# Colorado River Storage Project
# Flaming Gorge Working Group
# Meeting Minutes
# March 11, 2026

## Participation

This meeting was held Wednesday, March 11, 2026, starting at noon MT, in Vernal, UT and virtually via Microsoft Teams. Attendees are listed on the last page.

## Purpose of Meeting

The purpose of these working group meetings is to inform the public and other interested parties on Reclamation's current and future operational plans and to gather input from the public and interested parties regarding resources associated with the dam [Flaming Gorge].

### Introductions – Alex Pivarnik (Bureau of Reclamation)

This is the first Flaming Gorge Working Group meeting this year. A draft Flaming Gorge Operations Plan was distributed before the meeting. Comments on the draft plan were requested before the next meeting on April 21.

The Flaming Gorge Working Group meeting is an important step in developing the Flaming Gorge Operations Plan.

### Current and Forecasted Hydrology – Brenda Alcorn (Colorado Basin River Forecast Center)

The antecedent soil conditions, from fall 2025, can be an indicator of runoff efficiency in the spring. The Green and Yampa were both below normal this fall, with conditions in the 70-90% range for most of the Basins. Fall soil moisture conditions are similar to last year. Usually, there would not be much change in the soil moisture conditions over the winter, but due to extremely warm conditions, both Basins have seen rain instead of snow accumulation, even at higher elevations. This has increased the soil moisture, which may help the small amount of snowpack runoff more efficiently.

Water Year (WY) 2026 precipitation in the Upper Green is 110% of average and 120% of average above Fontenelle for year to date. The Yampa Basin is at 83% of average. These conditions look better than they actually are, as so much has fallen as rain rather than building snowpack. The NRCS data also shows 2026 precipitation in the Upper Green is slightly above median and very similar to last year, but SWE (Snow Water Equivalent) is about 2.5 inches below 2025.

Temperatures have been above normal. The NRCS has recorded periods of record warm daily average temperatures in the Upper Green and the CBRFC's monthly minimum temperatures have been 7 to 9+ °F warmer in most of the Colorado River Basin.

Modeled snowpack conditions in early January were at or above median in the Upper Green, but accumulation stalled after that and as of this late February meeting conditions above Fontenelle are at 88% of median and 80% of median above Flaming Gorge.

The Yampa's snowpack has been below median for the year, with conditions at 54% of median as of this meeting, with many of the snotel sites at or near record lows. At the beginning of the month, this would have correlated to the fourth driest water supply forecast at 590 kaf and forecasts continue to drop, with raw model guidance indicating a forecast of 563 kaf.

Forecasts on the Green have also continued to decline. The March 1st official forecast, the March 10th raw model guidance are shown in Table 2 with the 2025 observed volumes.

Table 1. April-July Forecasted Volume in kaf / percent of 1991-202 Average (Presented by Brenda Alcorn, CBRFC)

| | **Mar 1 Forecast** | **Mar 10 Guidance** | **2025 Observed** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Fontenelle** | 545 / 74% | 512 / 67% | 464 / 63% |
| **Flaming Gorge** | 615 / 64% | 574 / 55% | 517 / 54% |
| **Deerlodge** | 590 / 50% | 563 / 50% | 607 / 51% |

The peak flow for the Yampa based on the March 9th model run showed a peak flow much below average (6,179 cfs compared to 12,758 cfs). It is still early in the season and spring weather will play an important role in the observed peak flow.

In the near term, temperatures are expected to continue to be above average with below average chances for precipitation over the next two weeks.

Questions

A question was asked about the mid-elevation snowpack. Brenda clarified that the model builds its own snowpack and is not reliant on SNOTEL data. The CBRFC has a lumped model, but forecasters can at finer scales. The model does not indicate much snow below 8,000', but there is some and it is being factored into the forecasts. As temperatures warm next week, the runoff should provide an indication on the accuracy of the model estimates.

## Green River Research and Endangered Fish – Tildon Jones (Recovery)

Tildon started with a background on the listed fish, the threats to those species, the Recovery Program, and the native fish lifecycle in comparison to idealized flow and river temperatures.

The Recovery Program's 2026 request for moderately dry or drier classification prioritized 1) the smallmouth bass (SMB) flow spike, 2) the Colorado pikeminnow (CPM) base flow, and 3) the Larval Trigger Study Plan (LTSP).

SMB Flow Spike

There are three invasive fish species that Recovery focuses on, with SMB being one of the highest concerns. SMB have better reproductive success in average to drier years. The SMB flow

spike request focuses on temperature and flow. The SMB flow spike consists of 72 hours of Flaming Gorge release at power plant capacity.

CPM Base Flow
The CPM base flows are intended to improve survival and recruitment of young CPM by targeting flows at Jensen, based on hydrologic classification, through the end of September.

LTSP
The LTSP is intended to shift flows from the Yampa peak to being timed based on the presence of Razorback Sucker, with the intent to push larvae into wetlands

Drought Operations Input
The Recovery Request included input for potential drought operations from Flaming Gorge. These included apply extra releases towards experiments and prioritizing spring through autumn growing season for fish.

