

THE LOWER BASIN STATES' ALTERNATIVE FOR POST-2026 COLORADO RIVER OPERATIONS

The Lower Basin States' Alternative for Post-2026 Colorado River Operations will help ensure the river system's health and sustainability for decades to come. It moves beyond temporary solutions to build a sustainable and resilient river.

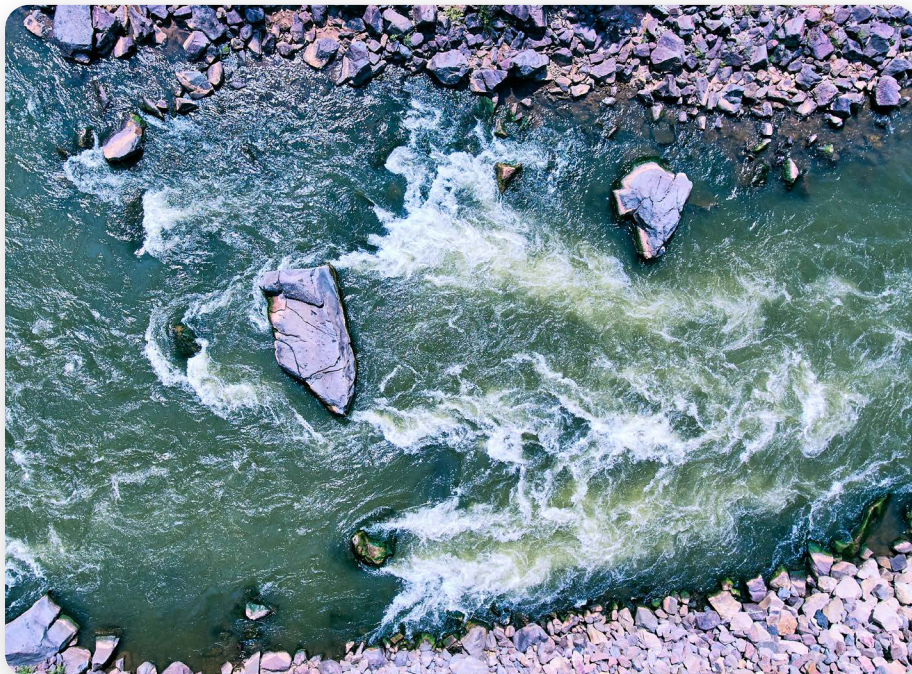
The Alternative was drafted collaboratively by Arizona, California and Nevada. The goal is to address the impacts of drought and climate change through a holistic and sustainable approach to the coordinated operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead that improves predictability for water users.

Water managers have learned a great deal from how the system has been operated over the past two decades, including during times of shortage. Those lessons have informed the improvements proposed in the Lower Basin Alternative.

This approach provides a clear picture of the health of the entire system, allowing water managers to better maintain that health while providing long-term stability and greater predictability for water users.

The system would be managed using actual hydrology and directly measured data, minimizing the use of forecasts.

Reductions to protect the system would be triggered by live storage in seven of the system's reservoirs: Flaming Gorge Reservoir, Blue Mesa Reservoir, Navajo Lake, Lake Powell, Lake Mead, Lake Mohave and Lake Havasu. This is called the Maximum System Contents Approach.



RESOLVES

Resolves the structural deficit in the Lower Basin and builds resiliency through Lower Basin reductions



RESPONDS

Responds to climate change, with additional reductions shared across the entire Basin



MANAGES

Manages the system as a whole, basing reductions on total system contents – the volume of water in seven major reservoirs across the Basin



