



— BUREAU OF —  
RECLAMATION

# Development of Post-2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Lake Powell and Lake Mead

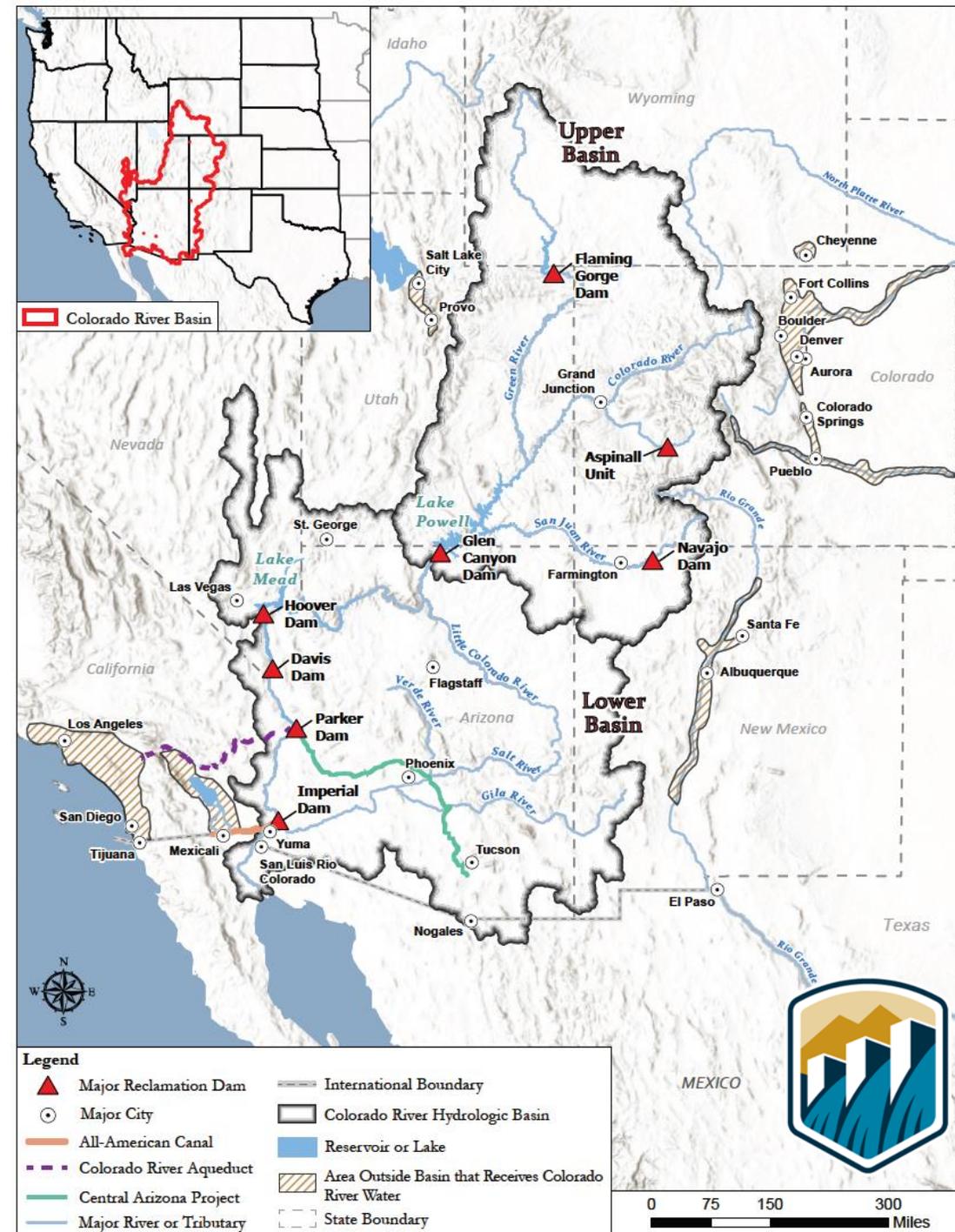
CSG West

Colorado River Forum – Pinedale WY

September 14, 2023

# Operational Setting

- Colorado River system provides water for 7 States, 30 Basin Tribes, and Mexico
- Dams and reservoirs on the river can store nearly 4 years' water supply and generate 4,200 megawatts of hydropower
- Two largest reservoirs in the system have the capacity to store 60 million acre-feet of water
  - Lake Powell – formed by Glen Canyon Dam
  - Lake Mead – formed by Hoover Dam
- Several operating agreements that govern the operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead expire at the end of 2026



