

# New Rules for the Colorado River

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The rules for managing the Colorado River expire at the end of 2026.

There isn't enough water in the Colorado River to go around. New rules are desperately needed to sustain the river for people and the environment.

## Current problems

- **Demand outpaces supply** in the Colorado River Basin
- **Water levels are falling** in Lake Powell and Lake Mead
- **Climate change** is reducing water flowing into the Colorado River
- **Cuts in water use** aren't big enough

## How will new rules be developed?

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is developing new guidelines in collaboration with state and federal agencies, Native American tribes, Mexico, and others to address changing conditions and reduce risks to water deliveries, power generation, and environmental and cultural resources.

## 5 guiding principles for a solution

- 1 Sustain the Colorado River and its tributaries
- 2 Reduce water demand and account for evaporation and water losses
- 3 Protect groundwater
- 4 Promote meaningful inclusion of 30 Colorado River Basin tribes
- 5 Prioritize climate resilience planning for dam infrastructure

## Facts & figures

### The Colorado River

- Supplies water to 40 million people in 7 states, 30 tribes, and Mexico
- Nourishes 5.5 million acres of farmland
- Powers 7 million households
- Fuels \$26 billion in recreational spending every year
- Supports over 16 million jobs in the region
- Is ecologically and culturally significant
- Flows through 9 national parks

## Climate change

### 2000-2021

- Driest conditions in 1,200 years
- Colorado River flows declined by 20%
- Flows are predicted to decline another 30% by 2050
- Amount of water lost equal to a full Lake Mead (10.4 trillion gallons of water or 32 million acre-feet)

Between 2000 and 2023 Lakes Powell and Mead shrank to 1/3 of their combined capacity

## Timeline

2022  
Pre-Scoping

2023  
Scoping

2024  
Alternatives

2025  
Draft Rule

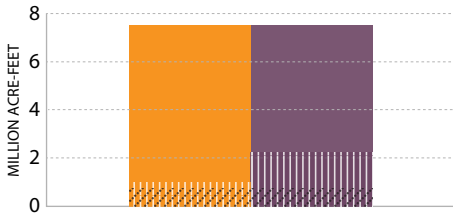
2026  
Final Rule  
and Decision



In order to avoid a catastrophic collapse of the Colorado River System and a future of uncertainty and conflict, water use in the Basin must be reduced.

— Tanya Trujillo, Former Assistant Secretary for Water and Science

## How is the Colorado River water divided up on paper?



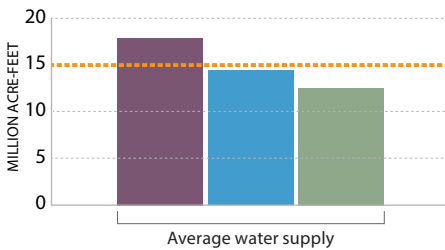
- Upper Basin: 7.5 million acre-feet
- Lower Basin: 7.5 million acre-feet + right to increase use by 1 million acre-feet
- ▨ 22 Colorado River Basin tribes: ~3.2 million acre-feet
- ▨ Mexico: 1.5 million acre-feet

\* 12 tribes have unresolved claims to additional Colorado River water

### HINT:

1 acre-foot is how much water it takes to flood 1 acre of land (a football field) a foot deep in water, or approximately 325,000 gallons.

## Real vs. paper water

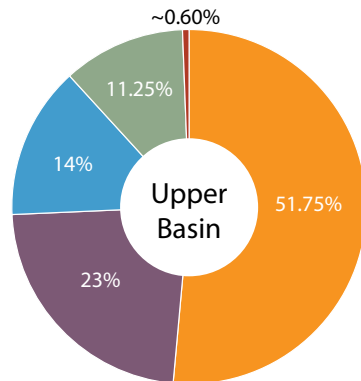


--- 15 million acre-feet promised to Upper and Lower basins each year

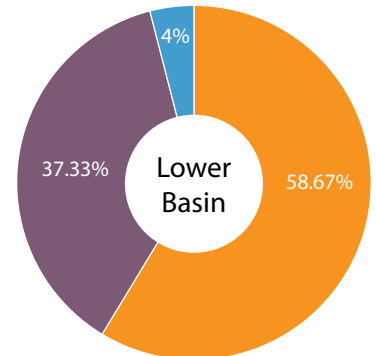
- Average water supply:
- 1906-1929 (17.9 million acre-feet)
  - 1930-1999 (14.3 million acre-feet)
  - 2000-2023 (12.5 million acre-feet)



## How does each basin divide its water?



- Colorado (3.855 million acre-feet)
- Utah (1.714 million acre-feet)
- Wyoming (1.043 million acre-feet)
- New Mexico (0.838 million acre-feet)
- Arizona (50,000 acre-feet)



- California (4.4 million acre-feet)
- Arizona (2.8 million acre-feet)
- Nevada (300,000 acre-feet)

## How much Colorado River water are we actually using?

While the Lower Basin uses its entire allocation and sometimes more, the Upper Basin uses a little more than half the water allocated to it.

## The Colorado River is running out of water

Developing new rules to sustain the Colorado River Basin is important but may not be enough to protect the river and the people, crops, wildlife, and landscapes that depend on it without evaluating the aging dam infrastructure.



The system is at its tipping point.

— Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, June 14, 2022 Hearing before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources



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