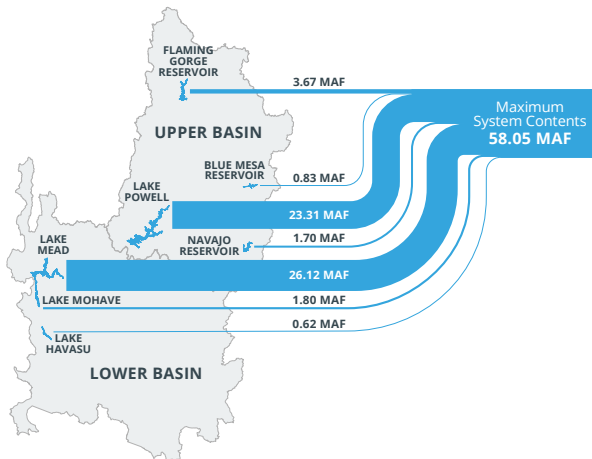
ENCOURAGES

Encourages opportunities for storage and augmentation to encourage conservation, innovation and investment

LOWER BASIN ALTERNATIVE REDUCTION DETERMINATION

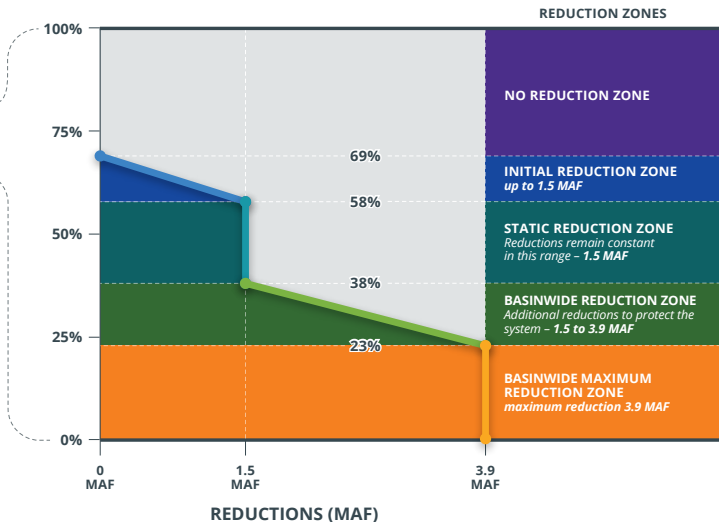
MAXIMUM SYSTEM CONTENTS

System contents are based on the volume in each reservoir that is available for release, in millions of acre-feet (MAF)



REDUCTION DETERMINATION

Reductions are based on the available system contents, based on the function below



When total system contents reach certain levels, relative to capacity, reductions would be as follows:

- Initial Reduction Zone (69% – 58% of capacity): Reduction to Lower Basin water uses increasing from 0 to 1.5 MAF
- Static Reduction Zone (58% – 38%): Consistent 1.5 MAF reduction to Lower Basin water uses
- Basinwide Reduction Zone (38% – 23%): Additional reductions to protect the system, increasing from 1.5 MAF to 3.9 MAF
- Maximum Basin-wide Reduction Zone (23% and below): Consistent 3.9 MAF reduction

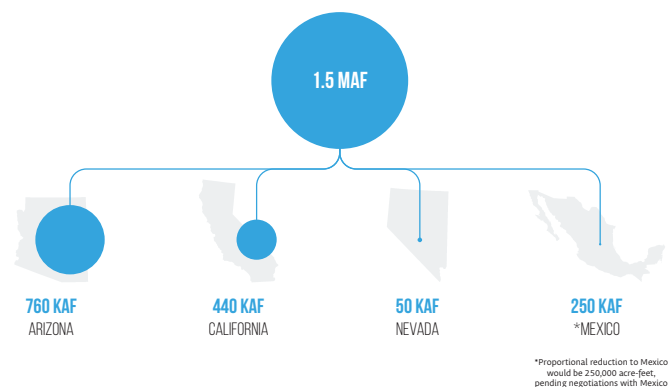
HOW ARE REDUCTIONS SHARED IN THE LOWER BASIN STATES' ALTERNATIVE?

Under this Alternative, reductions would be divided into four different zones – Initial Reduction, Static Reduction, Basinwide Reduction and Maximum Basinwide Reduction. While the Lower Basin States have proposed a way to share shortages in the Initial Reduction Zone and Static Reductions Zone, discussions continue on how to share shortages in the Basinwide Reduction Zone. Additionally, Arizona and California are in discussions about how to share reductions within each state for this Alternative.

