

Peer Review Plan

Colorado River Post-2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Lake Powell and Lake Mead Environmental Impact Statement

Date:

October 15, 2025

Originating Office:

Colorado River Post-2026 Program Office, Commissioner's Office, Bureau of Reclamation
421 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309

Reclamation Roles:

Director or delegated manager: Carly Jerla, Colorado River Post-2026 Program Manager, Commissioner's Office, Bureau of Reclamation

Peer Review Lead: KayLee Nelson, Colorado River Post-2026 Program Coordinator, Commissioner's Office, Bureau of Reclamation

Subject and Purpose:

The Colorado River Basin Post-2026 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is being carried out to identify successor operating guidelines for Lakes Powell and Mead. The current guidelines, comprised of the December 2007 Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead (2007 Interim Guidelines), the 2019 Colorado River Drought Contingency Plans, and international agreements between the United States and Mexico¹, which work in conjunction to define operating criteria for the reservoirs, are expiring at the end of water year 2026. The Secretary of the Department of the Interior (Secretary) must adopt new guidelines before October 2026 to provide an orderly transition to new long-term operations, which will take effect when the current operating guidelines expire and continue for up to 20 years into the future.

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the potential effects from various action alternatives and the no action alternative. The following federal agencies are cooperating in the environmental analysis and preparation of the EIS: Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), National Park Service (NPS), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC), and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). In addition, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) is providing scientific and modeling support as a partner with Reclamation.

The purpose of this peer review process is to ensure that the scientific information and analysis used in the resource impact sections of the EIS are valid and that any modeling results are properly

¹ International agreements are pursuant to the United States-Mexico Treaty on Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande (1944 Water Treaty). The United States will conduct all necessary and appropriate discussions regarding the proposed federal action and implementation of the 1944 Treaty with Mexico through the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) in consultation with the Department of State.

interpreted, applied, and disclosed.

Impact of Dissemination:

The Secretary, acting through Reclamation, proposes adoption of specific guidelines and coordinated management strategies to address Lake Powell and Lake Mead through their full operating range. This action would provide improved predictability to all water users and managers in the Colorado River Basin (Basin) by developing and adopting objective guidelines for the operation of Glen Canyon Dam and Hoover Dam to take effect when the current operating guidelines (the 2007 Interim Guidelines) and other associated agreements expire in 2026. The EIS will help inform the decision on which guidelines the Secretary would adopt. As such, Reclamation determined that the EIS provides highly influential scientific analysis and is warranted for peer review.

Peer Review Scope and Methods:

The subject of this review is the scientific information and analysis used in the resource impact sections of the EIS. Much of the analysis will be based on modeling results for each alternative as provided by Reclamation's Research and Modeling Groups, cooperating agencies, and USGS. Each model will undergo peer review in accordance with the modelling agency's guidance.

The scope of this EIS peer review is to ensure that the models are properly interpreted and applied in the analysis, that other scientific information used in the EIS is valid and appropriate, and that the analysis is logical and supported.

The peer review for the EIS will be conducted in two phases:

Phase 1: Cooperating Agency Peer Review. Under this phase, Reclamation will have staff from the cooperating agencies (BIA, NPS, Service, USIBWC, WAPA), along with the USGS, review the internal Preliminary Draft EIS. We anticipate that there will be over 30 technical expert reviewers. Agency comments will be documented using a comment matrix, in which all relevant comments will be responded to. The document will be revised as appropriate.

Phase 2: Reclamation will assemble three outside experts in NEPA technical analysis to review the EIS to respond to three criteria for each resource section that uses modeling results:

1. Ensure model uncertainty is sufficiently disclosed
2. Ensure results are not presented with over confidence
3. Ensure results and conclusion properly represent model results

Results will be documented in a memo and any discrepancies will be resolved prior to issuance of the Final EIS.

While not part of the formal peer review process, it should also be noted that Reclamation is planning to have a public review of the Draft EIS, during which time, the public can comment on the analysis. Reclamation will consider all public comments and update the analysis accordingly.

Timing of Review:

Phase 1 review period will occur over a one-week period in November once the Preliminary Draft EIS is complete, anticipated to be mid-November.

Phase 2 review period is anticipated to be in early 2026. Following the conclusion of the Phase 2 review period, the Peer Review Report is expected to be available on the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Peer Review public website (<http://www.usbr.gov/main/qoi/peeragenda.html>) prior to the publication of the final EIS.

Number of Peer Reviewers:

Phase 1: Over 30 technical experts will review the Preliminary Draft EIS

Phase 2: Three outside experts in NEPA technical analysis

Reviewer Selection Process:

The reviewers will be selected by Reclamation staff and the public will not be asked to nominate reviewers. The reviewers will have experience with the resources that they are evaluating.

Delivery of Findings:

The delivery of findings will be included in the project record and consist of two deliverables:

Phase 1: Comment matrix with responses

Phase 2: Memo of findings and resolution

Response to Peer Review:

The response to peer review will be included in the project record and consist of two deliverables:

Phase 1: Comment matrix with responses

Phase 2: Memo of findings and resolution

Federal Register Notice:

Federal Register notices will not be provided announcing the formation of a peer review team and completion of the final report.

Applicability of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA):

This peer review is not subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) because the review does not involve open meetings or committee chartering and reviewers are being asked to provide individual reviews on the subject matter. Reclamation is not seeking consensus advice from the reviewers as a group.

Agency Contact:

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