

HAND OUTS

**CITY COUNCIL
MEETING**

APRIL 19, 2022

Update on Discussions on Water

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Residents won't take conservation seriously while cities approve water playgrounds – Desert Sun Editorial Board – April 16

- Californians have been told to be careful when watering lawns, or take out lawns altogether, to turn off the faucet while brushing our teeth and to take shorter showers.
- Now new mandates for residential conservation are out
- Cynicism is warranted when average desert residents get such conservation nudging while developers plan four wave pools for surfers and, at a Disney-backed Rancho Mirage resort, a beach park and 24-acre lagoon.
- Does the Coachella Valley need to be a tropical paradise?

- Why do people need to go surfing in the desert when the Pacific Ocean is a mere hours away?
- Elected officials must change their approach to considering new developments.
- New developments are necessary, especially given the state's housing shortage and affordability crisis.
- City councils should reject any applications for new surf parks, lagoons and golf courses, and should reverse approval of any that have not been built.

CNN Report April 18 *CNN — The Colorado River is the most endangered river in the US this year*

- The Colorado River — which provides drinking water, irrigation and electricity for more than 40 million people in the West — is the most endangered river in the United States this year, according to the nonprofit conservation group American Rivers.
- The climate crisis has pushed the Colorado River's Lake Mead and Lake Powell — the largest and second-largest reservoirs in the country — to unprecedented lows.

United States Department of the Interior – April 8 letter to Reps from Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, California, Wyoming and Utah

“In light of the continuing drought and low runoff conditions, in recent weeks technical staff from the Bureau of Reclamation, along with Interior leadership, have communicated our concerns with projected runoff in the Colorado River Basin and the risk of Lake Powell and Lake Mead declining to critically-low elevations ...”

From Arizona Republic April 14, 2020: Lake Powell is tanking, and Interior’s proposed response may only buy us time

You must vote no on Coral Mountain Surf Resort

- **Let's do a beautiful residential-only development and charge a special "La Quinta Assessment" like Toll Brothers did at Stone Creek Ranch on 58th to help mitigate the Riverside Tax Issue - \$2100 per house?**
- **And residences can start building out right away**
- **It will have beautiful vistas and dark skies that people will want to make their permanent home with their families**
- **Hiking and biking is already abundant. The kids can go to X Park.**
- **We don't need surfing in the Desert in a PRIVATE RESORT**

Residents won't take conservation seriously while cities approve water playgrounds

Desert Sun Editorial Board

Published 5:02 a.m. PT April 16, 2022

For years, Californians have been told to be careful when watering lawns, or take out lawns altogether, to turn off the faucet while brushing our teeth and to take shorter showers.

That advice intensifies — and turns into mandates — when a drought worsens, as it has recently.

“Every drop counts!” says Splash, the cheerful droplet-shaped cartoon mascot created by local water agencies.

But does it?

Cynicism is warranted when average desert residents get such conservation nudging while developers plan four wave pools for surfers and, at a Disney-backed Rancho Mirage resort, a beach park and 24-acre lagoon.

To be clear, we encourage conservation. Upgrading toilets and appliances makes sense, and lush green lawns are hard to justify in a desert.

What's more, recent state numbers suggest valley residents are not doing our part. Three local water agencies, Desert Water, Coachella Valley and Myoma Dunes, are far above state averages in residential use per customer. (The agencies dispute the numbers, saying they don't fully account for our large number of seasonal residents.)

If we're going to change that reality, city and county officials can't allow massive and frivolous water-wasting projects like lagoons and wave parks to go forward. Doing so makes people less likely to take government conservation messages seriously.

How would you feel if you spent money on desert landscaping, trying to be a good citizen, then learned a recreational lagoon is being dug across the road? Or if you put in drip irrigation as a pro ice hockey arena came to life up the street?

Sure, there's a symbolic value in requiring restaurants to serve a glass of water only upon request, one of the smaller steps the Coachella Valley Water District's board of directors took on Tuesday. It also banned daytime lawn irrigation and increased rebates for putting in desert landscaping by 50%.

But in a new reality of climate change-driven increasing drought, we've got to start thinking big — much bigger than a diner's glass of ice water, or even than home lawns.

Elected officials must change their approach to considering new developments. Does the Coachella Valley need to be a tropical paradise?

