision establishes a ten-year decision framework through 2036. It sets broad principles and operational sideboards, including ranges for Lake Powell releases, Lower Basin reductions, and storage of conserved water, but does not establish a single operating regime for the full ten-year period. Instead, Interior generally will issue operating guidelines in two-year increments, with implementation through the annual operating plan.

The first set of guidelines establishes operations for 2027 and 2028. It provides for annual Lake Powell releases that respond to reservoir elevations and infrastructure risk. For Lake Mead, the guidelines determine a shortage condition and reduce Lower Basin consumptive use by 1.25 million acre-feet (AF) per year. Under the contemplated Lower Basin agreement, Arizona would be reduced by 760,000 AF, California by 440,000 AF, and Nevada by 50,000 AF, leaving 3.96 million AF available for use in California. The guidelines also contemplate an additional 700,000 AF of voluntary Lower Basin system conservation over 2026 through 2028. (2027–2028 Operating Guidelines).

Those provisions depend on the completion of a Lower Basin implementation agreement. Metropolitan staff will be directly involved in negotiating that agreement, as well as the separate arrangements needed to implement California's reduction. The agreement must address not only allocation of the reductions, but also accounting, forbearance, Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS) administration, and protection of the parties' rights under the Law of the River.

For Metropolitan, the 2027-2028 Operating Guidelines continue the ICS program and allow California contractors to deliver up to 400,000 AF of ICS annually. When Lake Mead is between elevations 1,025 and 1,000 feet, however, delivery requests are subject to consultation and may be reduced or denied if the delivery would cause the reservoir to fall below 1,000 feet. No ICS may be delivered in a year when the January 1 elevation is below

1,000 feet. This improves access to stored water under low-reservoir conditions, but it does not provide Metropolitan with unconditional access.

If the Lower Basin parties do not complete an implementation agreement, the specific allocation of the 1.25 million acre-foot reduction will not take effect. Interior instead will consult with the Lower Basin states and contractors and determine the apportionment under what it considers to be the applicable Law of the River. The federal documents therefore provide a path for operating the system, but they leave several consequential legal and implementation issues to the agreements now being negotiated.