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RECLAMATION

Bureau of Reclamation Update

Water Resources Research Center 2025 Annual Conference


Shared Borders, Shared Waters: Working Together in Times of Scarcity

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May 21, 2025

Colorado River Operating Agreements




THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

Record of Decision

Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the
Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead


December 2007

Recommending Official:


ROBERT JOHNSON
Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation

Date: December 13, 2007

Approved:


DIRK KEMPTHORNE
Secretary of the Department of the Interior

Date: December 13, 2007

- Several agreements governing the operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead expire at the end of 2026
 - 2007 Interim Guidelines (adopted in 2007, amended in 2024)
 - Minute 323 to the 1944 Water Treaty with Mexico (adopted in 2017)
 - 2019 Colorado River Basin Drought Contingency Plans (adopted in 2019)
- Agreements were adopted in sequence in response to changing hydrologic conditions
- The “Post-2026” process is intended to develop successor domestic agreements prior to preparation of the 2027 Annual Operating Plan (anticipated mid-2026)



Post-2026 Timeline

- June 2023: Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) formally initiated the Post-2026 Process
- October 2023: Scoping Summary Report and Federal Register Notice identified the Proposed Federal Action and Purpose & Need
- January 2025: Alternatives Report identified preliminary range of alternatives
- **Current: Overall process currently refining alternatives for Draft EIS**
- Fall-Winter 2025: Publication of Draft EIS
- Spring-Summer 2026: Publication of Final EIS
- Summer-Fall 2026: Adopt Record of Decision



Post-2026 Development of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Alternatives

- Goal is to develop a reasonable – and broad – range of alternatives through collaboration with our partners
- Throughout 2024 Reclamation worked extensively with stakeholders and partners to:
 - Better understand, refine, and analyze submitted proposals
 - Turn conceptual ideas into operational concepts
 - Find areas of overlap between proposals
 - Design additional alternative/s as needed to ensure a broad enough range
- Preliminary range of alternatives announced in November 2024 (published in January 2025), have received additional input from the Basin States and Basin Tribes since that time
- Have not made a final determination on the Draft EIS alternatives, currently modifying to incorporate additional input, as appropriate



NEPA Alternatives: Elements and Key Factors

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)	Surplus Guidelines to Increase Deliveries/Releases from Lake Mead	Additional Activities Above Lake Powell
Shortage Trigger	Release Factors	Location & Size	Surplus Trigger	Releases from Colorado River Storage Project Upper Initial Units
Shortage Start	Release Range	Excluded from Lake Powell Release Determination	Surplus Volume & Distribution	Upper Basin Conservation Timing & Magnitude
Max Shortage	Degree of Coordination	Excluded from Lower Basin Shortage Determination		“Conversion” of Upper Basin Conservation
Shortage Distribution	Infrastructure Protection	Flexibilities		Other Upper Basin Activities

Summary

- The Department of the Interior is committed to keep the Post-2026 Process on track and find a consensus-based path towards the Post-2026 Guidelines
- We are currently working to revise the NEPA alternatives for the Draft EIS as necessary to incorporate input
- We intend to publish the Draft EIS late this year
- Operational alignment with Mexico remains the preferred approach and engagement with Mexico will be coordinated through the State Department and the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC)