New developments are necessary, especially given the state's housing shortage and affordability crisis. And we all need water to live and eat. Swimming pools are one thing, but why do people need to go surfing in the desert when the Pacific Ocean is mere hours away?

Do people need backyard pools and a neighborhood lagoon? Again, lest we forget: in a desert.

City councils should reject any applications for new surf parks, lagoons and golf courses, and should reverse approval of any that have not been built.

Golf courses largely use recycled water or private wells. But because people come into close contact with them, lagoons and wave parks must use potable water, the same kind that comes out of household taps.

Either every drop counts, as Splash tells us, or it doesn't.

Massive water waste is unconscionable when people in the east valley still don't have access to clean water because they can't afford to pay to connect to municipal pipes — and because voter-imposed state law forbids suppliers from using their reserves to hook up new customers.

The more water used to maintain golf courses and fill aquatic playgrounds, the less available to replenish the valley's aquifer. That will be key if our population continues to grow.

You could be forgiven for assuming it's the local water agencies that decide who gets to use water, and how much.

Not really.

As The Desert Sun's Janet Wilson reported recently, their hands are often tied. Under state law, when a city council or county supervisors have approved a development, the water agency has to supply it as long as projections show it'll have enough to do so for 20 years.

So it comes back to city councils and the county.

Most elected leaders, at least when they run for office, say they have a vision for their jurisdiction's future.

But when you first want to win the next election, there's always a pull toward the short term.

Sometimes the right thing in the long term is not immediately popular. Thinking big might mean spending more money on a project to make it less wasteful, or even rejecting a development altogether. That will get you accused of costing the city thousands or millions in tax revenue.

In addition to rethinking developments, cities should set goals to reduce their own water usage significantly, which might mean reconsidering how parks and other facilities are constructed.

They should step up efforts to work with tribes and Riverside County, perhaps through the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, on regional water plans that have teeth.

Just as the lagoons and surf parks suggest we don't really value water, so too does its cost.

When a family in a 2,000-square-foot house can pay \$17 a month for water, less than the cost of some Netflix plans, how much incentive is there to conserve?

That's not going to change: Under the state's Proposition 218, a local government cannot charge customers more than the present cost of delivering a service. So water agencies can't hike rates just to encourage conservation.

Even if they could, it wouldn't be right to put even more on the backs of the average person. Not until elected leaders show they've gotten serious about ensuring enough water for the desert's future.



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

Mr. Thomas Buschatzke
Governor's Representative
State of Arizona
P.O. Box 36020
Phoenix, Arizona 85067

APR 08 2022

Dear Mr. Buschatzke:

As all who rely on the Colorado River are well aware, the Colorado River Basin is experiencing prolonged drought, low runoff conditions, and depleted storage in Lake Powell and Lake Mead. Recent studies indicate we are experiencing the driest conditions in the Basin in more than 1,200 years. These unprecedented challenges and changes in the Basin's runoff began more than two decades ago. The best available science indicates that the effects of climate change will continue to adversely impact the basin.

In light of the continuing drought and low runoff conditions, in recent weeks technical staff from the Bureau of Reclamation, along with Interior leadership, have communicated our concerns with projected runoff in the Colorado River Basin and the risk of Lake Powell and Lake Mead declining to critically-low elevations over the next 24 months. Our staff has worked diligently to explain the basis for these risks and concerns with representatives of the Basin's Tribal nations, other federal and state agencies, the Republic of Mexico, water users, and non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). As you know we have also communicated these concerns to each of you in your roles as the Governor's Representatives of the seven Colorado River Basin States.

Presently, staff from the Bureau of Reclamation and the Upper Division States are working closely with the Lower Division States, Tribes, other federal agencies, and NGOs to complete a 2022 Drought Response Operations Plan, as required by the 2019 Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan Authorization Act. Pub. L. No. 116-14 (Apr. 16, 2019). We are prioritizing these efforts and anticipate that the 2022 Drought Response Operations Plan will be finalized within the month.