Questions
During the presentation, Tildon noted that 7 of 8 reservoirs have nonnative fish screening. A question was asked about which reservoir does not have screening. Tildon explained that it is Catamount on the Yampa River, which is a source of Pike.

A question was asked about the SMB Flow Spike and if bass are expected to re-nest. Tildon explained that the experiment is timed to wait until the bass have spawned, so if the bass do re-nest they have a shorter growing season and are less likely to survive the winter.

A question was asked about if drought operations were speculation. Reclamation clarified that we expect that a drought action will be taken, but the details are still being determined. A follow up question was asked if that would mean higher base flows. Reclamation indicated that operations would likely be similar to 2022 DRO releases.

A question asked about which experiments Recovery prioritizes. Tildon covered the Moderately Dry and drier priorities and explained that the priorities change based on the hydrologic classification.

A question was asked about how many years we have done the SMB and CPM experiments and are they still experimental. SMB and CPM have been done in 4 years. For SMB we do have the data that shows young-of-year bass are lower than expected for similarly dry hydrologies and lower than the overall average. Tildon will check-in with Dr. Bestgen on presenting that data later. The process of fully adopting instead of incorporating via adaptive management would require multi-agency coordination. The amount of data needed to support that process has not been determined, and it was noted that experiments would need to be conducted across a variety of hydrologies to understand the results.

**Flaming Gorge Reservoir Operations – Amanda Becker (Bureau of Reclamation),**
Amanda reviewed Flaming Gorge operations, starting with a background of the project.

In the Draft Flaming Gorge Operations Plan, the Dry year would attempt the LTSP and SMB flow spike. Summer flows for CPM may not be able to be met due to a tight water budget and low contributions from the Yampa.

The forecast currently indicates a Moderately Dry classification. This would target LTSP and SMB flow spike. Summer flows for CPM may not be able to be met due to a tight water budget and low contributions from the Yampa. Autumn and winter flows would use the lower end of the baseflow range.

In Average would likely need bypass to meet the LTSP targets. The SMB flow spike would be included. The plan would target CPM, but the actual target would depend on the available water. Flows would decrease for the fall and increase for the winter.

In Moderately Wet, the Recovery Request does not include the SMB spike flow. Spring Flows are intended to be timed to match and extend peak flows but may extend to encompass larval drift. Flows would decrease for the fall and increase for the winter.

In Wet, spring operations would likely be driven by flood control operations, but Reclamation would attempt to time releases to meet biologic and channel maintenance goals. The plan would target CPM, but the actual target would depend on the available water. Flows would decrease for the fall and increase for the winter.

Drought

The Recovery Program Request and FGTWG Proposal have included recommendations for any additional release for drought operations:

- The first recommendation is to allocate additional DRO volumes according to the priorities identified in the Recovery Program flow request letter, such that DRO releases can be applied to experiments in the order listed.
- CPM summer base flows do not exceed 3,000 cfs at the Jensen gage in any hydrologic classification and the Recovery Program requests that Reclamation not exceed this threshold in implementing DRO releases from the onset of larval Colorado pikeminnow presence in summer through the winter base flow period (December through February). This recommendation is intended to maintain nursery habitat conditions for age-0 Colorado pikeminnow.
- In addition, when DRO is implemented that result in higher base flows, FGTWG along with Recovery Program, recommends Reclamation work with the FGTWG and subject matter experts to monitor temperature differences between the Green and Yampa rivers during Colorado pikeminnow larval presence and limit that difference to less than 5°C during the larval drift period (Muth et al. 2000; LaGory et al. in review). This recommendation is also intended to increase survival and growth of larvae and avoid negative impacts from higher releases.

In addition to the Recovery Program Request, FGTWG recommended the following:

- The first recommendation is to allocate additional DRO volumes according to the priorities identified in the Recovery Program flow request letter, such that DRO releases can be applied to experiments in the order listed.
- CPM summer base flows do not exceed 3,000 cfs at the Jensen gage in any hydrologic classification and the Recovery Program requests that Reclamation not exceed this threshold in implementing DRO releases from the onset of larval Colorado pikeminnow presence in summer through the winter base flow period (December through February). This recommendation is intended to maintain nursery habitat conditions for age-0 Colorado pikeminnow.
- In addition, when DRO is implemented that result in higher base flows, FGTWG along with Recovery Program, recommends Reclamation work with the FGTWG and subject matter experts to monitor temperature differences between the Green and Yampa rivers during Colorado pikeminnow larval presence and limit that difference to less than 5°C during the larval drift period (Muth et al. 2000; LaGory et al. in review). This recommendation is also intended to increase survival and growth of larvae and avoid negative impacts from higher releases.

## Questions/Comments

Questions:

A question was asked about repairing the Selective Withdrawal Structure on Unit 1. Jared (Reclamation) explained that a feasibility study was recently concluded repairs will need to wait for appropriated funds. Reclamation has worked around this issue by running Unit 1 in the winter (when release temperatures are less of a concern) and using Units 2 and 3 during the temperature management season; this keeps unit use consistent. Reclamation has also implemented a structural fix to avoid this issue in the future.

