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NEWS & MULTIMEDIA

Reclamation projects Colorado River drought operations for the next 5 years

Media Contact: Marlon Duke, 385-228-4845, mduke@usbr.gov
Patti Aaron, 702-293-8189, paaron@usbr.gov

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WASHINGTON – Modeling results for the Colorado River Basin operations released today by the Bureau of Reclamation indicate continued drought and an increased chance of potential water shortages by 2025. The Colorado River Basin is in its 21st year of an extended drought. As reservoir levels decline, Lake Powell and Lake Mead operations are potentially impacted. The Colorado River Simulation System modeling results, released at least three times per year, provide water managers with information needed to plan accordingly for the future.

“Reclamation’s technical experts provide leading-edge scientific modeling which helps Colorado River water managers make their operational decisions,” said Commissioner Brenda Burman. “That science helps us protect the water resources in the Basin, ensuring sustainable, reliable water and hydropower for the 40 million people who depend on this river.”

Due to the below average runoff this year (55% of average for the water year), the CRSS projections indicate an increase by as much as 12 percent in the chance of Lake Powell and Lake Mead falling to critically low reservoir levels by 2025 as compared with the projections released this spring. The chance of a Lower Basin shortage determination increased by as much as 20 percent through 2025, assuming a dry hydrologic future similar to what the Basin has experienced over the past 2 decades. These increases put the chances of reaching critically lower levels near 20 percent and a Lower Basin shortage near 80 percent by 2025. The CRSS projections can be found at <https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/riverops/coriver-projections.html>.

A key source of Reclamation’s technical capability comes through a partnership with University of Colorado-Boulder, where Reclamation helped establish and continues to support the Center for Advanced Decision Support for Water and Environmental Systems. In collaboration with the Colorado River regional operations offices, Reclamation uses the best available science to develop reliable projections to guide water management and operational decisions.

The extended drought increases the importance of ongoing drought contingency actions and operational adjustments that Reclamation and partner entities have taken on the river. These actions successfully demonstrate that voluntary, compensated water conservation projects can conserve water for the Colorado River system storage and help mitigate the impacts of drought.

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