Notwithstanding these robust, ongoing efforts to analyze potential releases from Colorado River Storage Project initial units to protect critical elevations at Lake Powell, we believe that additional actions are needed to reduce the risk of Lake Powell dropping to elevations at which Glen Canyon Dam releases could only be accomplished through the river outlet works (i.e., below elevation 3490' mean sea level (msl)), or hydropower operations infrastructure at Glen Canyon Dam would be adversely impacted (i.e., as reservoir elevations decline towards elevation 3490' msl). In such circumstances, Glen Canyon Dam facilities face unprecedented operational reliability challenges, water users in the Basin face increased uncertainty, downstream resources could be impacted, the western electrical grid would experience uncertain risk and instability, and water and power supplies to the West and Southwestern United States would be subject to increased operational uncertainty.

Glen Canyon Dam was not envisioned to operate solely through the outlet works for an extended period of time and operating at this low lake level increases risks to water delivery and potential adverse impacts to downstream resources and infrastructure. In addition, should Lake Powell decline further below elevation 3490 feet, we have recently confirmed that essential drinking water infrastructure supplying the City of Page, Arizona and the LeChee Chapter of the Navajo Nation could not function.¹ Given our lack of actual operating experience in such circumstances since Lake Powell filled, these issues raise profound concerns regarding prudent dam operations, facility reliability, public health and safety, and the ability to conduct emergency operations.

Consistent with applicable federal law, and applicable provisions of the 2007 Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead (73 FR 19873), we are fully committed to consult with the Basin States and work together to consider these concerns and develop and implement responsive operational strategies.

The Bureau of Reclamation is also fully committed to operate Glen Canyon Dam in a safe manner and maintain reliable downstream releases. However, given the ongoing low runoff conditions, as stated above, we are approaching operating conditions for which we have only very limited actual operating experience – and which occurred nearly 60 years ago. We hope to be able to delay or avoid operational conditions below the critical elevations referenced above but we fully realize that absent a change in the recent hydrological conditions, we may not be able to avoid such operations. This reality reinforces the need for the Basin States, and all entities in the Basin, to prioritize work to further conserve and reduce use of Colorado River water to stabilize the System's reservoirs. As we engage in that regard, we will continue to work cooperatively with each of you to develop prudent, temporary actions this calendar year to protect critical elevations at Lake Powell. In particular, in conjunction with any potential 2022 Drought Response Operations Plan releases the Department respectfully requests your consideration of potentially reducing Glen Canyon Dam releases to 7.0 maf this water year and providing additional certainty regarding annual release volumes and tier determinations for the 2023 water year. Sections 6 and 7.D. of the 2007 Interim Guidelines authorize the potential reduction under current circumstances.

Given the need to make prompt decisions and implement actions in a timely manner, we request your feedback and recommendations on or before April 22, 2022. Doing so would facilitate prompt decision making in the spring of this year, enhancing our ability to implement responsive actions in a timely manner.

We stand ready to work with each of you, along with our ongoing consultation and engagement with the Basin's Tribes, other federal agencies, the Republic of Mexico, water users, and NGOs. We appreciate your prompt attention to this important and urgent matter.

¹ Reclamation estimates that at elevation 3465 feet these intakes would not function and staff are actively working with local officials about this concern.

Sincerely,



Tanya Trujillo
Assistant Secretary
for Water and Science

cc: Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation
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The top 10 most endangered rivers in America



By [Rachel Ramirez](#)

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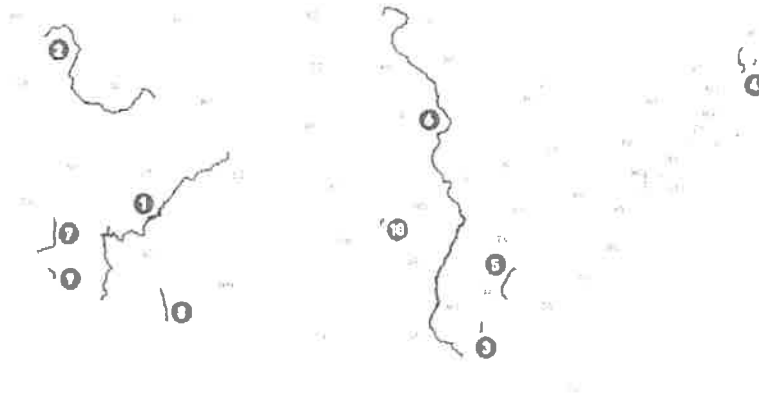
CNN —

The [Colorado River](#) — which provides drinking water, irrigation and electricity for more than 40 million people in the West — is the most endangered river in the United States this year, according to the nonprofit conservation group American Rivers.

