



Upper Colorado
River Commission

UCRC 316th Special Meeting Advances 2026 Colorado River Operations Amid Continued Dry Conditions

Commissioners approve drought response plan and accounting report as Upper Basin prioritizes supply-based management and River system stability

SALT LAKE CITY — April 22, 2026 — The Upper Colorado River Commission (UCRC) convened its 316th Special Meeting on April 21, bringing together the Commissioners from Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming to address the real and ongoing water shortages suffered across the Upper Basin amid worsening hydrologic conditions. Shortages impact Upper Basin communities, agriculture, Tribes, national security installations and vital industries, as well as operations at Lake Powell.

Commissioners emphasized the dire situation at Lake Powell, which is the result not only of the dry hydrology in 2026 but also of a decades-long imbalance between releases and inflows. They urged that future operations at Lake Powell must reflect the available supply.

The Commissioners called on Lower Basin counterparts to rejoin negotiations to solve the Basin's math problem, where uses are greater than the available supply in the Lower Basin. They outlined four focal points for renewed negotiations:

- Future operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead that improve storage and system reliability
- Mediation to solve the Basin's math problem, rather than clinging to legal theories that fail in the face of current hydrology
- Support for federal funding to build resilience across the Basin to support a seven-state consensus
- Support for creative solutions

The 2026 Drought Response Operations Plan, developed under the Drought Response Operations Agreement, was approved. The plan outlines potential releases from Flaming Gorge Reservoir ranging from 660,000 to 1 million acre-feet, depending on hydrologic conditions, and is designed to help protect Lake Powell, with ongoing monitoring and analysis of effectiveness. The plan evaluates but does not include additional releases from Blue Mesa and Navajo Reservoirs due to the limited available supply.

The Commission also approved the Water Year 2025 Provisional Accounting Report, which documents and accounts for projects in the Upper Basin that contribute to Lake Powell. The Accounting Report highlights the advanced water management, measurement and accounting procedures being implemented in the Upper Basin. The Accounting Report is a significant step forward in demonstrating how Upper Basin programs and projects can contribute water to protect Upper Basin users and Lake Powell.

The Commissioners of the Upper Division States provided the following statements:

UCRC Chair and Colorado Commissioner, Becky Mitchell

“The Upper Division States are proud to be part of the solution — but we cannot be the entire solution. This year's hydrology is a harsh reminder that water supplies do not match full demands. In the Upper Division States, that requires us all to use a lot less. We are working with each other in real time as hydrology worsens to put water on the table, including today's actions, to solve the daunting math problem. Today, we are asking the Lower Basin to join us in solving this math problem, to return to the table and work out real-world solutions in partnership.”



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New Mexico Commissioner, Estevan Lopez

"New Mexicans are already feeling the strain of reduced supplies, and we cannot afford to wait for conditions to worsen before acting. We are committed to working with our fellow Upper Division States and Reclamation to take responsible, science-based steps that protect critical elevations at Lake Powell and uphold the Compact. These actions are difficult, but they are necessary to safeguard New Mexico's water users today and preserve the Colorado River for future generations."

Utah Commissioner, Gene Shawcroft

"Utah has always managed its water with the understanding that supply is variable and limited. This year puts that principle to its greatest test yet. The approved releases from Flaming Gorge are an important and necessary step, and I want Utahns to know that any water released will be fully recovered once conditions allow. The mandatory cuts already being borne by farmers, communities, and local economies are real and significant, and we do not take that burden lightly. Protecting Lake Powell means protecting Utah's water future, and that is exactly what we are focused on."

Wyoming Commissioner, Brandon Gebhart

"What we are approving today will have significant negative impacts on our water resources, local economies and recreation both this year and for years to come. We expect that 3 of the 5 Flaming Gorge boat ramps in Wyoming will likely be rendered unusable, and low reservoir levels will have a long-lasting negative impact on the reservoir fisheries. It will also impair our ability to respond to poor hydrologic conditions in the future. Our consideration and approval are not taken lightly, and we wouldn't be recommending this release except for the historically dire conditions."

For more information about the Upper Colorado River Commission, visit <http://www.ucrccommission.com>.

About the Upper Colorado River Commission (UCRC):

The UCRC is an interstate administrative agency made up of duly appointed representatives from the four Upper Division States of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

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