Colorado River Update

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What's Happening on the Colorado River?

- Basin States have been negotiating operational rules set to take effect on October 1, 2026
- Negotiations have been unsuccessful
  - Numerous proposals and frameworks explored
  - Missed November and February deadlines
  - Main barrier to agreement is the division of cuts between Upper and Lower basins
- Basin States reached impasse in February



Winter 2026 Hydrology

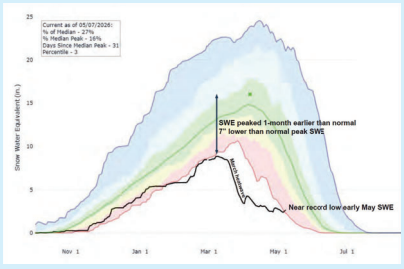
- Water Year 2026 hydrology was historically poor:
  - Worst snowpack on record
  - Annual inflow to Lake Powell ~35% of average
- Without intervention, Lake Powell was projected to drop 35 feet below minimum power pool
- To avoid this, Reclamation is:
  - Reducing the Lake Powell release from 7.48 MAF to 6 MAF
  - Releasing 0.66-1 MAF of water from Flaming Gorge

'No good news': Colorado River forecast gets historically bad

KUNC | By Scott Franz
Published May 11, 2026 at 10:27 PM MDT

Reuters

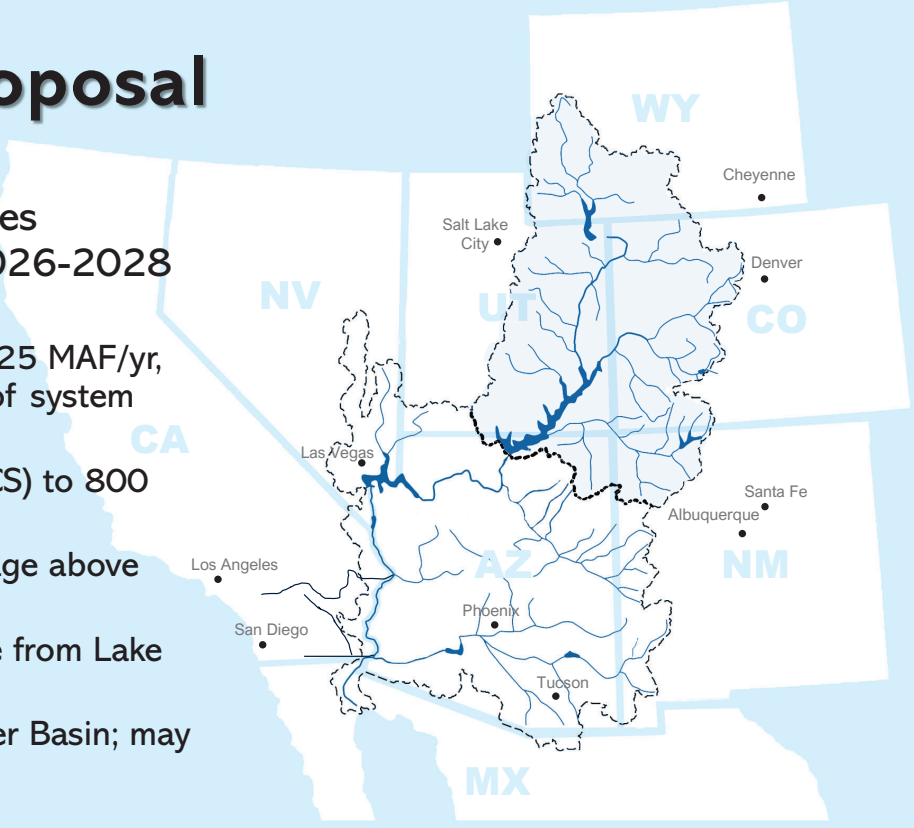
Colorado River to hit record low after worst-ever Rockies snowpacks





Lower Basin Proposal

- On May 1, Lower Basin States submitted a proposal for 2026-2028 operations to Reclamation
  - Lower Basin reductions of 1.25 MAF/yr, with an additional 700 KAF of system conservation through 2028
  - Limit use of banked water (ICS) to 800 KAF through 2028
  - Moderate releases from storage above Lake Powell
  - Releases of 7.0 MAF or more from Lake Powell unless in emergency
  - No legal protections for Upper Basin; may pursue Compact Call



Proposed Federal Framework

- In mid-May Reclamation shared a framework for the Post-2026 preferred alternative
  - 10-year framework, with new operations in 2-year increments
  - Will include specific operations for 2027-2028
  - Operations beyond 2028 left open-ended, to be determined by future Basin States consensus
  - Lays out general operational goals and analyzes wide range of operations

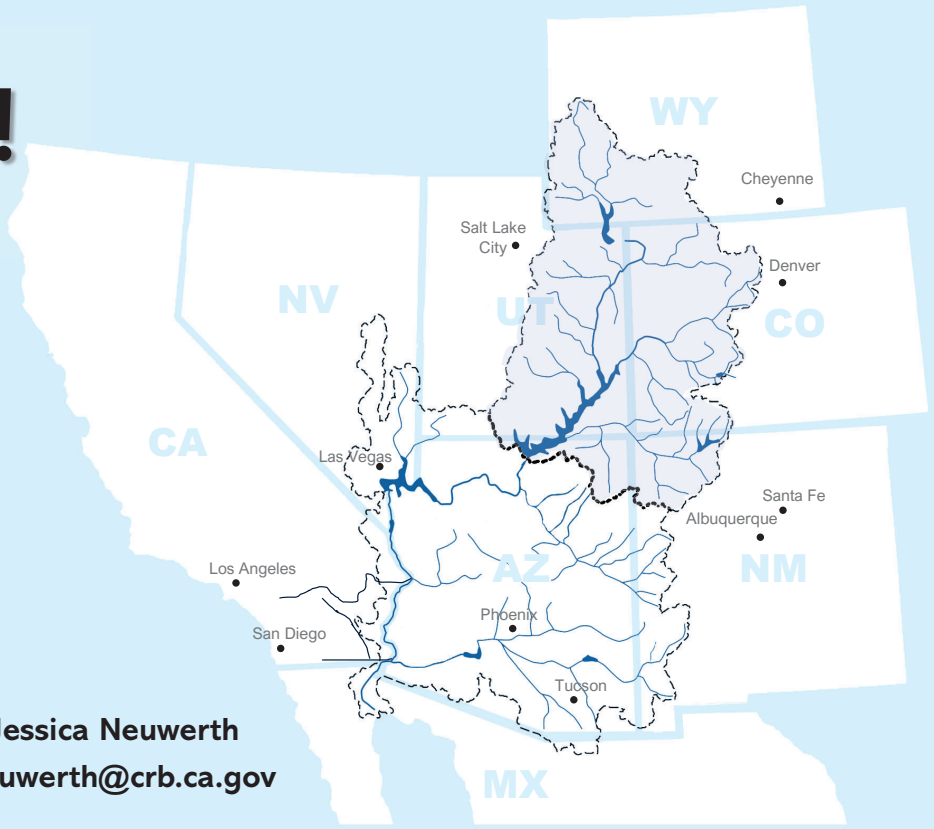


What Next?

- Reclamation has provided feedback on Lower Basin proposal; hoping to reach understanding on 2026-2028 operations by mid-June
- Lower Basin will spend summer preparing implementing agreements, seeking board approvals, etc.
- New rules must be in place by October 1
- Potential for mediated discussions with Upper Basin this fall



Thank you!



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