Under the Static Reduction Zone and beyond, Arizona, California and Nevada have proposed taking the reductions necessary to address a long-standing issue within the river community – the structural deficit below Lake Powell.

The deficit is caused, in part, by evaporation and conveyance losses, estimated by Reclamation to total about 1.3 million acre-feet annually.

Reductions proposed under all the zones in this alternative are sufficient to stabilize the entire Colorado River system over a broad range of hydrologic conditions, including periods that are drier than have ever been experienced in the past.



The reductions in the Alternative of up to 1.5 million acre-feet exceed Reclamation's estimate, and the additional water would build resiliency in the system.

HOW WILL WATER USERS REALISTICALLY MAKE THE REDUCTIONS PROPOSED IN THE LOWER BASIN STATES' ALTERNATIVE?

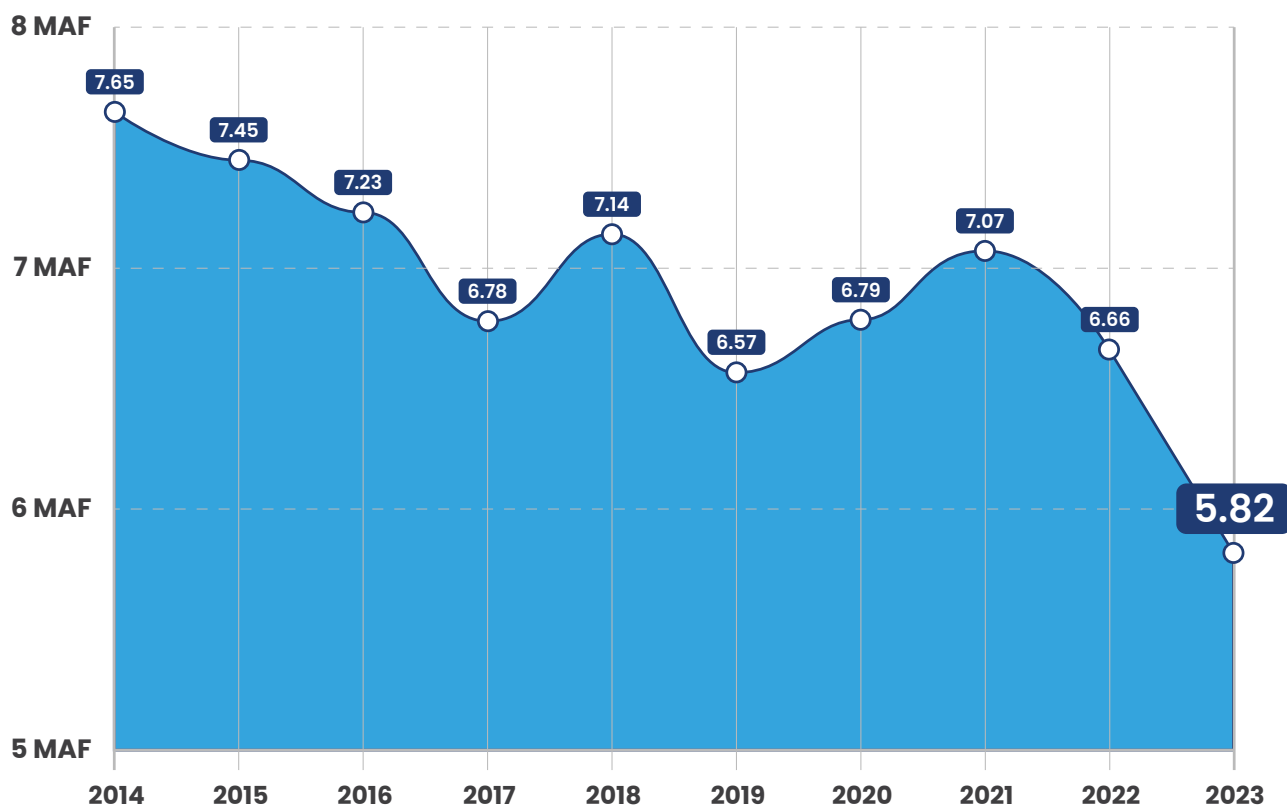
The reductions proposed in the Lower Basin States' Alternative would be mandatory and long-term. Lower Basin states have a successful track-record of mandatory reductions and voluntary actions that have added water to and stabilized Lake Mead for more than a decade through investments in water efficiency across agricultural and urban communities.

