

[U.S. Department of the Interior](#)



# NEWS

---

---

---

## U.S. Department of the Interior

Office of the Secretary  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 13, 2007

Contact: Kip White 202-271-8577  
or Robert Walsh 702-591-0029  
(Reclamation)  
Chris Paolino or Joan Moody 202-208-6416  
(Office of the Secretary)

## Secretary Kempthorne Signs Historic Decision For New Colorado River Management Strategies

LAS VEGAS, NEV. – Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne today signed an historic decision that will implement innovative strategies for management of the Colorado River, reflecting “a remarkable consensus” among stakeholders about sharing water during the current drought and charting a water management course for the future.

“This is the most important agreement among the seven basin states since the original Colorado River Compact of 1922,” said Kempthorne, noting that his decision memorializes “a remarkable consensus” not only to solve current problems but also to prepare ahead of time for future droughts or surpluses rather than resorting to disruptive litigation.

Signed at the Colorado River Water Users Association’s annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nev., the Record of Decision activates a legal agreement among the basin states that contains a provision in which they firmly commit to address future controversies on the river through consultation and negotiation before initiating any litigation.

“As the Colorado River navigates a 1,500-mile journey down mountains through canyons and across desert landscapes, you have navigated the shoals of history,” Kempthorne said in addressing the meeting. “You have steered around the cataracts and sharp boulders of litigation and acrimony. You have found the serene waters of partnership and cooperation.”

The decision implements new, interim operational guidelines to meet the challenges of the current eight-year drought in the basin and, potentially, low-water conditions caused by continued drought or other causes in the future. The rules, which take effect

immediately, will be in place through 2026.

“This is truly an historic moment,” the Secretary added. “These guidelines not only address the ongoing drought, they also encourage and promote water conservation. The signing of this document is being viewed by everyone in this room today but soon will be reviewed by people across the nation and throughout the world. It is that significant and that historic.”

The Secretary noted that representatives at a recent World Bank meeting expressed an interest in innovations contained in the plan.

The Record of Decision adopts four key elements of river management.

- First, the new guidelines establish rules for shortages – specifying who will take reductions and when they take them. This is essential for prudent water planning in times of drought.
- Second, the new operational rules for Lake Powell and Lake Mead will allow these two massive reservoirs to rise and fall in tandem, thereby better sharing the risk of drought.
- Third, the new guidelines establish rules for surpluses, so that if the basin is blessed with ample runoff, the Department of the Interior will have rules in place to distribute the extra water.
- Fourth, the new rules will address the ongoing drought by encouraging new initiatives for water conservation.

“I am particularly impressed by the innovative approaches you have taken to conserve water, especially the construction project known as Drop 2,” the Secretary told state leaders. The Drop 2 project will be located in California, but it is being paid for by Nevada. It will create an important reservoir to conserve additional water for Nevada’s use over the next two decades. After that, the additional water will benefit all water users in the lower basin states. “This is truly an innovative example of cooperation among states....that may help other states facing shortages meet their needs,” the Secretary added.

Other conservation measures in the guidelines include an agreement allowing water users to obtain future credit for conserving water and leaving it in Lake Mead. The Record of Decision also sets up a framework to allow cities to contract with willing farmers to temporarily fallow fields in dry years while respecting the basin’s agricultural heritage.

Specifics in the guidelines include the elevations in Lake Mead at which the Secretary would declare shortages in the Lower Basin, as well as what those shortages would be. The guidelines also specify the conditions under which Lakes Powell and Mead will be operated, with the intent of operating the reservoirs to avoid the risk of water curtailments in the Upper Basin and minimize shortages in the Lower Basin. The guidelines provide a mechanism that encourages water

conservation in Lake Mead in the Lower Basin to minimize the likelihood and severity of potential future shortages; and modify and extend the Interim Surplus Guidelines, implemented in 2001, through 2026

Secretary Kempthorne emphasized the importance of today's decision, which facilitates setting "an innovative example of cooperation among states.... As other states – and other countries – struggle to resolve their water issues in the coming decades, they will look to the cooperation among the basin states as a model. A way to embrace consensus rather than conflict. To conserve and share water rather than fight over water. To ensure that everyone walks away from the table a winner."

A full copy of the Record of Decision is available at [www.usbr.gov/lc/region/programs/strategies.html](http://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/programs/strategies.html), under "New Info."

[— DOI —](#)

---

[Accessibility](#)|[Feedback](#)|[Notices](#)|[Disclaimer](#)|[Privacy Statement](#)|[FOIA](#)|[E-Gov](#)|[USA.gov](#)|[DOI Home](#)

U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240  
[webteam@ios.doi.gov](mailto:webteam@ios.doi.gov)  
Last Updated on 12/13/07