From the Pacific Northwest to Alabama, American Rivers ranked the [top 10 most endangered rivers](#) across the country — crises brought on by [worsening droughts](#), [human-made dams](#) and [coal-ash contamination](#). The Colorado River's [outdated water management](#) practices have been worsened by climate change, pushing the river into the No. 1 slot, the group said.

Matt Rice, the group's director of the Colorado Basin Program, said that the [climate crisis](#) is really the theme of this year's report.

"The climate crisis is really a water crisis, and ground zero for that crisis is the Colorado River Basin," Rice told CNN. "We are being pushed in realtime to live with the river we have, to adapt to a hotter, drier reality in the Colorado River."



American Rivers

AMERICA'S MOST ENDANGERED RIVERS

1. Colorado River

- Threats: Climate crisis, outdated water management

2. Snake River

- Threats: Four federal dams

3. Mobile River

- Threats: Coal ash contamination

4. Maine's Atlantic Salmon Rivers

- Threats: Dams

5. Coosa River

- Threats: Agricultural pollution

6. Mississippi River

- Threats: Pollution, habitat loss

7. Lower Kern River

- Threats: Excessive water withdrawals

8. San Pedro River

- Threats: Excessive water pumping; loss of Clean Water Act protections

9. Los Angeles River

“This is a river in crisis because of climate change,” Rice said of the Colorado. “This is not the same river it was two years ago, three years ago or five years ago. We need to learn to live with the river that we have, and we need to implement solutions to allow us to do so.”

Although the Colorado River system is already operating at a deficit, the report says that the climate crisis will likely continue to reduce the river’s flow by 10 to 30% by 2050.

Rice said if the river system collapse, the economic toll would be staggering. If the Colorado River basin was a country, it would rank as the 7th largest economy in the world, [according to American Rivers](#).

“If the river crashes, it’s a massive economy that’s at stake not only in the Southwest, for cities like Los Angeles, Phoenix, Las Vegas and Denver,” he said. “I would argue that it’s a national economic crisis. This is a national story.”

- Threats: Development, pollution

10. Tar Creek

- Threats: Pollution
- Source: *American Rivers*

Rivers are a critical source of water, food and energy. These long, flowing bodies of water are vital to many cultures and communities — particularly tribal nations — and are home to a plethora of important species like salmon and trout. They also bolster ecosystems by restoring groundwater and often serve as a buffer against drought.

American Rivers has published the endangered rivers list since the 1980s in collaboration with other conservation groups. It curates the list based on major proposed actions that the public could help influence, the significance of the river to people and ecosystems and the scale of the threat.

The climate crisis has pushed the Colorado River's Lake Mead and Lake Powell — the largest and second-largest reservoirs in the country — to unprecedented lows. Last year, the federal government declared a water shortage on the river for the first time, triggering mandatory water consumption cuts for states in the Southwest.

Lake Mead last year reached its lowest point since the lake was filled after the Hoover Dam was completed in the 1930s. Meanwhile, Lake Powell sank below a critical threshold in March, and a recent report from the US Geological Survey found the reservoir has lost nearly 7% of its potential storage capacity since 1963 when Glen Canyon Dam was built.



Powerful 'rivers in the sky' could cause Antarctic Peninsula's biggest ice shelf to collapse

JOANNA ALLHANDS | Opinion *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

Lake Powell is tanking, and Interior's proposed response may only buy us time

Opinion: Federal officials have proposed leaving more water in Lake Powell to avoid potential calamity. It's necessary, painful - and still solves nothing.



Joanna Allhands
Arizona Republic

Published 8:00 a.m. MT April 14, 2022

If Lake Powell isn't already doomed, it may soon be.

Insufficient runoff has put the reservoir on a quick and dangerous descent to 3,490 feet of elevation – a water level so low that Glen Canyon Dam's hydropower turbines can no longer operate. A key part of the Western power grid would be lost.

The city of Page and the LeChee Chapter of the Navajo Nation also would lose their drinking water because the infrastructure that supplies them could no longer function.

Not to mention that if Powell falls to 3,490 feet, the only way millions of acre-feet of Colorado River water can flow past the dam and downstream to sustain Lake Mead – the reservoir on which Arizona relies – is through four bypass tubes, which have never handled that kind of volume, particularly for an extended period.

