



International Boundary and Water Commission United States and Mexico

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COLORADO RIVER DROUGHT TRIGGERS MORE WATER DELIVERY REDUCTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO IN 2023; ADDITIONAL ACTIONS NEEDED AS RESERVOIRS CONTINUE THEIR RAPID DECLINE

Colorado River water allocations to users in the United States and Mexico will be reduced in 2023 for the second time since the signing of the 1944 Water Treaty. Reservoir elevation projections by the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation for the Colorado River Basin reservoirs indicate the reductions will be the largest ever following the worst 23-year long drought on record. The current drought is the worst in the 114-year long recorded history and one of the worst over the past 1,200 years. Total system storage of Colorado River reservoirs is 34% of capacity -- the lowest level on record.

The reduction in the allocations will be in accordance with Minute 323, an agreement signed in 2017 by the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC). The cooperative actions identified in the Minute, including investment in water conservation projects, have benefited water users in both countries.

Minute 323 recognizes that both countries will reduce the use of their annual allotment of Colorado River waters when the January 1 Lake Mead elevation is projected to be at or below 1,075 feet. This is in addition to water savings starting at elevation 1,090 feet or below that will be recoverable when reservoir conditions improve. Reclamation this week released the August 2022 24-Month Study, which determines the delivery reduction volumes to the United States and Mexico under low elevation reservoir conditions for 2023.

In 2023, Mexico's allotment will be reduced by 70,000 acre-feet (86 million cubic meters [mcm]) and, in addition, Mexico will contribute 34,000 acre-feet (42 mcm) of recoverable water savings under the Minute's Binational Water Scarcity Contingency Plan (BWSCP), resulting in a total reduction of deliveries to Mexico of 104,000 acre-feet (128 mcm). Lower Basin users in the United States will see a reduction of 417,000 acre-feet (514 mcm) and recoverable water savings of 200,000 acre-feet (247 mcm) under domestic policies, known as the 2007 Interim Guidelines and the 2019 Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan (DCP), resulting in a total reduction to users in the Lower Basin in the United States of 617,000 acre-feet (761 mcm). Through these combined binational efforts, Colorado River water deliveries will be decreased by a total of 721,000 acre-feet (889 mcm) in 2023, representing 8% of the total normal allotment to Lower Basin users in the United States and Mexico.

Even with these record reductions and savings, officials in the United States and Mexico recognize that more action is needed – and needed promptly – in response to worsening drought and low runoff conditions. The two largest reservoirs in the basin – Lakes Powell and Mead – both reached record low elevations in 2022. The

United States and Mexico are working in partnership on additional water conservation measures to bolster storage and further protect critical elevations in both lakes. This effort includes U.S. funds in addition to the \$31.5 million dollars in Minute 323 to support conservation projects in Mexico. The combined efforts of the United States and Mexico under Minute 323, its predecessor Minute 319, and related conservation activities have already generated 4.6 million acre-feet (5,674 mcm) in water conservation at Lake Mead. However, without additional immediate action or relief from the dry conditions associated with climate change, the reservoirs are projected to continue their rapid decline, putting water deliveries at risk to users in the entire Basin, including Mexico. Of particular concern are projections showing that within the next few years, it is possible that levels in Lake Powell or Lake Mead could fall so low that it would be difficult to release water for farms and cities that depend on these essential supplies.

A special binational work group established in late 2021 has identified opportunities to conserve an additional volume of up to 180,000 acre-feet (222 mcm) in Mexico in 2022 and 2023 to complement measures under consideration in the United States to conserve an additional volume of at least 500,000 acre-feet (617 mcm) per year in the Lower Basin. These volumes benefit reservoir storage, reducing the triggering of larger reduction levels.

“We will continue to work closely with our counterparts in Mexico to implement additional water conservation measures in response to the drought. We realize additional conservation is absolutely critical to protect our shared water supply,” said U.S. Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner.

Mexican Commissioner Adriana Resendez expressed her great concern over Colorado River Basin conditions and the speed with which the levels of the main dams in the basin are declining. “I reiterate Mexico’s commitment to continue working to identify projects that help conserve water and protect the reservoir levels in the basin,” she said.

The agreements reached for reduced allocations and recoverable savings reflect U.S.-Mexico cooperation on the Colorado River since 2007 led by the IBWC in collaboration with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Mexico’s National Water Commission, U.S. and Mexico Colorado River Basin States, and other institutions in both countries. These agreements reflect a shared commitment of the Governments and their partners in both countries to work proactively to address the potential for unprecedented reductions on the Colorado River as a result of hydrologic conditions, meeting system demands, and increased temperatures in the basin.

Water managers from the United States and Mexico are continuing to meet to identify additional water conservation measures that can be implemented in the near term to protect critical reservoir elevations.

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