



# UPPER COLORADO RIVER COMMISSION

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## **UCRC summary of Consensus Based Modeling Approach submitted on 01/30/2023 for consideration for Reclamation's analysis in their SEIS Process**

- On December 15, 2022, at the Colorado River Water Users Association meeting in Las Vegas, the Basin States (Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming) announced their intention to work collaboratively over a 45-day period to submit a consensus-based approach to Reclamation for it to model/evaluate in its Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement seeking to protect critical infrastructure and resources in Lake Powell and Lake Mead from impacts of the on-going drought and depleted storage by February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023
- The Basin States worked intensively over the 45-day period to analyze and evaluate an array of technical, operational, policy and legal means to protect critical elevations in Lake Powell and Lake Mead to ensure the system can continue to serve more than 40 million people, including 30 Tribes, and vital resources such as irrigated agriculture, environmental values and energy production across the 7 Basin States and northwest Mexico.
- Through the course of the 45-day effort, representatives of the Basin States acknowledged the shared risks and shared burden to protect and restore the Colorado River system. They noted the need to manage water uses within the available supply, the risks to all water users, use sectors and resources stemming from depleted storage and ongoing drought, the need to address the issue of unaccounted-for evaporation and losses in the Lower Basin, the potential limitations imposed on the Upper Basin due to annual variations in hydrology, and the necessity for additional actions.
- The result is a Consensus Based Modeling Approach (CBMA) submitted by Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming on 01/30 for Reclamation's consideration.
- The Basin States are committed to continuing to work together and with Tribes, water users, environmental and conservation organizations along with Federal Agencies to refine the approach and to develop partnerships and agreements as necessary to implement actions to protect the Colorado River system, its resources, and critical infrastructure.
- The CBMA is a balanced approach that provides:
  - o operational certainty for water users and resource managers across the Basin,
  - o mechanisms to help protect critical elevations in Lake Powell and Mead,
  - o distribution of reductions and actions across the Basin, with recognition that while the majority of actions focus on the Lower Basin, the burden to protect and restore the Colorado River system is a responsibility shared by all,
  - o continued coordinated operations in Lake Powell and Mead with adjustments designed to operate at lower elevations,
  - o continued operations within the existing legal and regulatory framework.
- The CBMA includes:
  - o Efforts to manage water uses across the Basin within the available supply

- Additional Lower Basin reductions of more than 2.0 MAF/yr adapting to changing hydrologic conditions
  - 1.54 MA/yr reductions under all conditions and at all Mead elevations to address and account for evaporation and losses occurring in the Lower Basin
  - Lower Basin reductions totaling 1.375 MAF/yr beginning at Lake Mead <1050'
  - Additional graduated Lower Basin reductions when Lake Mead falls below 1030' (250 kaf, 450 kaf)
  - Additional reductions in releases as necessary from Lake Mead to protect elevation 1,000'
- Recognition of the impacts of hydrologic shortage conditions to Upper Basin water users and supplies
- Contributions from the Upper Basin include:
  - Potential Drought Response Operations (releasing storage from upstream CRSPA units - Flaming Gorge, Aspinnall and Navajo Reservoirs) of up to 500 kaf/yr as appropriate, including recovery operations and subject to all provisions of the Drought Response Operations Agreement
  - Additional conservation actions such as System Conservation Pilot Program and other programs depending upon hydrologic conditions and supply availability. This is subject to voluntary participation and approval by the Upper Colorado River Commission
- Revising Lake Powell operations to provide greater certainty for water releases and to protect critical elevations by:
  - Limiting Lake Powell releases in the Lower Elevation Balancing Tier to 7.0 MAF and raising the trigger elevation for that tier to 3,550', while allowing for further reduced releases to protect 3,500' if needed
- Preserving rights and legal positions of the Lower and Upper Basin relative to the implementation of the Law of the River
- While the CBMA is not an implementation agreement, it outlines an approach for Reclamation to analyze in their SEIS process that protects critical infrastructure in Lake Powell and Lake Mead, and balances the burdens among water users across the Lower Basin and Upper Basin within the existing legal framework. The CBMA can be a catalyst for deeper commitments and actions among all the Basin States to protect the Colorado River system, its water users, and resources from the impacts of the ongoing drought and depleted storage.

Additional coordination with Mexico through the International Boundary and Water Commission will be necessary in carrying out elements of the CBMA.