# Colorado River Operating Agreements



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

**Record of Decision**

Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the  
Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead

December 2007

Recommending Official:

  
ROBERT JOHNSON  
Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation

Date: December 13, 2007

Approved:

  
DIRK KEMPTHORNE  
Secretary of the Department of the Interior

Date: December 13, 2007

- Several operating agreements governing the annual operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead expire at the end of 2026
  - 2007 Interim Guidelines (adopted in 2007)
  - Minute 323 to the 1944 Water Treaty with Mexico (adopted in 2017)
  - 2019 Colorado River Basin Drought Contingency Plans (adopted in 2019)
- The “**Post-2026 Process**” is a multi-year NEPA process intended to develop successor domestic agreements prior to operating decisions for 2027
  - Initiated in June 2023 with 60-day Scoping Period
  - Near-term target is to complete Draft EIS by end of 2024



# 2007 Interim Guidelines

## Purpose

- Improve management of the Colorado River by considering trade-offs between the frequency and magnitude of reductions of water deliveries
- Provide a greater degree of predictability with respect to the amount of annual water deliveries in future years
- Provide additional mechanisms for the storage and delivery of water supplies in Lake Mead to increase the flexibility of meeting water use needs from Lake Mead

## Operational Elements

- **Shortage Guidelines** – Prescribed volumes of Lower Basin Shortages at specific Lake Mead elevations
- **Coordinated Reservoir Operations** – Guidelines for coordinated operations between Lake Powell and Lake Mead
- **Storage and Delivery of Conserved Water** – Mechanism for storage and delivery of conserved water in Lake Mead
- **Surplus Guidelines** – Guidelines to identify Surplus Conditions

*Summarized from the 2007 Interim Guidelines Record of Decision*

# 2007 Interim Guidelines - Operational Diagram

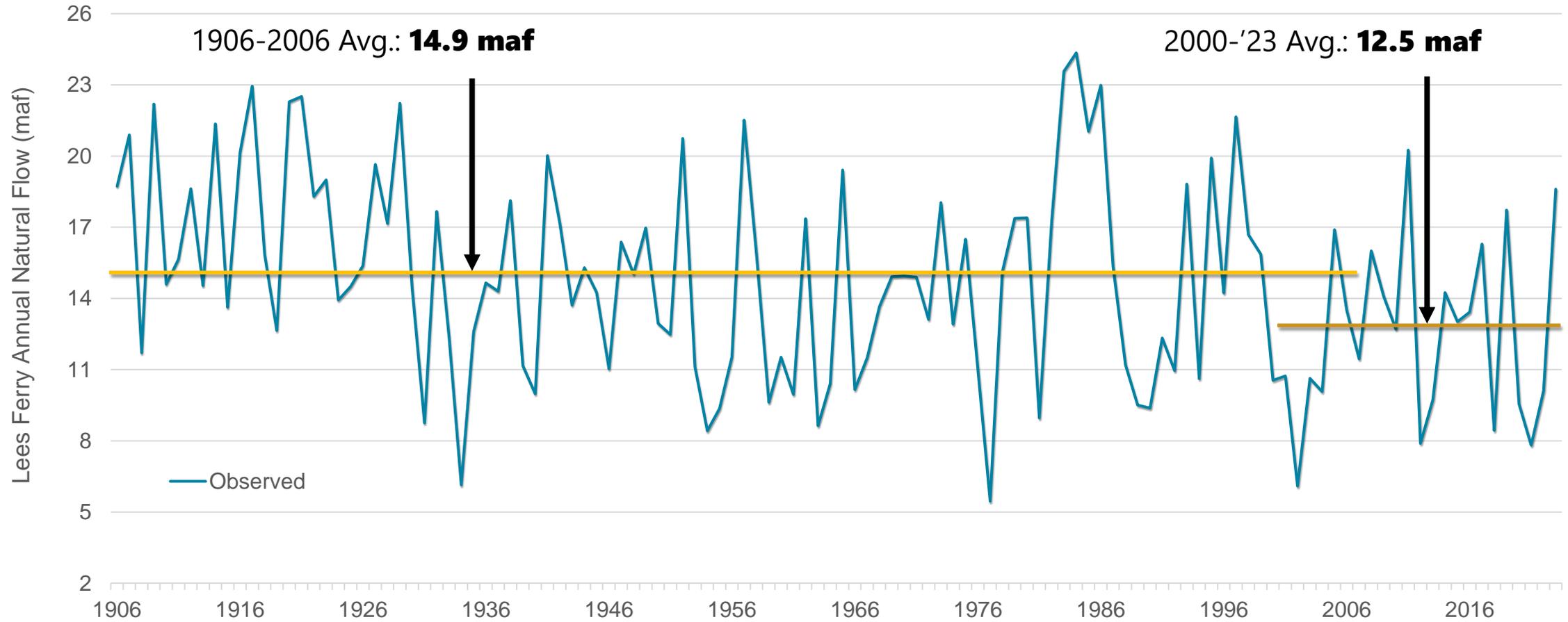
Lake Powell		
Elevation (feet)	Operation According to the Interim Guidelines	Live Storage (maf) <sup>1</sup>
3,700	<b>Equalization Tier</b> Equalize, avoid spills, or release 8.23 maf	24.3
3,636-3,666 (2008-2026)	<b>Upper Elevation Balancing Tier<sup>3</sup></b> Release 8.23 maf; if Lake Mead < 1,075 feet, balance contents with a min/max release of 7.0 and 9.0 maf	15.5-19.3 (2008-2026)
3,575		9.5
3,525	<b>Mid-Elevation Release Tier</b> Release 7.48 maf; if Lake Mead < 1,025 feet, release 8.23 maf	5.9
3,490	<b>Lower Elevation Balancing Tier</b> Balance contents with a min/max release of 7.0 and 9.5 maf	4.0
3,370		0

