Colorado River Storage Project
Flaming Gorge Working Group
Meeting Minutes
April 21, 2026

Participation

This meeting was held Tuesday, April 21, 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 and Rick Baxter (Bureau of Reclamation)

This is the second Flaming Gorge Working Group meeting this year. An updated draft Flaming Gorge Operations Plan was distributed before the meeting.

The Flaming Gorge Working Group meeting is an important step in developing the Flaming Gorge Operations Plan, which is a part of the process to implement adaptive management under the ROD. Reclamation takes the input provided as part of this process very seriously and appreciates the comments and questions provided through the Working Group.

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

Water Year (WY) 2026 precipitation in the Upper Green is 105% of average and 100% of average above Fontenelle for year to date. The Yampa Basin is at 80% of average. These conditions look better than they actually are, as so much has fallen as rain rather than building snowpack. The NRCS data shows 2026 SWE (Snow-Water- Equivalent) is at a record low in both the Green and Yampa basins. A heatwave in March caused snowmelt at levels that usually isn't seen until May.

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 were 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.

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 and maximum temperatures have been 7 to 9+ °F warmer in most of the Colorado River Basin.

Forecasts on the Green have also continued to decline. The April 1st official forecast, the April 20th raw model guidance are shown in Table 1 with the record minimum volumes.

Table 1. April-July Forecasted Volume in kaf / percent of 1991-2020 Average (Presented by Brenda Alcorn, CBRFC)

	Apr 1st Forecast	**Apr 20th Guidance**	**Record Minimum**
Fontenelle	440 / 60%	420 / 57%	1977: 213
Flaming Gorge	490 / 51%	455 / 47%	1977: 254
Deerlodge	360 / 30%	320 / 27%	2021: 357

Forecast verification indicates that the model may tend to over forecast in dry conditions. Model error is largely due to uncertainty in future weather conditions, though some error may be due to model state assumptions.

The peak flow for the Yampa based on the April 20th model run showed a peak flow much below average (4,112 cfs compared to 12,758 cfs). The forecaster informed forecast is even lower, with the 50% forecast of 3,500 cfs and the 75 and 25% exceedance of 2,500 and 5,000 cfs, respectively. It is still early in the season and spring weather will play an important role in the observed peak flow.

In the near term, there are above average chances for precipitation over the next two weeks.

Questions

A question was asked about if irrigation is turning on earlier than usual due to the unusual weather and if the model takes that into account. Brenda clarified that irrigation has been picking up. The diversions are largely unmeasured, so it can be difficult to put into the model, and since it is so much earlier than usual, the model may not be capturing it well. April flows may come in lower than forecasted, but by May, the model will have better assumptions around diversions.

A question was raised about the uncertainty in the models and how it is used to determine the hydrologic classification. Brenda confirmed that forecasters are reviewing observed conditions and updating the model states. How this is tied to the hydrologic classification and Flaming Gorge operations will be covered by Reclamation.

Flaming Gorge Reservoir Operations – Michael Callahan (Bureau of Reclamation)

Michael reviewed Flaming Gorge operations, starting with a background of the project and a review of the hydrology. The April official forecast indicates that Flaming Gorge will be in the Moderately Dry classification; even with the drop in the forecast since the official forecast, the classification remains Moderately Dry. The Yampa does not receive an official classification, but following the same statistical ranges, it is currently in a Dry condition.

The peak is hard to forecast at this point but is expected to be much below average. Reclamation will work closely with CBRFC and the Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group (FGTWG) to

set the timing of the spring peak. Tildon Jones, with the UC Recovery Program, informed the group that the biologic models are indicating larval razorback emergence towards the end of the first week of May or into the second week. Similar to the peak runoff, timing will be dependent on weather and temperatures.

Under a Moderately Dry or drier classification, the UC Recovery Program flow request this year prioritized 1) the smallmouth bass flow spike, 2) experimental base flows, and 3) spring releases consistent with the Larval Trigger Study Plan (LTSP). The summary of the FGTWG proposal was provided.

Usually this meeting would cover all of the hydrologic classifications, but due to the interest in drought operations and that the forecast currently indicates a Moderately Dry classification, the presentation focused on those operations. Operations are expected to be within the upper and lower bounds presented, but actual operations will be dependent on available water.

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.
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The DROA plan is available at https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/dcp/droa.html. Flaming Gorge specific operations are in Attachment C.

Val Deppe, with Reclamation, covered DROA operations from the Basin perspective. Under the most probable hydrologic scenario, Powell is projected to reach a low elevation of 3455.8' next spring. Under DROA, the first consideration is monthly release adjustments at Powell, which were implemented starting in December 2025. Reclamation is proposing a DROA release from Flaming Gorge between ~660 kaf and 1 maf, dependent on hydrology. The DROA release will be made within the limits of the ROD. Currently, there is no DROA release planned for Aspinall or Navajo as there is no uncontracted water available, but this will be re-evaluated in water year 2027. Releases from Powell are also expected to be reduced under Section 6E of the 2024 Near Term SEIS. Charts were shared showing the impacts of DROA releases and DROA releases in conjunction with the 6E release.

