



# Utah Department of Natural Resources

## Water Resources

### Colorado River Basin Drought Contingency Plans How they affect Utah, the Colorado River and Drought Planning

To keep Utah citizens informed, the Utah Division of Water Resources provides the following explanation on Utah's use of its Colorado River water and the development of Drought Contingency Plans (DCPs) needed to protect water storage levels at lakes Powell and Mead.

#### Colorado River Water Use

- All Colorado River basin states have the right to develop and use their allocation of water
- State apportionments of Colorado River water are not based on priority dates
- Utah's apportionment is 23 percent of the water available in the Upper Basin
- Currently, Utah's annual reliable water supply from the Colorado River is 1.4 million acre-feet
- Utah currently uses approximately 1 million acre-feet annually of its apportionment

Utah and the other states in the Upper Basin are not currently using all their apportionment of the Colorado River as defined by the "Law of the River."

The Law of the River requires that the Upper Basin states not cause the flow of the river at Lee Ferry to be depleted below an aggregate of 75 million acre-feet of water on a 10-year rolling average. During the last 10 years, which includes some of the driest years in history, the Upper Basin has delivered 92 million acre-feet of water to the Lower Basin – 17 million acre-feet of water more than the Lower Basins' compact allocation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *69th Annual Report of the Upper Colorado River Commission Report, September 2017*  
[http://www.ucrccommission.com/RepDoc/UCRCAnnualReports/69\\_UCRC\\_Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ucrccommission.com/RepDoc/UCRCAnnualReports/69_UCRC_Annual_Report.pdf)

#### About the Drought Contingency Plans

The seven Colorado River Basin states have been working with the Department of Interior and Mexico to develop DCPs which, if implemented, would reduce the risk of Colorado River reservoirs from declining to critically low levels.

- The DCPs affirm the right of each state to develop their Colorado River allocations
- The DCP agreements have been signed by all Colorado River basin states
- Congressional legislation for implementation has been obtained
- There are two separate plans: one for the Upper Basin states (Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and New Mexico) and one for the Lower Basin states (California, Arizona and Nevada)
- There is a binational agreement wherein Mexico will also take voluntary reductions once the Lower Basin plan is in place





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- The Upper Basin plan is to protect water levels at Lake Powell from reaching its critical level of 3,525 feet above sea level
- The Lower Basin plan is to protect water levels at Lake Mead from reaching its critical level of 1,020 feet above sea level

Because of differences in operation between the Upper and Lower Basins, the terms of the DCPs vary by basin. The Upper Basin DCP is designed to protect against Lake Powell falling to critical elevations to help assure continued compliance with the 1922 Colorado River Compact. The Lower Basin DCP is designed to: a) require Arizona, California and Nevada to contribute additional water to Lake Mead storage at predetermined elevations and b) create additional flexibility to incentivize additional voluntary conservation of water to be stored in Lake Mead.

### ***Upper Basin Plan***

Consists of two agreements: Drought Response Operations and Demand Management Storage

- Agreement 1: Drought Response Operations – Requires the Upper Basin states prepare a drought response to minimize the risk of Lake Powell reaching its critical level
  - Authorizes water stored in other Colorado River Storage Project facilities to be used to augment water levels at Lake Powell, if needed
- Agreement 2: Demand Management Storage Agreement – Allows water users in the states to participate in a voluntary and compensated program to reduce consumptive use and store the conserved water in Lake Powell

### ***Lower Basin Plan***

- Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan Agreement – Requires the Lower Basin states to prepare a drought response that minimizes the risk of Lake Mead falling below critical levels through a reduction in use based on identified elevation triggers in Lake Mead

### ***Companion Agreement (both Upper and Lower Basins)***

- Ties the Upper and Lower Basin DCPs together
- Requires performance by both basins under their respective DCPs
- Process for resolution of controversies and enforcement
- Agreement to consult on operations and future implementation

For more information on the DCPs, visit <https://www.usbr.gov/dcp/>.

