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NEWS RELEASE

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Lake Powell to Temporarily Decline Below 3,525 Feet *Coming months crucial to drought response planning*

SALT LAKE CITY – The Bureau of Reclamation today announced Lake Powell will decline below 3,525 feet in elevation in the near future, reflecting the abnormally dry winter season. The drop is temporary and Lake Powell’s elevation is expected to recover above 3,525 feet through the course of the spring runoff season, likely in May. Reclamation, the Upper Division States, and the Upper Colorado River Commission are preparing additional measures to implement later this year to help maintain elevation 3,525 feet at Lake Powell.

A very dry January and February eroded the Colorado River Basin’s snowpack, decreasing Lake Powell’s projected unregulated inflow forecast for water year 2022 by approximately 2.2 million acre-feet from January through February. As a result, [the February 24 Month Study projections](#) show Lake Powell potentially dropping 2 to 3 feet below 3,525 feet in March.

As part of the 2019 Drought Contingency Plan Agreements, specifically the Drought Response Operations Agreement, Reclamation and the Upper Division States describe elevation 3,525 feet as the target elevation and elevation 3,490 feet as the minimum power pool elevation, the lowest point Glen Canyon Dam can generate hydropower. The target elevation provides a 35-foot buffer and allows time for response actions to help prevent Lake Powell from dropping below minimum power pool.

“This year the Colorado River Basin has experienced extremely variable conditions with a record high snowpack one month, followed by weeks without snow,” **said Reclamation Acting Commissioner David Palumbo**. “This variable hydrology and a warmer, drier west have drastically impacted our operations and we are faced with the urgent need to manage in the moment.”

Consistent with the provisions of the Drought Response Operations Agreement, Reclamation, in consultation with the Upper Division States, through the Upper Colorado River Commission, has twice implemented proactive drought response operations that together have helped protect Lake Powell’s target elevation: 1) sending an additional 161 thousand acre-feet of water from Blue Mesa and Flaming Gorge reservoirs to Lake Powell from July 2021 through October 2021, and 2) temporarily reducing monthly releases from Glen Canyon Dam in order to hold back 350 thousand acre-feet of water in Lake Powell from January 2022 through April 2022 for release later in the year. The combined impact of these proactive actions ensured that Lake Powell will avoid dropping significantly below the target elevation of 3,525 feet during the spring of 2022.

“Reclamation is not planning to take further action to address this temporary dip below 3,525 feet because the spring runoff will resolve the deficit in the short term,” **said Reclamation Upper Colorado Basin Regional Director Wayne Pullan**. “However, our work is not done. Lake Powell is projected to drop below elevation 3,525 feet again later this year. Reclamation and the Upper Division States

continue to collaborate with stakeholders and partners to develop and implement additional actions later this year if appropriate.”

Reclamation’s Upper Colorado Basin Region and the Upper Division States, with the assistance of the Upper Colorado River Commission, are preparing a Drought Response Operations Plan that will propose additional actions to help protect Lake Powell elevations in 2022 if necessary.

“We appreciate the collaboration among Reclamation and the Upper Basin States at this critical time to develop the 2022 Drought Response Operations Agreement Operations Plan. We are optimistic these actions will provide additional protection to critical elevations in Lake Powell,” **said Chuck Cullom, Executive Director of the Upper Colorado River Commission.**

Reclamation continues to closely monitor the Basin’s snowpack and runoff projections. Reclamation, the Upper Division States, and the Upper Colorado River Commission are actively engaged with Tribes, federal agencies such as the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Western Area Power Administration; water users, non-governmental organizations and other key stakeholders, including the public, to protect the elevations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead.

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