International Border and the Colorado River



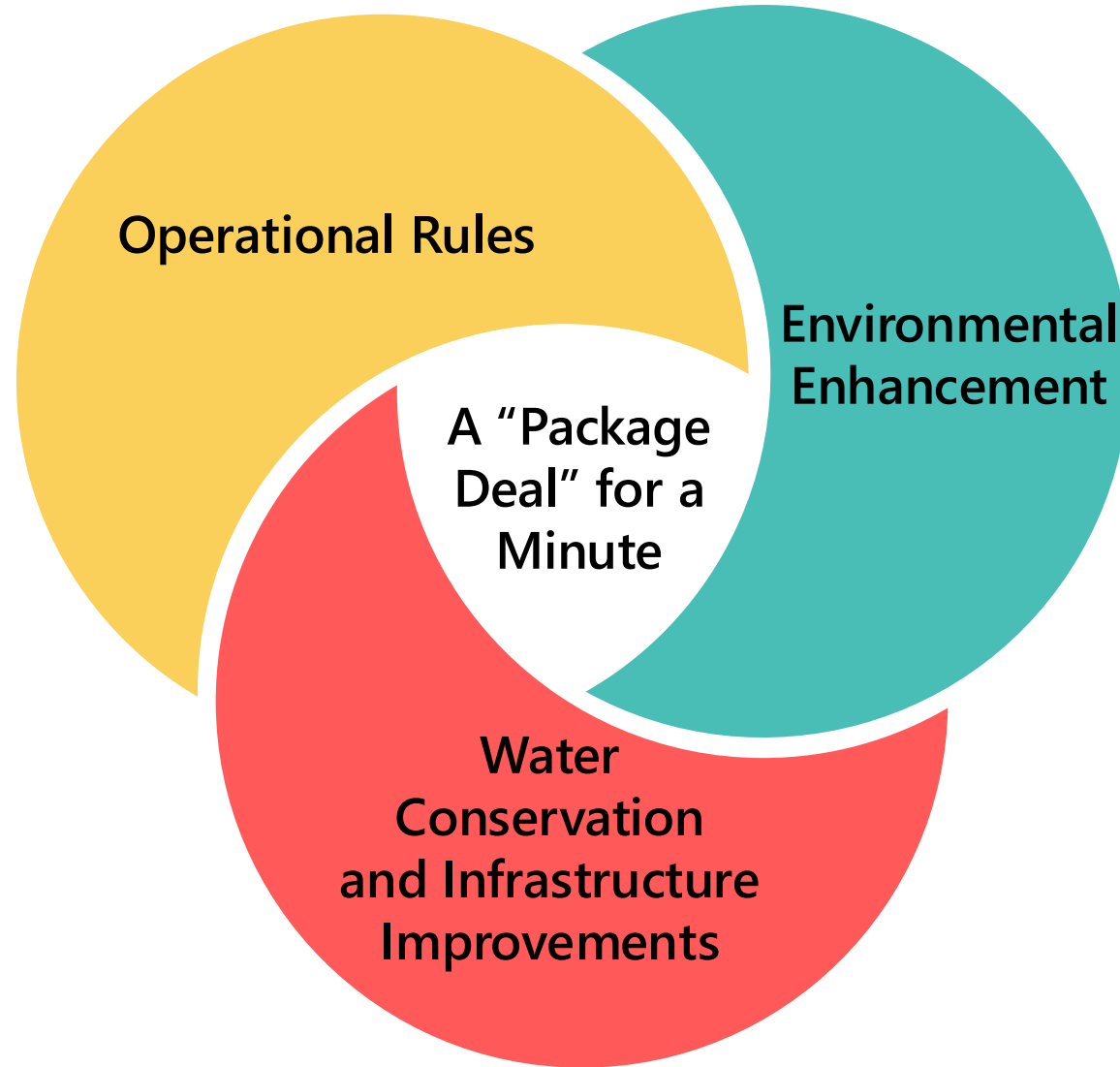
The 1944 Water Treaty

The Law of the River includes the 1944 Water Treaty, which:

- Formalizes shared use of the Colorado River between the U.S./Mexico
- Establishes the International Boundary and Water Commission, U.S. and Mexican Sections
- Mexico receives 1.5 million acre-feet of water from the Colorado River at the Northerly and Southerly International Boundaries under normal conditions



A “Package Deal” for a Minute



Implementing Minute 323

- Minute Oversight Group
 - Led by Commissioners from IBWC, the International Boundary and Water Commission, Mexican Section (CILA), Reclamation and Mexico's National Water Commission (CONAGUA) leadership
 - Participation from policy level federal and non-federal representatives from the Colorado River Basin
 - IBWC, CILA, CONAGUA, Reclamation, Department of the Interior Solicitor's Office, and Basin States representatives
- Topic Specific Work Groups: Environmental, Salinity, Flow Variability, Hydrology, All-American Canal Turnout Project, Desalination, and Systems Operations



Binational Panel at the Colorado Water Users Association Conference, 2021



Minute 330 to the 1944 Water Treaty

- In effect April 2024 through December 2026
- The U.S. and Mexico agreed to additional joint measures to protect Colorado River reservoirs from reaching critical low elevations
- Parallels U.S. domestic efforts to conserve at least 3 million acre-feet from 2023-2026



Minute 330 Signing, El Paso, Texas, 2024

Link to Minute No. 330: <https://www.ibwc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Minute-330-English-Spanish-Version-Signed-Clean.pdf>

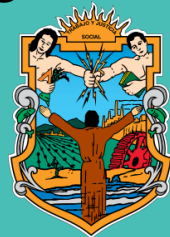


Binational Cooperation: National and International Collaborators

U.S. and Mexican Federal Agencies



U.S. and Mexican State Agencies



Universities and Non-Governmental Organizations



Universidad Autónoma de Baja California



Water Districts



Distrito de Riego 014



List will expand in the future to include additional collaborators as appropriate

What's Next for the Bureau of Reclamation Binational Program Participation and Efforts

- Minute 323 Implementation
 - Environmental deliveries to the CO River Delta
 - Salinity Analyses
 - Hydrology Analyses
 - Water Conservation Projects
- Minute 330 Implementation
 - Salinity Analyses
 - Water Conservation Projects
- Post-2026 Minute Negotiation
- Support for U.S. Post-2026 EIS Process
- Support for Other Binational Watersheds



Thank you!



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