

An aerial photograph showing a residential neighborhood with many houses and trees. A road curves through the center of the image, and a river flows along the right side. The text is overlaid on the image.

State of the River: *On the Cusp of a New Century*

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State of the Colorado River Basin

- Modeling by Reclamation indicates that water users in the Basin must reduce uses by 2-4 MAF/yr beyond the Tier Reductions to protect critical elevations
- Lake Powell will soon be hovering at its identified critical elevation of ~3,500 feet
- Lake Mead will reach its identified critical elevation of ~1,000 feet in 2024 (with no additional action)

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- The Lower Basin has been in Tier 1 in 2022 (613 KAF reduction) and will decline to Tier 2a in 2023 (721 KAF reduction)
- Likely Tier 3 in 2024 (1.375 MAF)
- There have been other actions in 2021 and 2022:
 - 500+ Plan arising from the “1,030’ Consultation” provisions of the LBDCP
 - “Protect Lake Powell” actions taken in May 2022

State of the Colorado River Basin

- Reclamation has been encouraging voluntary reductions from the States and their water users for some time, and issued an RFP in October for system conservation with funding from the Inflation Reduction Act
- Reclamation is also considering its authorities to impose additional mandatory reductions to supplement voluntary reductions

State of the Colorado River Basin

- Reclamation published a Federal Register Notice in November announcing a Supplemental EIS process to re-evaluate the 2007 Guidelines
- Specific items that will be reviewed include:
 - Annual releases from Glen Canyon Dam below 7 MAF during shortage conditions
 - Modifications to Tier elevation triggers or Tier reductions

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- There have been quite a few responses to Reclamation's RFP
- In connection with a recently-announced agreement to provide Federal funding for the Salton Sea, California has committed to identify up to 400 KAF in system conservation for 4 years
- It is unclear how far these proposed actions will go towards closing the 2-4 MAF/yr gap identified by Reclamation and how much remaining action by the U.S. will be required

State of the Colorado River Basin

- There is a great deal of uncertainty among water users about the efficacy of voluntary actions:
 - Is the compensation offered adequate?
 - Is there the ability to make voluntary reductions if yet unidentified mandatory reductions will follow?
 - Will it make a difference vs. diverting and using or storing?
 - Will conserved amounts just end up being delivered to higher priority water users in a subsequent year?

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- Both potential voluntary and potential mandatory actions are beset by considerations about contract priorities and the possibility of litigation
- In order to reach overall reductions in use required to protect critical elevations, ***all sectors and all priorities will need to reduce***, but there is an expectation by higher priority users that lower priority users should take reductions first
- Health and safety considerations related to municipal use vs. food production and food security related to ag use trade-offs
- Complicated by lower priority water in tribal water settlements

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- ***There is the real possibility of effective dead pool or run of the river operations in less than two years if this deadlock is not resolved***
 - Piecemeal or sequential reductions by priority seems to be the most deleterious path to dead pool in Lake Mead
 - Litigation will not be resolved quickly enough to prevent the most disastrous outcomes without a different approach
 - Reclamation, States, Tribes and other water users must reach a compromise approach quickly to reduce significantly that will do the least harm and prevent complete draining of the reservoirs

State of the Colorado River Basin

- This is our collective top priority in the next 6 months
- Simultaneously, we must redouble our efforts on efficiency and reuse, recovery and augmentation, without which wherever we are in 6 months is likely to persist indefinitely
- Efficiency and reuse, recovery and augmentation will take time and money, but eventually there can be a renaissance in the Colorado River Basin

An aerial photograph showing a residential neighborhood with many houses and trees on the left. A road with a few cars runs vertically through the center. To the right of the road is a canal with a concrete lining. The foreground shows a large area of green trees and a dirt embankment.

Thank you!