Engineers are concerned whether this setup can move enough water, especially if one or more of the tubes were damaged by heavy flows over time. If the bypass tubes move significantly less water than what the eight turbines do now, that could all but guarantee the demise of Lake Mead.

We must do more to buy Lake Powell time

This is serious.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, which operates the two reservoirs via the Bureau of Reclamation, said in a grimly worded letter last week that it must take more drastic actions to slow Powell's descent.

"We are approaching operating conditions for which we have only very limited actual operating experience – and which occurred nearly 60 years ago," the letter states. "We hope to be able to delay or avoid operational conditions below (3,490 feet) but we fully realize that absent a change in the recent hydrological conditions, we may not be able to avoid such operations."

Did you catch that? Interior is essentially saying that if we don't get more snow (and that snow doesn't produce more runoff), the best we may be able to do is delay the point at which Powell falls below 3,490 feet.

In other words, we are once again being asked to sacrifice – not to fix the problem, but simply to buy time.

We've been buying time on Lake Mead for years

If this feels like déjà vu, well, it is.

We haven't even fully implemented the 500-plus plan from December, in which the lower basin states of Arizona, California and Nevada agreed to store an additional 500,000 acre-feet of water in Lake Mead each year, simply to lower the risk of it tanking before 2026.

That deal, which is only funded for the next two years but must persist through 2026 if we want to protect Lake Mead, essentially pays people not to use water. It's not a solution. We're simply buying time.

And that's on top of the mandatory cuts in the Drought Contingency Plan, which the lower basin states signed in 2019 – again, not to fix Mead's problems, but to simply buy us time.

Reclamation has already delayed the release of 350,000 acre-feet from Powell to Mead though the end of this month – a move that makes Powell appear about 7 feet higher than it otherwise would be. Its current elevation is 3,522 feet.

It also is finalizing a Drought Response Operations Plan to protect Powell elevations – something the upper basin agreed to do in its version of the Drought Contingency Plan – potentially by moving more water from the smaller reservoirs upstream into Powell.

Will the basin states agree to this plan?

Now, Interior is asking the basin states to accept a release of just 7 million acre-feet from Powell to Mead this water year, which ends in September, instead of the 7.48 million acre-feet we were expecting. That's the smallest release since the river's operational guidelines were created in 2007 – and the first time its operational tiers would be adjusted down to provide less water mid-year.

Interior also says it wants to provide “additional certainty regarding annual release volumes and tier determinations for the 2023 water year.”

How would that work? And how long would an extra 480,000 acre-feet last in Powell – without causing significant pain for Mead? The details have not been publicly discussed, but Interior has given states until April 22 to weigh in.

This is a tenuous moment. Annual releases from Powell to Mead have always been a point of contention among the upper and lower basins. This could easily devolve into finger pointing over how we got into this shape or who should have done more to prevent it.

Indeed, it's an open question whether the states will submit a joint response agreeing to what Interior has proposed, or whether some might branch off if they don't like the deal.

As tempting as it is to get indignant or self-righteous about how much we're already doing, it is in Arizona's best interest to do more – even if it hurts, and yes, even if it doesn't resolve anything.

It would buy time to install new pipes for Page and the adjacent LeChee community and delay the risky venture of moving water through Powell's bypass tubes. The consequences are probably far worse for Mead if we send water through those backup pipes and one of them fails than if we were to leave what might amount to about 8 feet of additional water in Powell.

Colorado River needs solutions, not time

No, that does not make it a good idea. We are buying time in increasingly shorter durations, with heavier costs and fewer decent alternatives.

This can't continue for much longer.

The guidelines for operating the river expire at the end of 2026. Yet state negotiators (and Reclamation) have spent most of their time and energy putting out these fires, not making headway on the issues that must drive a new set of rules, like how much water the Colorado River can realistically provide to states moving forward.

If 7.5 million acre-feet – the annual amount guaranteed to each basin in the Colorado River compact – is no longer realistic, what is?

If we don't answer questions like this soon, there won't be a Lake Powell (or a Lake Mead) to save.

Reach Allhands at joanna.allhands@arizonarepublic.com. On Twitter: @joannaallhands.

If you love this content (or love to hate it – hey, I won't judge), why not subscribe to get more?