A question was asked about road work over dam. This is the responsibility of UDOT, not Reclamation, but current work plans indicate that work is expected in the next state fiscal year, which begins in July 2026.

A question was asked about the impact of losing power at Glen Canyon. In addition to the power generation impacts, Leslie (CREDA/NWRA) noted that it would result in an impact to the Basin Fund, which pays for Operation, Maintenance, and Replacement costs.

A question asked about when the Draft Flaming Gorge Operations Plan would be updated. Reclamation indicated that it will be updated between the April 24-Month Study (published April 15) and the next Working Group (April 21). However, even when the plan is finalized, operations may be modified to reflect changing hydrologic conditions.

Many questions were asked around drought operations and boat ramp access. Reclamation is still coordinating the specifics, but any drought release would be done within the existing Record of Decision. As Reclamation considers drought releases, information on recreation, including boat ramp elevations, is being included.

Comments:
There were various comments requesting that daily/hourly fluctuations be minimized for recreation.

UDWR requested that reductions to pool elevation in the winter attempt to be minimized to protect Kokanee spawning in Flaming Gorge.

NPS recommended that additional flows be added to the Spring Peak over extending CPM.

Requests were made to quantify drought operation benefits, beyond the existing DROA accounting.

## Next Meeting

April 21, 2026 at noon.

## Attendees

- Adams, Todd - Utah Dept of Natural Resources
- Alcorn, Brenda - CBRFC
- Alexander, Jason - National Park Service - Water Rights Branch
- Arnold, Tyler - BLM-Vernal
- Bailey, Rodney - WAPA
- Bair, Woody - FLAMING GORGE RESORT
- Becker, Amanda - USBR
- Berry, Nicholas - Recon Angling
- Bestgen, Kevin - Colorado State University, Larval Fish Laboratory
- Billerbeck, Rob – NPS
- Bode, Ana – USFWS
- Boren, Natalie - UDWR
- Clegg, Kevin - USFS
- Cowley, Jeff - Wyoming State Engineer's Office
- Cunningham, Colleen - New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission
- Curtis, Colton - Wyoming Game and Fish Department
- Deppe, Val - USBR
- Detlor, Jordan - UDWR
- Eaton, Christopher - Trout Creek Flies
- Elder, Tom – Private
- Engelbert, Bryan - UDWR
- Fegler, Melinda - Wyoming State Engineer's Office
- Figgins, Eric - none
- Foster, Georgia - BLM
- Fryer, Derek - WAPA
- Garrison, Michelle - Colorado Water Conservation Board
- Gaylord, Tim - Holiday River Expeditions

- Gibney, Nicki - NPS
- Gillman, Darrell - Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
- Graf, David - upper CO River Endangered Fish Recovery Program
- Griffin, Simone - Blue-ribbon Coalition
- Griffiths, Ron - USGS
- Hedrick, Trina - Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
- Herrera, Lisa - Green River Chamber of Commerce
- Hewitt, Jordynn - Daggett County
- Hinkhouse, Carsen – UDWR
- Hyder, Saidee - UDWR
- James, Leslie - CREDA/NWRA
- Jones, Tildon - Recovery Program
- Kot, Mark - WWDC
- Lavoie, Bruce - OARS
- Leonard, Christy - National Park Service
- Lucas, Matt - WRF Guides and GRC
- Lytle, Jack - Daggett County
- Marquis, Jared - USBR
- Martin, David - Sweetwater NOW
- Martin, Tom - River Runners for Wilderness
- McClure, Catherine - Colorado State University
- Mcdonald, Carrie - US Forest Service
- Miller, Mechelle - Utah Public Safety / Division of Emergency Mangement
- Morris, Allen - Myself
- Noftsker, Christina - NMISC
- Oleen, Grizz - KODA-GNB LLC
- Partlow, Mike - UDWR
- Pedro, William - National Park Service - Dinosaur National Monument
- Pivarnik, Alex - USBR
- Rasmussen, Danny - Uintah Mosquito Abatement District
- Rockey, Cal - CBRFC
- Rowland, Ryan - USGS Utah Water Science Center
- Schelly, Bob - NPS - Dinosaur National Monument
- Seppie, Bryan - GR/RS/SC-Joint Powers Water Board
- Shawcroft, Gene - CUWCD
- Smith, Rod - DOI SOL
- Souza, Ana - NOLS
- Stahli, Julie - USFWS
- Stewart, Bill - USBR
- Taylor, Jerry - Lucerne Valley Marina
- Thompson, Troy - Fisherman

- Todea, Nathaniel - USBR
- Valdez, Tony - Buckboard Marina at Flaming Gorge LLC
- Walrath, John - Wyoming Game and Fish Department
- Weeks, Trevor - Uintah Mosquito Abatement District
- Wilhite, Jerry – WAPA
- Wilson, Lisa - USFWS
- Winter, Ashley - Green River Conservancy
- Young, Emily - ADWR