In fact, the Lower Basin has consistently and steadily reduced consumptive use for more than a decade. Consumptive use in the Lower Basin in 2023 was about 5.8 million acre-feet – the lowest since 1983 and 1.7 million acre-feet lower than the Basin's allocation.

Land fallowing, efficient irrigation practices and significant reductions in urban outdoor water use are among the tools the Lower Basin water users have used and will continue to use to produce the necessary reductions. New tools, including investing in alternative local supplies, such as recycled water, are also being developed.

More innovation, conservation and collaboration will be required across the Basin in the future.

**LOWER BASIN CONSUMPTIVE USE
2014 THROUGH 2023**



HOW DOES THE LOWER BASIN STATES' ALTERNATIVE PROTECT THE SYSTEM FROM CLIMATE CHANGE?

Climate change impacts the entire Colorado River Basin, and all water users must adapt and collectively participate in the solution. In addition to the Lower Basin states proposed reductions to address the structural deficit, additional reductions may be necessary to ensure the Colorado River Basin is protected against increasingly dry hydrological conditions in the future due to climate change or drought.

Under the Lower Basin States' Alternative, additional reductions beyond 1.5 million acre-feet would be shared equally between the Upper and Lower Basins.

Everyone sharing in reductions means no single water user will be overly affected, increasing the sustainability of the entire system.



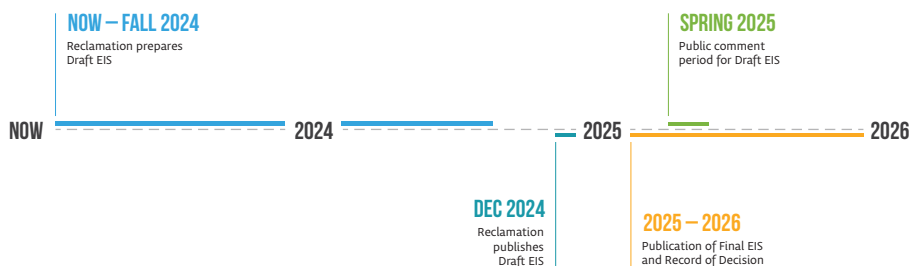
HOW IS THE LOWER BASIN STATES' ALTERNATIVE DIFFERENT FROM THE ALTERNATIVE PROPOSED BY THE UPPER BASIN STATES?

The Lower Basin States' Alternative recognizes that everyone who relies on the Colorado River must share in the burden of protecting it. While Arizona, California and Nevada have proposed taking on reductions that, under the majority of hydrological conditions, would stabilize the system, the Upper Basin states would also have to reduce use as climate change increasingly strains the river.

In the Upper Basin alternative, all reductions are the exclusive responsibility of the Lower Basin. Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming make no commitments to reduce their use.

In addition, the reductions proposed in the Lower Basin States' Alternative would be certain and enforceable. The Upper Basin has proposed policies and programs that might potentially produce reductions, but without certainty.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?



The Lower Basin States' Alternative can now be reviewed as part of a multi-year environmental review process lead by Reclamation.

Additional work remains to refine the details in the Alternative, including determining how to equitably share future reductions that may be necessary as climate change further reduces runoff in the system and how to share reductions within each state.

The Lower Basin remains committed to working with the Upper Basin along with tribes, environmental stakeholders and Mexico to negotiate a consensus-based approach that balances supplies with demands, adapts to climate change and protects the long-term sustainability of the river system.