BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

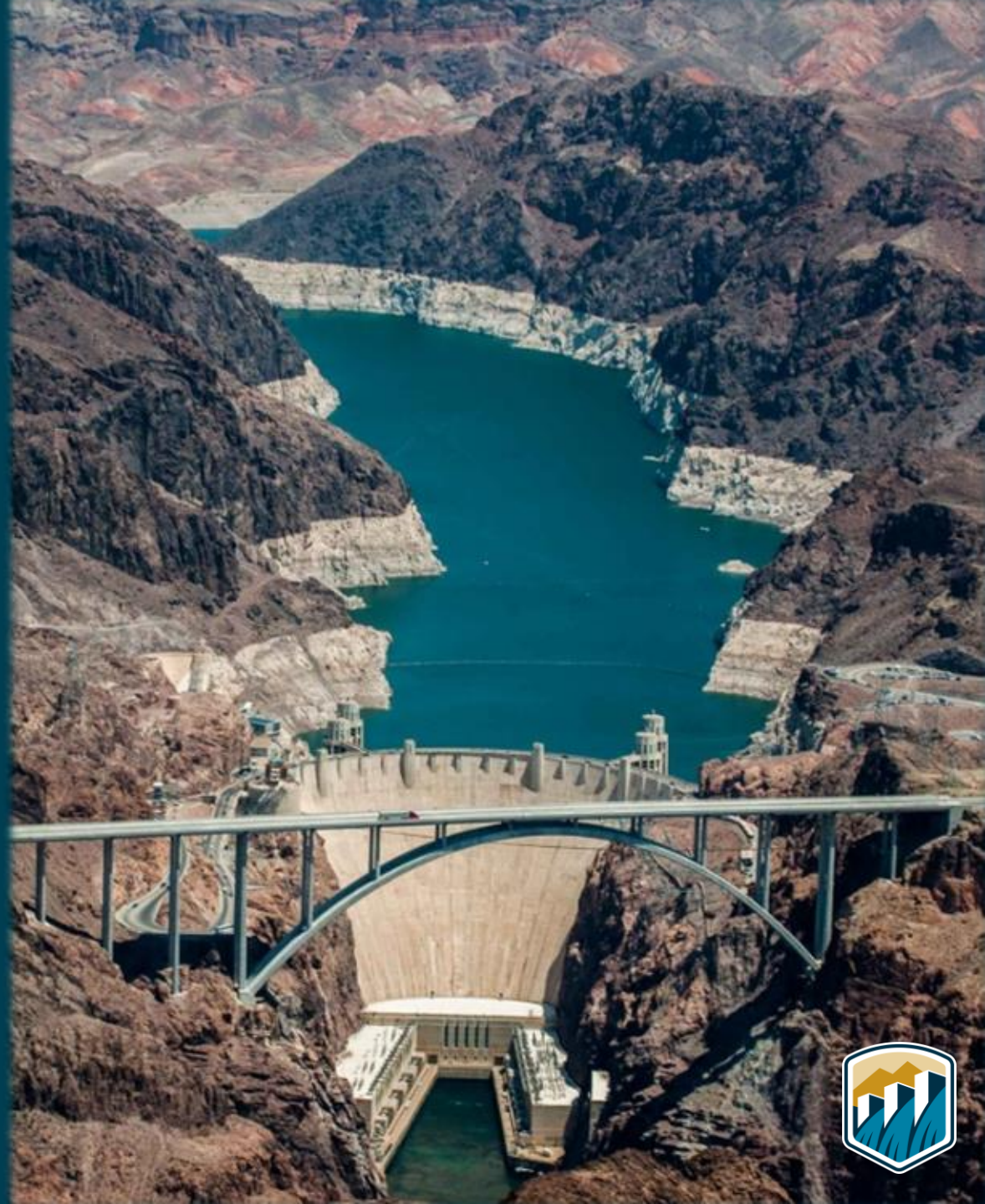
Colorado River Operations and Post-2026 Status Update

Carly Jerla, Post-2026 Program Manager

CRWUA 2025 - December 17, 2025

Presentation Overview

- Hydrology & Operations
  - Year in review: 2025
  - Looking forward: 2026
  - Looking back: 2008-2025
- Operational Agreements since 2008
- Post-2026 Process – Status update
- Summary



2025 Operations

2025 Powell Water Year Inflow*

5.4 maf
(56% of avg)

Lake Powell

Dec '24 3,572 ft (37% full)

Dec '25 3,540 ft (28% full)