Questions/Comments

Reclamation clarified about DROA and 6E based on questions received.

- Adequacy of DROA and 6E releases:
  - Participants discussed what actions may be necessary if DROA and 6E releases are insufficient to protect critical elevations at Powell. Reclamation has committed to continuing to evaluate the DROA release and publishing the monthly DROA accounting. Additional water would require re-evaluation and would be coordinated with the appropriate parties.
  - Reductions to Powell releases beyond those in 6E are not within existing regulations and were not considered in this process.
  - Operations beyond 2026 are part of the Post 2026 process. Information on that is available at https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/index.html.
- Operational Ranges and Flexibility:
  - The ~660kaf to 1 maf DROA release this year is a range that will be dependent on hydrology. Current modeling shows the need to maximize DROA to protect infrastructure.
  - Upper end of the DROA release ranges would likely result in an operation similar to an Average Classification in a more typical year.
- Impacts and Considerations:

    - Comments were received on the impacts to the reservoir and the surrounding communities related to DROA releases, notably to marinas, the Kokanee spawning (notably in October), downstream erosion, and other recreation.
    - The rafting community can benefit from the higher releases during DROA, but has highlighted the concern with potential impacts during the recovery portion of DROA.
    - The spring bypass release, and the drawdown associated with it, may be especially impactful.
    - UDWR has noted that there is a need for funding to extend boat ramps if DROA-like releases are expected to continue into the future.
- Coordination:
    - An update on DROA operations to date and planned operations will be provided at the next Working Group meeting in August.
    - Cooperating Agencies are welcome to reach out and be included in the process; it was recommended that they reach out to Reclamation's Public Affairs team at ucbpao@usbr.gov.
    - Current DROA releases are under the existing DROA framework. Any action taken before October 2026 will be subject to recovery in the future. Reclamation is continuing to work with the appropriate parties to provide the flexibility needed in the future.
    - Reclamation confirmed that DROA release and recovery would be made within the existing ROD.
    - A final decision on DROA is expected this week, with UCRC meeting on Tuesday and the Secretary of Interior expected to make a final decision after that.
    - Reclamation works closely with the CBRFC to show near-term releases from Flaming Gorge at https://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/dbdata/station/flowgraph/flowgraph_hc.html?id=GRZU1O_F&ptype=3.
    - 6E and DROA are expected to be reflected in the 24 Month-Study starting with the May studies.
- Classifications, Forecasts, and Models:
    - Flaming Gorge's hydrologic classification is based on statistics of the unregulated inflow for the period of record. The ranges that define the hydrologic classification are laid out in the ROD. Reclamation has the flexibility under Adaptive Management to move up 2 (wetter) or down 1 (drier) classification.
    - Reclamation committed to providing a draft hydrograph. This will be heavily caveated as timing and flow-rates will be adjusted for hydrology and biological conditions.
- WAPA Perspective:
    - WAPA indicated overall support for the operational approach, with only minor comments submitted.
    - WAPA intends to pattern releases.

    - WAPA intends to schedule a GROGA meeting before the smallmouth bass flow, please reach out to Derek (Fryer@wapa.gov) for additional information.
- Flow Range and Temperature Concerns:
    - The use of bypass for the spring peak has not been formally determined, but the current DROA modeling includes 7 days.
        - Concerns about low in-river temperatures during the spring peak were addressed: Recovery Program does not anticipate risk to razorback sucker during spring peak flows based on previous years' data; the temperature differential in the ROD is designed to protect Colorado pikeminnow larvae drifting from the Yampa River into the Green.
        - Issues were raised regarding impacts to private lands, hydropower, and reservoir drawdown impact related to the use of bypass.
    - Daily release variations will be influenced by the low Yampa River contribution and stage-change requirements at Jensen.

Next Meeting

TBD – expected in August 2026.

Attendees

Akers, Phil-NPS

Alcorn, Brenda-CBRFC

Alexander, Jason-National Park Service - Water Resources Division

Allen, Kris-Public

Ampe, Judd-DHMC

Anderson, Brandon-Pacificorp/citizen

Andrews, Jaron-USFWS

Apel, Chris-Na

Arnold, Tyler-BLM-Vernal

bair, woody-FLAMING GORGE RESORT

Baxter, Rick-USBR

Becker, Amanda-Reclamation

Belanger, Laura-Western Resource Advocates

Berggren, John-Western Resource Advocates

Bestgen, Kevin-Colorado State University, Larval Fish Laboratory

Bolgiano, Randy-Upper Colorado River Commission, Wyoming SEO

Bonomo, Cherette-USDA Forest Service-Ashley National Forest

Boren, Rebecca-Citizen

Borgione, Joe-Just a friendly fisherman

Borin, Natalie-UDWR

Brier, Jason-Private

Brown, Chris-Wyoming Attorney General's Office

Bryant, Becki-DOI

C, Brett-Personal

Callahan, Mike-USBR

Callister, Kathy-Reclamation

Chitrakar, suman-Wyoming State Engineer’s Office

Clegg, Kevin-USFS

Cook, Cynthia M-Sheangler

Coonrod, Whitney-Utah DEM

Cowley, Jeff-Wyoming State Engineer's Office

Crews, Julia-CLG

Crowther, Wendy-Utah Attorney General's Office

Cunningham, Colleen-New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission

Davis, Seth-OARS

Detlor, Jordan-UDWR

Dickinson, T Wright-Vermillion Ranch

Dubois, Shane-Recon Angling

Duncan, Joe-Wyoming State Engineer's Office

Ellsworth, Craig-WAPA

Englebert, Ryan-UDWR

Erickson, Jennifer-USBR

Evans, Richard-Citizen

Fairbanks, Andrew-Long Beach Casting Club

Fegler, Melinda-Wyoming State Engineer's Office

Figgins, Eric-Private boater/river enthusiast

Flyshop, Yellow Dory-Western Rivers Flyfisher Guides

Foster, Georgia-BLM

Friedman, Jonathan-U.S. Geological Survey

Fryer, Derek-WAPA

Garrison, Michelle-Colorado Water Conservation Board

Gaylord, Tim-Holiday River Expeditions

Gibney, Nicki-NPS

Gillman, Darrell-UDAF

Graf, David-upper CO River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

Grantz, Katrina-Reclamation

Haas, Amy-Colorado River Authority of Utah

Haimoit, Ted-Citizen

Hanberg, Miles-UTDWR

Heath, Brett-USFS

Hedrick, Trina-Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Herrera, Lisa-Green River Chamber of Commerce

Hines, Brian-Reclamation

Holmquist-Johnson, Chris-USGS

Hyder, Saidee-UTDWR

Johnson, Hattie-American Whitewater

Johnson, Kristl-Sheri Griffith Expeditions

Jones, Tildon-Recovery Program

Kieffer-Selby, Tonya-UDWR

Klotz, Jim-None

Kot, Mark-WWDC

Krause, Patrick-Green River Drifters

Lucas, Matt-WRF Guides

Mancuso, Tony-Utah Forestry, Fire and State Lands

Marquis, Jared-USBR

Mart, Darrien-Ute Indian Tribe

Maxon, Meagan-Self

McClure, Catherine-Colorado State University

Mcdonald, Carrie-US Forest Service

Mead, Jaydon-BLM Price Field Office

Merkley, William-Uintah Water Conservancy District

Miller, Bart-Western Resource Advocates

Mott, Weston-Private Party

Muir, Cody-USFS

Musil, Rachel-Upper Colorado River Commission

Newkirk, Braxton-Trout Unlimited

Nielson, Ashley-Upper Colorado River Commission

Ovard, Troy-CUWCD

Payne, Kevin-Wyoming State Engineer's Office

Pearson, Roger

Pedro, William-National Park Service - Dinosaur National Monument

Perry, Cody-Living Rivers Colorado Riverkeeper

Pinkham, Patricia-Golden River Sports

Pivarnik, Alex-Reclamation

Powell, Steven-Sweetwater County Sheriff's Office

Pullan, Wayne-Reclamation

Rasmussen, Danny-Uintah Mosquito Abatement District

Rauch, John-Cedar Springs Marina

Rauch, Stacey-Cedar Springs Marina

Robbins, Jason-Outfitter

Robbins, Kassie-Dinosaur River expeditions

Robbins, Kirk-Citizen

Rockey, Cal-CBRFC

Rowland, Ryan-USGS Utah Water Science Center

Santos, Noe-Reclamation

Schelly, Bob-NPS

Selansa, Penn-Lucerne Marina

Seppie, Bryan-GR/RS/SC-Joint Powers Water Board

Smith, Rod-Interior

Snider, Annie-Politico

Souza, Ana-NOLS

Spencer, Jim-USDA-NRCS

Taylor, Jenny and Jill-Lucerne Marina

Thomason, Joseph-State of Utah DNR

Todea, Nathaniel-Reclamation

Torado, Landre-DOI

Trungale, Joe-The Nature Conservancy

Uriona, Beau-USDA-NRCS SNOTEL/SSWSFS

Valdez, Jen-Buckboard Marina at Flaming Gorge

Veryser, Jeremy-Public

Veryser, Jeremy-Public

Walker, Alex-Reclamation

Walrath, John-Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Westbury, Annie-Adrift Dinosaur

WIld, Ron-RMP

William, Bart-Lucerne Marina

Williams, Jessica-Lucerne Marina

Williams, Jody-Holland & Hart

Wilson, Lisa-USFWS

Woolf, Ben-USBR

Work, Dominique-New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission

Young, Emily-ADWR