



# Colorado River Update

*Western States Water Council  
Legal Committee*

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# Post-2026 Colorado River Operations

Reclamation initiated the NEPA process in June 2023

<https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/index.html>



— BUREAU OF —  
RECLAMATION

## Scoping Report for Post-2026 Colorado River Reservoir Operations

Upper and Lower Colorado Basin Regions



# Scoping Report: Purpose and Need

- The Secretary is required to coordinate operations of the Colorado River reservoirs
- 2007 Interim Guidelines are expiring and have not sufficiently reduced risk
- Imbalance between supply and demand will be exacerbated by increasingly likely low-runoff conditions
- Expanded and innovative use of conservation is needed
- Addressing tribal concerns regarding Colorado River basin management is needed

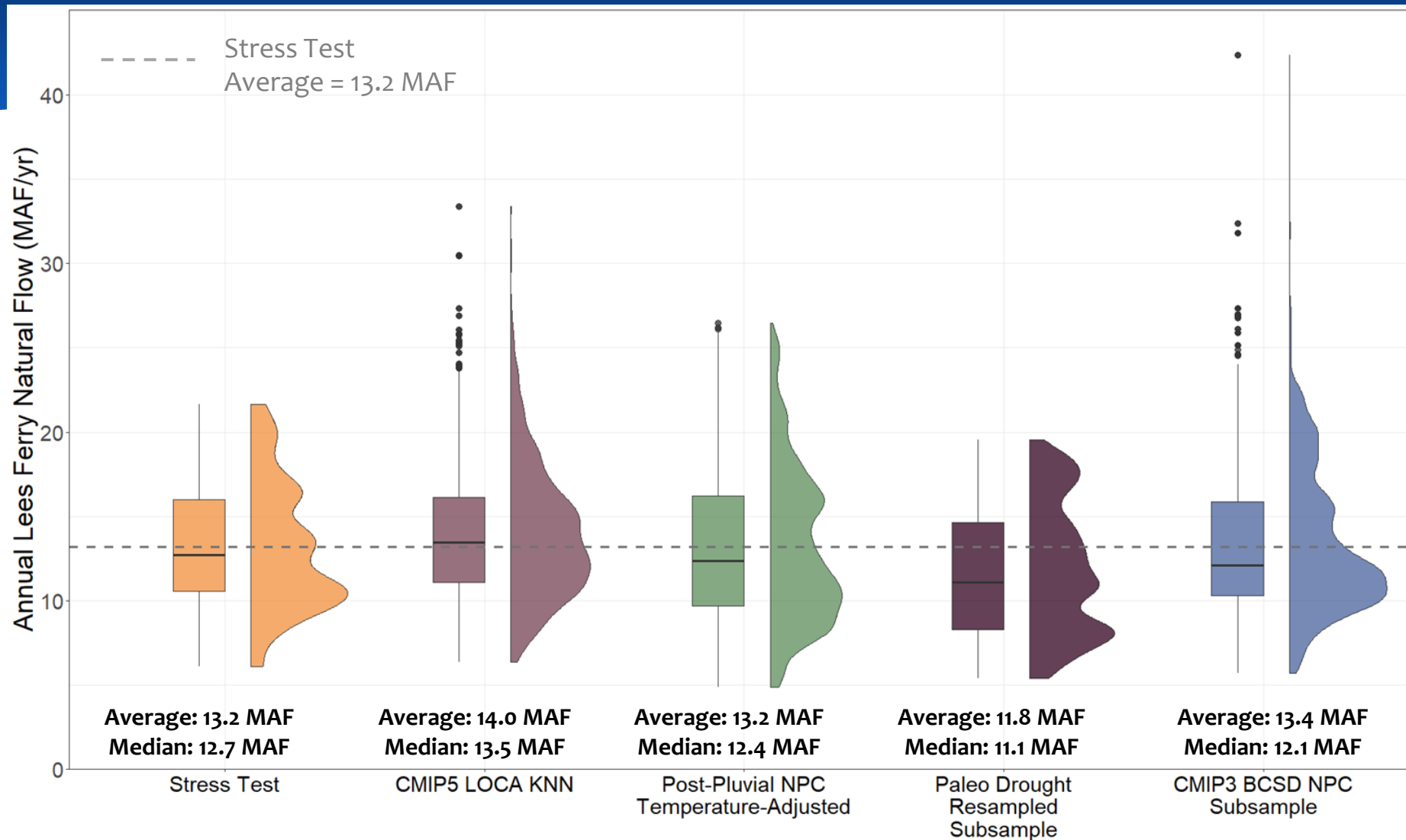
# Scoping Report: Purpose and Need

- Update and expand reservoir management guidelines, particularly for Lakes Powell and Mead
- Provide a greater degree of predictability of the amount of water available under anticipated increasing variability, low runoff and low reservoir conditions
- Provide additional mechanisms for conservation, and reservoir storage and delivery
- Provide new or enhanced opportunities for Basin Tribes to benefit from their water rights
- Provide flexibility to build resilience and accommodate future needs and growth that are supported by Colorado River water supplies, including the integration of unquantified tribal water rights once they are resolved

# Reclamation Provided Hydrologies

- Reclamation selected a wide range of future hydrologies to explore system robustness under different operational strategies.
- The hydrologies represent a historical natural flow record in addition to incorporating impacts of climate change, a warming future, and extended droughts.
- One of the ‘wetter’ hydrologies selected is the Stress Test, which is the natural flow record from 1988 to 2020, with an average flow of 13.2 MAF.
- Overall, the hydrologies cover a wide range of minimum and maximum flow sequences that extend beyond the historical records, especially for the minimum flows.

# Reclamation-Provided Hydrologies



# “Comparison” Alternatives

- No Action Alternative – Legal framework that would take effect if there is no action – based largely on pre-2007 framework
- Continuing Current Strategies Alternative – Continues 2007 Guidelines + DCP
- Neither alternative will meet the purpose and need

# Action Alternatives

- Lower Basin Alternative
- Upper Colorado River Commission Alternative
- Cooperative Conservation Alternative
- US Fish and Wildlife Service & National Park Service
- Comments from Tribes
- Others



# Action Alternatives

- Alternatives were submitted *for analysis*
- Alternatives do not represent a firm agreement re: implementation
- Modeling results and analysis of alternatives may provide a foundation for negotiations
- Consensus – among 7 States, Tribes, Mexico, water users, NGOs, etc., will likely be required to implement several aspects of the proposed alternatives
  - May require federal legislation in some cases
  - May require agreements among states, water users, US/Mexico, etc.
- NO ONE has agreed to anything YET!

# General Points of Agreement\*

- Cannot continue current operational framework
- Must develop a framework to avoid “crisis management”
- Must REDUCE USE

\* No one has agreed to anything yet, and everyone reserves all rights to object, disagree, and legally challenge, as well as any other rights that can be reserved.

# General Points of Disagreement

- Who should reduce their uses, when, and by how much?
- In the face of low flows and substantial reduction, how much water do we use and how much do we set aside?
- Who should reduce their uses?

# What's Next?

- NEPA process:
  - Reclamation is modeling the alternatives.
  - After the modeling results are complete, the impacts of each alternative must be analyzed.
  - The Post-2026 Draft EIS is projected to be released at the end of the year.
- Other activity:
  - Ongoing discussions among Basin States, Tribes, and Mexico
  - Intra-state discussions



# Questions?

Website: [azwater.gov](http://azwater.gov)

Twitter: [@azwater](https://twitter.com/azwater)