3,490 ft min power pool

2025 Lake Powell Release

7.48 maf

Lake Mead

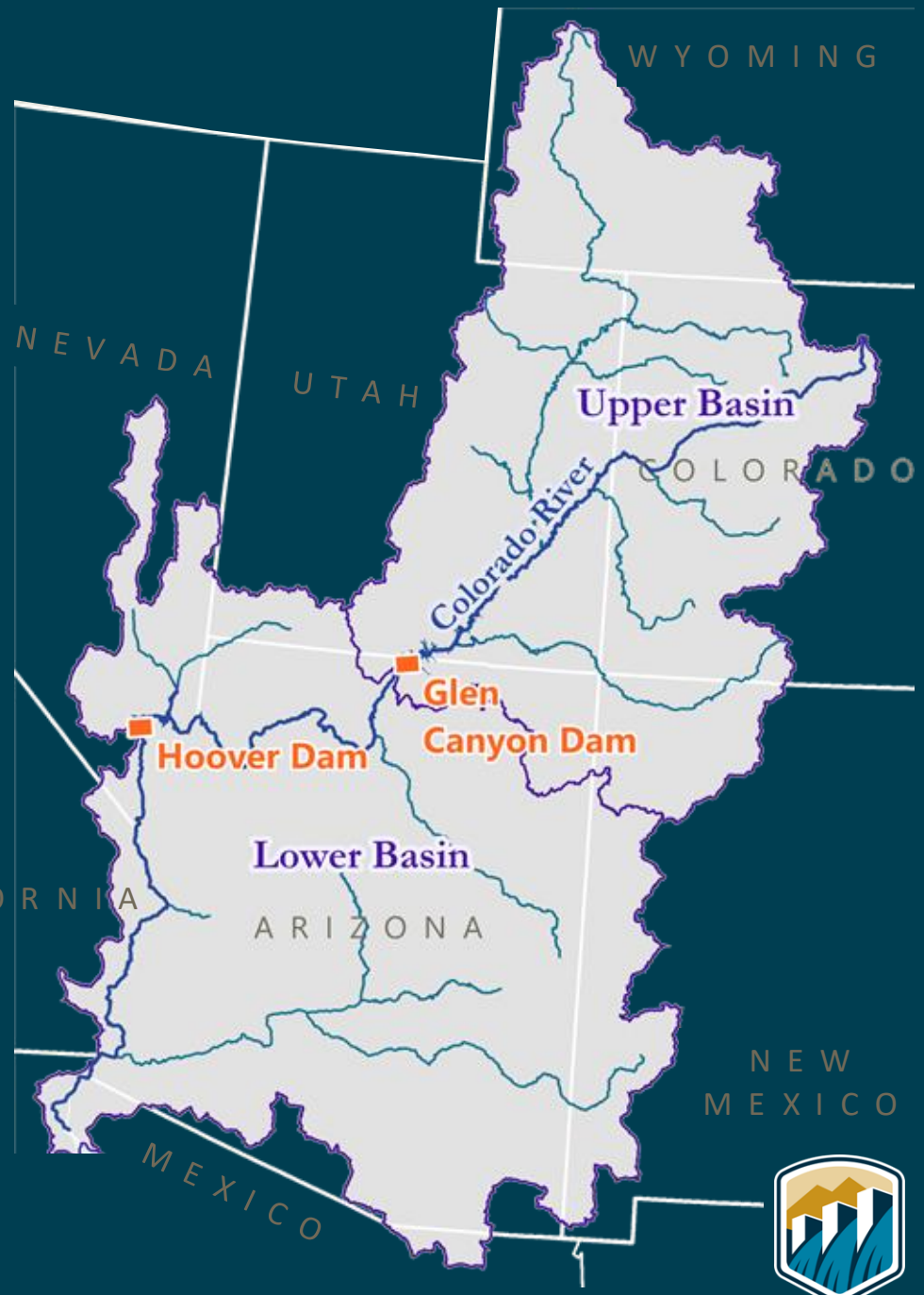
Dec '25 Dec '24 1,063 ft (33% full)