Lake Mead		
Elevation (feet)	Operation According to the Interim Guidelines	Live Storage (maf) <sup>1</sup>
1,220	<b>Flood Control Surplus or Quantified Surplus Condition</b> Deliver > 7.5 maf	25.9
1,200 (approx.) <sup>2</sup>	<b>Domestic Surplus or ICS Surplus Condition</b> Deliver > 7.5 maf	22.9 (approx.) <sup>2</sup>
1,145		15.9
1,075	<b>Normal or ICS Surplus Condition</b> Deliver ≥ 7.5 maf	9.4
1,050	<b>Shortage Condition</b> Deliver 7.167 <sup>4</sup> maf	7.5
1,025	<b>Shortage Condition</b> Deliver 7.083 <sup>5</sup> maf	5.8
1,000	<b>Shortage Condition</b> Deliver 7.0 <sup>6</sup> maf Further measures may be undertaken <sup>7</sup>	4.3
895		0

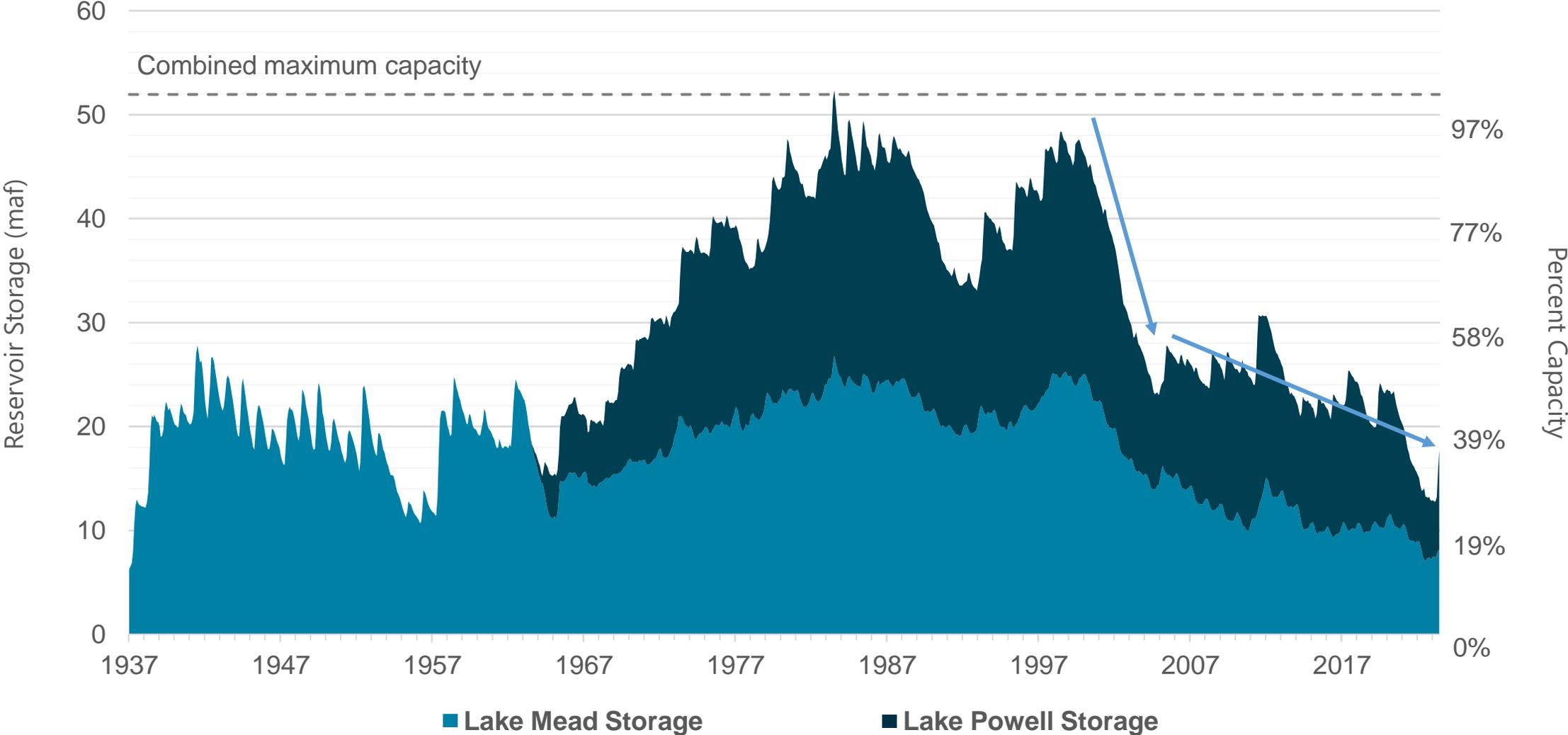
**Diagram not to scale;** <sup>1</sup>Acronym for million acre-feet; <sup>2</sup>This elevation is shown as approximate as it is determined each year by considering several factors including Lake Powell and Lake Mead storage, projected Upper Basin demands, and an assumed inflow; <sup>3</sup>Subject to April adjustments which may result in a release according to the Equalization Tier; <sup>4</sup>Of which 2.48 maf is apportioned to Arizona, 4.4 maf to California, and 0.287 maf to Nevada; <sup>5</sup>Of which 2.40 maf is apportioned to Arizona, 4.4 maf to California, and 0.283 maf to Nevada; <sup>6</sup>Of which 2.32 maf is apportioned to Arizona, 4.4 maf to California, and 0.280 maf to Nevada; <sup>7</sup>Whenever Lake Mead is below elevation 1,025 feet, the Secretary shall consider whether hydrologic conditions together with anticipated deliveries to the Lower Division States and Mexico are likely to cause the elevation at Lake Mead to fall below 1,000 feet. Such consideration, in consultation with the Basin States, may result in the undertaking of further measures, consistent with applicable Federal law.



