

## **Colorado River Reservoir Operation:**

### **Development of Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead<sup>1</sup>**

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#### **Description of Preferred Alternative to be Considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement**

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA, the Department of the Interior (Department) published in the *Federal Register* (FR) a Notice of Intent on September 30, 2005 (70 FR 57322), issued a Scoping Summary Report on March 31, 2006 (71 FR 16341), and issued a Draft EIS on February 28, 2007 (72 FR 9026) for Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead. The Draft EIS is available at <http://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/programs/strategies/draftEIS/index.html>.

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), acting at the direction of and on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary), proposes to take action to adopt interim Lower Colorado River Basin shortage guidelines and coordinated reservoir management strategies to address operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead, particularly under low reservoir conditions. The Department anticipates that the operational guidelines will be implemented through 2026 and that the elements of the proposed action will include:

- Adoption of guidelines that will identify those circumstances under which the Secretary would reduce the annual amount of water available for consumptive use from Lake Mead to the Colorado River Lower Division states (Arizona, California, and Nevada) below 7.5 million acre-feet (a "Shortage") pursuant to Article II(B)(3) of the Consolidated Decree entered by the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Arizona v. California* ;
- Adoption of guidelines for the coordinated operation of Lake Powell and Lake Mead to provide improved operation of the two reservoirs, particularly under low reservoir conditions;
- Adoption of guidelines to allow for the storage and delivery, pursuant to applicable federal law, of conserved Colorado River system and non-system water in Lake Mead to increase the flexibility of meeting water use needs from Lake Mead, particularly under drought and low reservoir conditions; and
- Modification of the substance of the existing Interim Surplus Guidelines (ISG), published in the FR on January 25, 2001 (66 FR 7772), and the term of the ISG from 2016 to 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> Publication of this description of the Preferred Alternative is intended to facilitate public information regarding this ongoing NEPA process. Reclamation intends to utilize this Preferred Alternative as its proposed action as it prepares appropriate environmental compliance documents. However, further refinement of the information presented in this description will occur as Reclamation prepares a Final EIS (which is anticipated to be published in September, 2007) and other appropriate documentation.

Through extensive coordination with the cooperating agencies, stakeholders, and the public, Reclamation developed a No Action Alternative and four action alternatives and analyzed those alternatives in the Draft EIS. Each of the alternatives in the Draft EIS included some expression of the four elements of the proposed action noted above. Reclamation did not identify a preferred alternative in the Draft EIS and sought comment with regard to stakeholder preferences.

After consideration of the comments received on the Draft EIS and further analysis, Reclamation has identified the operational elements that it intends to incorporate as the Preferred Alternative that will be analyzed in the Final EIS. The Preferred Alternative is comprised of operational elements identified and analyzed in the Draft EIS. The key assumptions for all of the alternatives are summarized in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

The next steps include determination of the potential impacts to environmental resources of the Preferred Alternative. The results of the resource analyses will be documented in the Final EIS, targeted for publication in September 2007.