1,035 ft significant loss of hydropower

950 ft min power pool

2025 Lower Basin and Mexico Water Use

7.2 maf



*Unregulated

2026 Operations (Projected)**

2026 Powell Water Year Inflow*
Most Probable: 7.04 maf (73% of avg)
Min Probable: 4.24 maf (44% of avg)

Lake Powell

Dec '25 3,540 ft (28% full)
Most Probable: 3,520 ft
Min Probable: 3,481 ft

3,490 ft min power pool

2026 Lake Powell Release
Most Probable: 7.48 maf
Min Probable: 7.48 maf

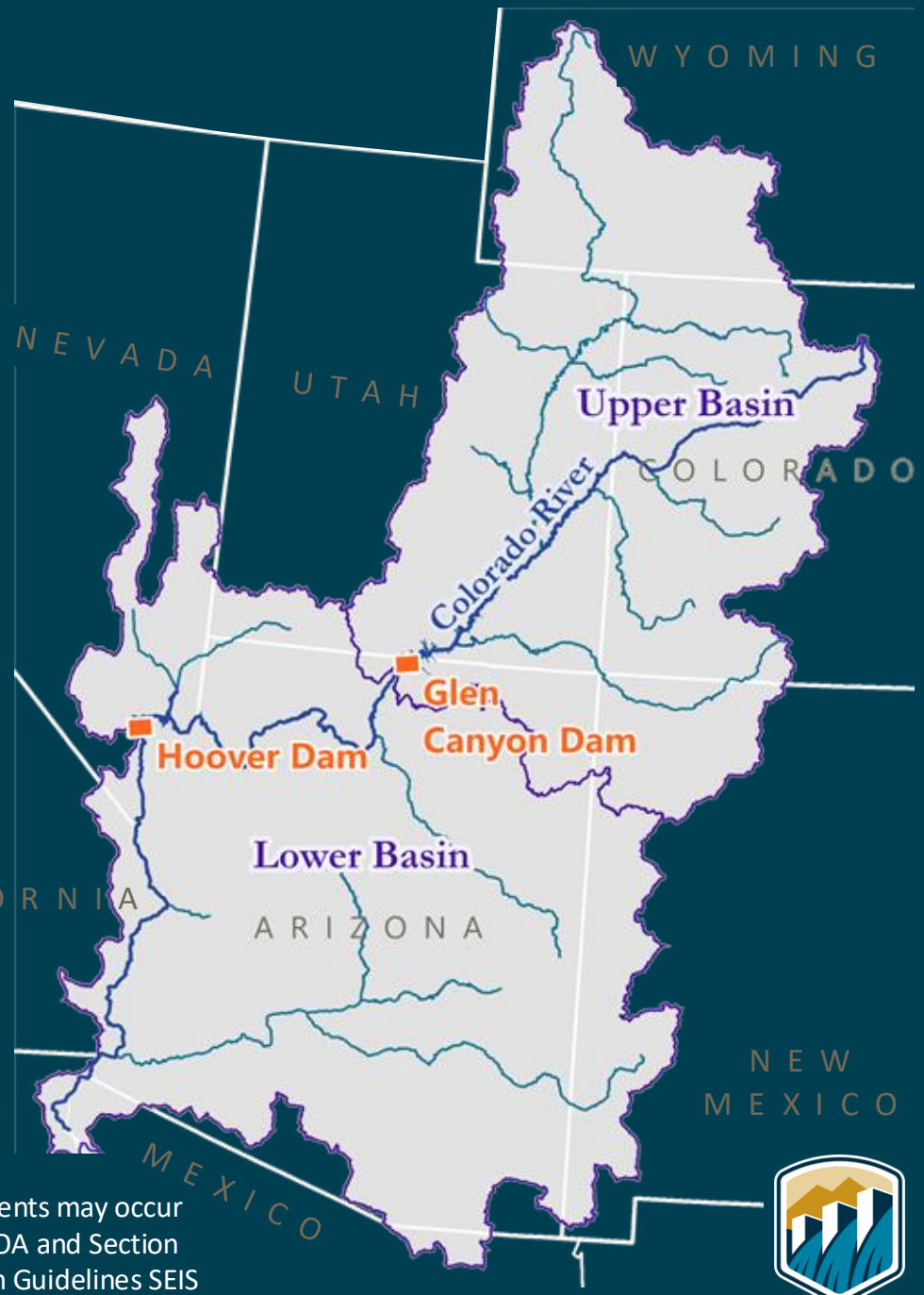
Lake Mead

Dec '25 1,063 ft (33% full)
Most Probable: 1,058 ft
Min Probable: 1,053 ft

1,035 ft significant loss of hydropower

950 ft min power pool

2026 Lower Basin and Mexico Water Use
Most Probable: 7.61 maf
Min Probable: 7.81 maf

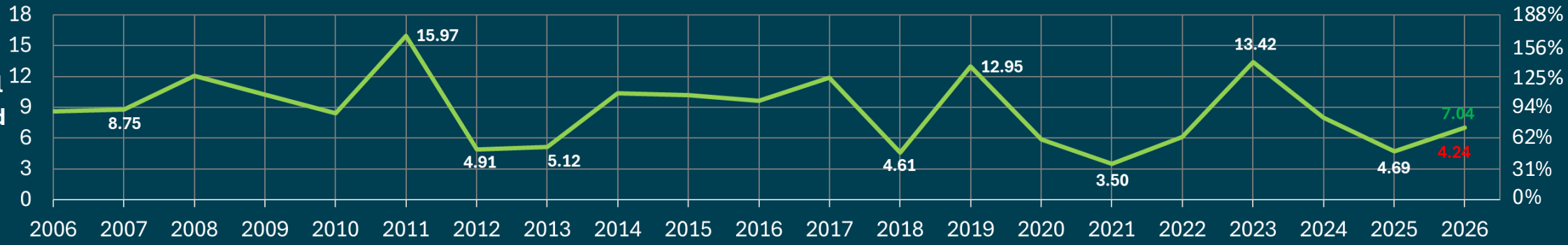


**Operational adjustments may occur consistent with the DROA and Section 6.E. of the 2024 Interim Guidelines SEIS

*Unregulated

2007-2026 Operations and Agreements

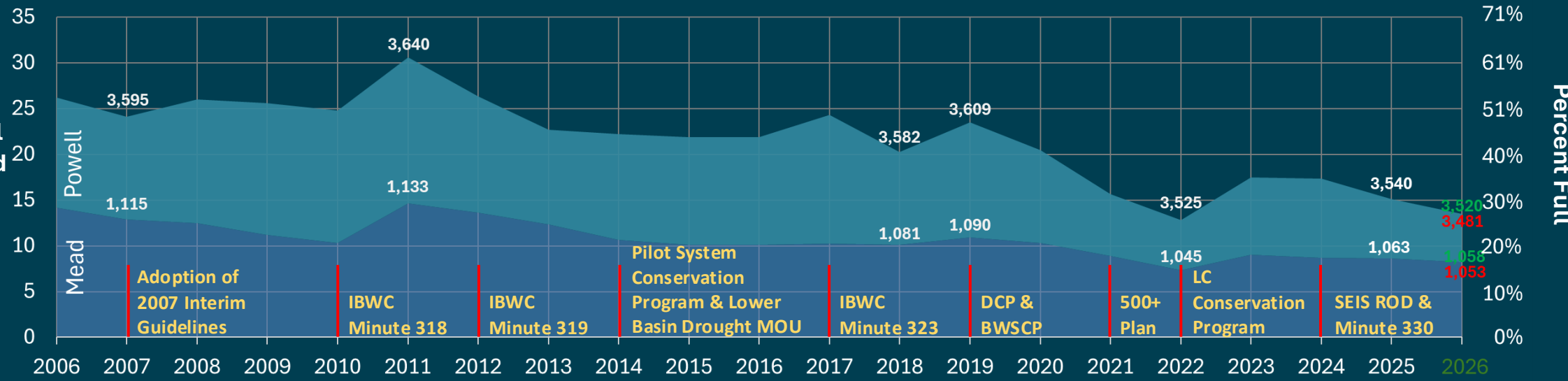
Water Year Lake Powell Unregulated Inflow (maf)



Lake Powell Water Year Release (maf)

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
8.23	8.98	8.24	8.23	12.5	9.47	8.23	7.48	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	8.23	8.23	7.00	8.58	7.48	7.48	7.48 7.48*

Lake Powell & Lake Mead Dec. 31 Storage (maf)



Lower Basin + Mexico Use (maf)

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
8.95	9.02	8.94	8.88	8.82	8.81	8.85	9.20	8.95	8.73	8.28	8.64	8.03	8.22	8.53	8.11	7.16	7.41	7.20	7.61 7.81

Operational Agreements Adopted Since 2008

- Adopted in sequence to address changing conditions, these agreements provided additional certainty and flexibility for river management
- Experience over the past 18 years provides important considerations*:
    1. Objective operational criteria for the full range of reservoir elevations provide certainty and predictability in reservoir operations
    2. Implementing operational rules for a long – but not permanent – period provides opportunity to gain valuable operating experience
    3. Flexibility should be preserved to deal with further challenges such as deepening drought
    4. More robust measures to protect reservoir levels are needed
    5. Enhanced flexibilities and transparencies for water users are needed
    6. Expanded participation in conservation and Basin-wide programs is needed
    7. The federal government should continue to facilitate – but not dictate – informed decision-making in the Basin and encourage parties to address future controversies through consultation and negotiation … before resorting to litigation

*from the Review of the Colorado River Interim Guidelines "7.D Review", December 2020