# Hydrologic Conditions



# System Response



# Colorado River Drought

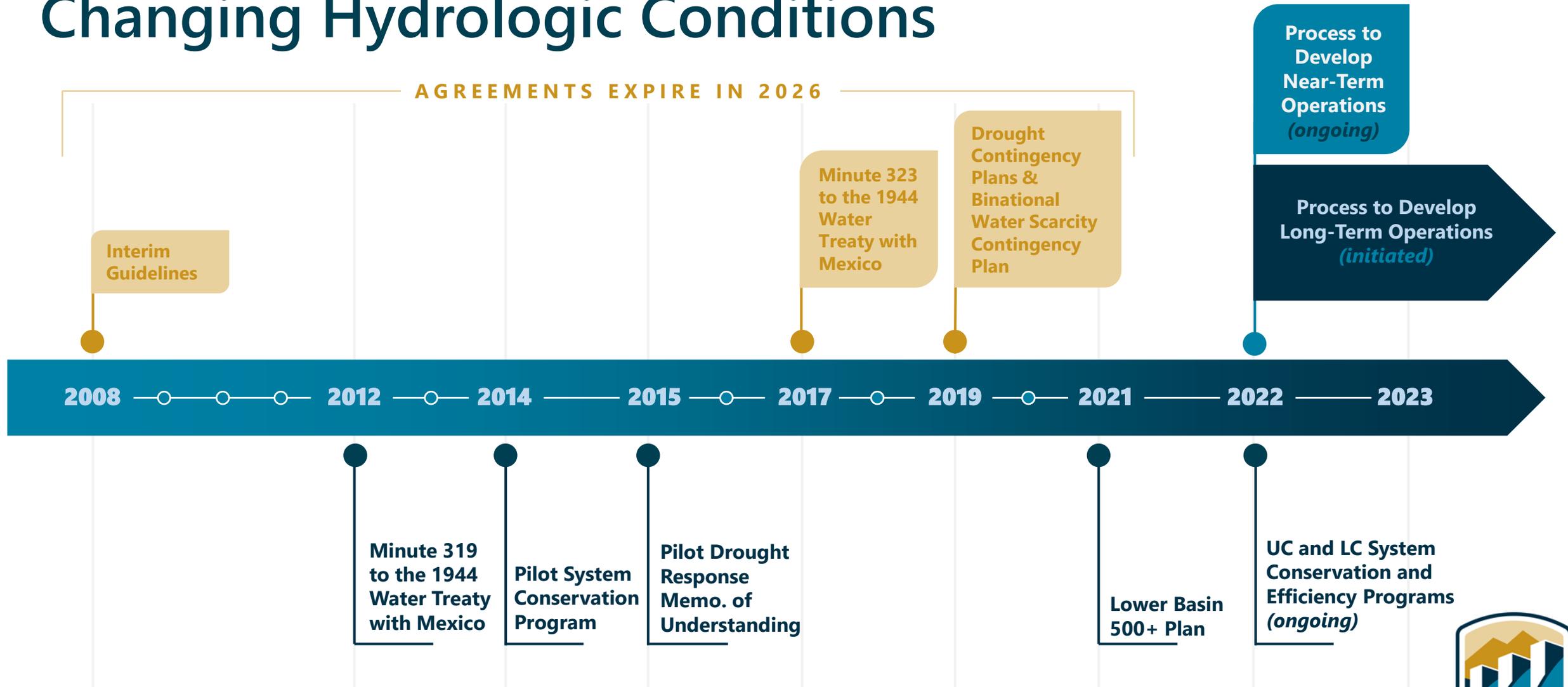


Lake Mead near Hoover Dam in 2000



Lake Mead near Hoover Dam in 2022

# Operational Response to Changing Hydrologic Conditions



# Long-term vs. Near-term Planning Processes

	<b>NEAR-TERM COLORADO RIVER OPERATIONS (SEIS)</b>	<b>LONG-TERM COLORADO RIVER OPERATIONS (POST-2026)</b>
<b>PLANNING EFFORT</b> ▶		
<b>RANGE OF OPERATIONS</b> ▶	<p>Limited sections of the 2007 Interim Guidelines;</p> <p>Develop the operational tools needed to address extreme drought and low water levels.</p>	<p>Revisit all sections of the 2007 Interim Guidelines and other operating agreements that expire in 2026.</p> <p>Public Scoping Process will help determine scope of post-2026 long-term planning process.</p>
<b>DURATION</b> ▶	<b>2024 – 2026 (3 YEARS)</b>	<b>2026 AND BEYOND</b>

# Post-2026: Proposed Schedule



◆ Key NEPA Process milestones – Opportunities for Tribal, State, Partner, Stakeholder, and Public engagement





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# Questions & Discussion

For further information please visit

<https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026>