



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

**MAY 03 2022**

Mr. Thomas Buschatzke  
Governor's Representative  
State of Arizona  
P.O. Box 36020  
Phoenix, Arizona 85067

Dear Mr. Buschatzke:

The Colorado River Basin is experiencing unprecedented conditions of drought and low runoff. The best available science indicates that the effects of climate change will continue to adversely impact the basin. Combined water storage at our primary Colorado River reservoirs – Lake Powell and Lake Mead – is at the lowest level since Hoover Dam and Glen Canyon Dam were constructed. Colorado River inflow into Lake Powell last year was the second-lowest since Lake Powell began filling nearly sixty years ago. Current National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration projections indicate that basin runoff will again be well below average this year.

In recent weeks, Department of the Interior staff have shared the best available information regarding hydrologic conditions and the potential for adverse effects on Glen Canyon Dam facilities and operations with representatives of the seven Colorado River Basin States, Basin Tribal leaders, Congressional staff, officials from the Republic of Mexico, water users, water districts, federal and state agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We have identified a number of concerns, including concerns for public health and safety, that could occur within this calendar year if Lake Powell were to decline below critical elevations. These include water supply interruptions to water users that rely on Lake Powell for drinking water supplies, hydropower interruptions to users that rely on Glen Canyon Dam for power supplies, and increased uncertainty regarding downstream releases should Lake Powell elevations continue to decline. Reclamation staff have initiated efforts to assess operational and infrastructure risks and accelerate maintenance and response actions for water delivery and hydropower generation infrastructure at the facility.

The Department has reviewed these concerns, along with input from the Basin States, Tribal leaders and others and has concluded that prudent operation of Glen Canyon Dam for 2022 requires a downward adjustment to the water release volume originally planned for this water year to delay or avoid Lake Powell declining further to critical elevations. Given all of the relevant considerations, and consistent with Sections 6 and 7.D. of the 2007 Interim Guidelines, the revised operations will be implemented to include the following determinations:

### Glen Canyon Dam Operations in 2022 Water Year

- The schedule for Glen Canyon Dam annual releases for water year 2022 will be temporarily changed from 7.48 million acre-feet (maf) to 7.0 maf, a reduction of 480,000 acre-feet (480,000 af reduced release amount).

### Implementation of Tier Determinations

- To ensure operational neutrality with respect to the 480,000 af reduced release amount:
  - For projections of Lake Powell elevations, the August 24-Month Study determinations will be made as if the 480,000 af reduced release amount is not present in Lake Powell;
  - For projections of Lake Mead elevations, the August 24-Month Study determinations will be made as if the 480,000 af reduced release amount is present in Lake Mead;
  - The foregoing approach to operational neutrality and tier determinations will be made in the August 2022 24-Month Study projections for water year /calendar year 2023 and all subsequent tier determinations under the 2007 Interim Guidelines and the 2019 Drought Contingency Plan or until such time as the 480,000 af reduced release amount is fully released from Glen Canyon Dam.
- Consistent with the provisions of the 2007 Interim Guidelines and to preserve the benefits to Glen Canyon Dam facilities and operations in 2023, Reclamation will consult with the Basin States on monthly and annual operations.

### Accounting for the Reduced Release amount for Water Year 2022

- Reclamation will take appropriate actions to account for and track the 480,000 af reduced release amount in subsequent years.
- Reclamation will evaluate continuing risks of Lake Powell and Lake Mead declining below critical elevations and develop strategies to mitigate and reduce such risks.
- Reclamation will address future releases of the 480,000 af reduced release amount from Lake Powell in an appropriate manner, and at an appropriate time, and will seek support from the Basin States for any such future releases given all relevant operational considerations for Glen Canyon Dam and Hoover Dam.

We deeply appreciate the consensus implementation actions contained in the 2022 Drought Response Operations Plan submitted to the Department on April 21, 2022 and we will ensure that the enhanced releases from Flaming Gorge are implemented in addition to implementing the reduced release amount from Glen Canyon Dam. These combined actions have received consensus support from the Basin States.<sup>1</sup> We have also received written support from the Colorado River Indian Tribes and the Gila River Indian Community, while other partners have also expressed general agreement with these actions. We believe these consensus approaches are superior to the exercise of unilateral action by the Department to address emergency conditions under either the Drought Response Operations Agreement or the 2007 Interim Guidelines.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> See Letter from Governor's representatives, Colorado River Basin States (April 22, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> See e.g., Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead, Sec. XI, G., at Sec. 7.D. (73 Fed. Reg. at 19892 (April 11, 2008)); Record of Decision - Operation of Flaming Gorge Dam, Action Alternative at p. 4, Sec. III (Feb. 16, 2006).

Department of the Interior and Reclamation will ensure appropriate consultation with the Basin States, Tribes, the Republic of Mexico, municipal and agricultural water users, water districts, federal and state agencies, and NGOs to address the present risks facing the Basin, continue to consult and coordinate with the Basin States pursuant to the 2007 Interim Guidelines and work cooperatively with all interested parties on efforts to address long-term supply and demand imbalances, including development of post-2026 operating guidelines.

We appreciate your support and cooperation as we continue to address the current issues and risks facing the Colorado River Basin.

Sincerely,



Tanya Trujillo  
Assistant Secretary  
for Water and Science

cc: Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation  
David M. Palumbo, Acting Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation  
Wayne G. Pullan, Regional Director, Bureau of Reclamation  
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Identical Letters Sent To:

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