Post-2026 Timeline

Opportunities for Public Input

Public Scoping Period – opportunity for public to provide input on scope of EIS and Purpose and Need for Proposed Action

JUNE – AUGUST 2023

Development of NEPA Alternatives by Reclamation, partners, and stakeholders

FALL 2023 – SUMMER 2025

Publication of Draft EIS and public comment period

WINTER 2025

NEPA Milestones

JUNE 2023

NOI to Prepare EIS - initiates NEPA Process - Begins public Scoping Period

AUGUST – OCTOBER 2023

Scoping Summary Report published with anticipated Purpose & Need

SPRING – WINTER 2025

Draft EIS prepared and published

SPRING – SUMMER 2026

Final EIS prepared and published, Record of Decision issued

Approach to Draft EIS

- Analyzes a broad range of alternatives that incorporates input from our key partners, stakeholders, and the public
- Anticipate identification of Preferred Alternative between Draft and Final
- Adopts an analysis approach that accounts for future uncertainty in Basin conditions and avoids assigning probabilities to specific future conditions – Decision Making Under Deep Uncertainty
- Applies approach to wide range of resource categories

Example Components of Draft EIS Alternatives

Shortage Guidelines to Reduce Deliveries from Lake Mead	Coordinated Reservoir Operations (Lake Powell and Lake Mead)	Storage and Delivery of Conserved System and Non-system Water (Lake Mead and/or Lake Powell)	Additional Activities Above Lake Powell
Shortage Trigger	Release Factors	Treatment of Pre-2027 ICS	CRSP Upper Initial Units Releases
Shortage Start	Release Range	Accumulation Limits (in Lake Mead)	Accumulation Limits (in Lake Powell)
Maximum Shortage	Approach to Coordination	“Operational Neutrality”	“Operational Neutrality”
Shortage Distribution		Flexibilities	UB Conservation Magnitude

Summary

- Challenging hydrologic conditions have led to declining reservoirs but absent continuing adaptation and responsive actions by the Basin States, Tribes, Mexico and other partners, the Basin would have already experienced a crisis

- Current agreements have provided critical management tools, but more are likely needed to respond to the anticipated persistence of declining runoff and the range of needs and demands in the Basin

- The Draft EIS analyzes a broad range of carefully crafted alternatives to provide a sufficient range for analysis and were designed to enable States, Tribes and other Basin interests to continue to work towards a consensus agreement


For more information:
Colorado River Basin | Bureau of Reclamation
https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/
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7.D. Review: Effectiveness of the Guidelines

Effectiveness

Effectiveness of Guidelines with respect to Purpose

- **Improve Reclamation's mgmt**.: Having objective operational criteria for the full range of reservoir elevations improved Reclamation's management of the Colorado River, but drought necessitated DCPs and additional voluntary actions.
- **Provide predictability**: Structuring deliveries around specific Lake Mead elevations improved predictability for Lower Division states and provided a common framework for appreciation of future risk
- **Provide flexibility for meeting water use needs**:
  - The Guidelines provided a framework on which to build additional flexibilities and conservation opportunities through the Upper and Lower Basin DCPs
  - The ICS mechanism provided Lower Division states flexibility in meeting water use needs, played a critical role in avoiding low Lake Mead levels (nearly 3.2 maf saved), and provided a foundation for the concept of DCP contributions
  - Adding additional parties/exhibits proved challenging and may have limited ICS participation.

Adherence of Guidelines to Common Themes

- **Encourage conservation**: robust conservation through the ICS mechanism (the foundation of a similar mechanism for Mexico) and facilitation of other conservation activities; aspects of the ICS mechanism were limiting
- **Plan for shortages**: clearly defined shortage criteria provided the ability to plan for shortages and additional mitigation activities as risk of reaching critically low reservoir elevations increased
- **Closer coordination**: through close coordination of Lake Powell and Mead, several experiences stand out:
  - Predominance of balancing and equalization releases, highlight the increased link between Upper and Lower Basin activities
  - Severe, prolonged drought undermined two objectives: minimizing shortages in the Lower Basin and avoiding risk of curtailment in the Upper Basin; the DCPs were necessary to address increasing risk of reservoirs reaching critically low elevations
- **Preserve flexibility**: the Guidelines provided flexibility and stability to support subsequent operational decisions
- **Long but not permanent period**: in effect through 2026, providing 19 years of operational experience
- **Feds facilitate, not dictate**: Basin States agreed to mandatory consultation and negotiation before litigation; collaboration activated by Guidelines underpinned complementary activities and supports long-term stable management