

DRAFT Meeting Minutes
Colorado River Authority of Utah
March 24, 2026 -- 1:00 p.m. MT

1. Call to Order – Gene Shawcroft, Chair

Mr. Shawcroft called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm stating there was a quorum. A list of all attendees is included in Attachment I. Attendees introduced themselves.

2. Approval of the Minutes of January 20, 2026, Colorado River Authority of Utah Board Meeting – Gene Shawcroft

Mr. Humphrey motioned to approve the minutes, Mr. Renstrom seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

3. Public Comment Pursuant to the Public Comment Policy of the Authority (limit of 2 minutes per person) – Gene Shawcroft

There was no public comment.

4. Report of the Chair – Gene Shawcroft

Mr. Shawcroft provided an update on Basin States negotiations and NEPA and explained that discussions between Basin States have stalled across three key areas – operational rules (Lake Powell releases); water use reductions (Lower Basin Cuts, Upper Basin Conservation) and legal (Compact) protections. Mr. Shawcroft explained that without a consensus among the states, the Bureau of Reclamation will independently select a NEPA Preferred Alternative for system operations by October 1.

Mr. Shawcroft discussed the short-term outlook and explained the pivot to short-term planning is driven by a rapid decline in forecasted Lake Powell inflows. Mr. Shawcroft explained a mid-March heat wave resulted in a loss of 550 kaf from the forecast in just two weeks and the Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) in the Basin is currently the lowest on record. Mr. Shawcroft explained that water year 2026 Lake Powell inflow is projected at 4.4 million acre-feet (MAF) which is 46% of average under the “Most Probable” forecast.

Mr. Shawcroft explained to maintain Lake Powell elevation above the critical 3,500’ threshold, a “hole” of approximately 1.7 MAF must be filled. Under current “Most Probable” projections, Lake Powell is expected to drop below 3,525’ which is the target elevation for a DROA plan. Mr. Shawcroft explained that releasing water from upper initial units alone isn’t going to resolve the issue and protect critical elevation at Lake Powell. Mr. Shawcroft explained that the Bureau of Reclamation must make a SEIS 6.E adjustment decision before the Upper Division States can approve a DROA plan.

Mr. Shawcroft discussed today’s UCRC Special Meeting and explained the action items that were approved by the UCRC including the Upper Division States’ Provisional Accounting projects and the MOU between the Upper Division States and Bureau of Reclamation regarding coordination of consumptive use data. Mr. Shawcroft explained that the Upper Division States and the Upper Division Tribes are meeting in Denver to coordinate regarding Post-2026 developments and to share relevant information.

Mr. Shawcroft asked Ms. Wilhelmsen to share some thoughts on the drought. Ms. Wilhelmsen stated she believed we would be experiencing some lows we never have before in some of the systems, and that it's not looking good.

5. Report of the Executive Director – Amy Haas, Executive Director

Ms. Haas asked Ms. Epperson to read the names of the virtual attendees which she did. Ms. Haas explained that on March 2nd the Authority, on behalf of the State of Utah, submitted comment on the Draft EIS for Post 2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies at Lake Powell and Lake Mead Reclamation and that the comment is posted on the Authority website. The comment reflects input from Utah Department of Natural Resources, particularly the Division of Water Rights, Division of Water Resources, the Division of Wildlife Resources, and PLPCO. Ms. Haas explained that generally, Utah supports the implementation of robust and adaptive guidelines for Post-2026 operations and continues to seek a consensus alternative among the Colorado River Basin States. Ms. Haas stated there were a couple non-negotiables and explained that Utah will not support a preferred alternative that jeopardizes or negatively impacts the collective non-depletion obligation of the Upper Division States under Article III of the Colorado River Compact, or that impairs Utah's ability to fulfill its Tribal obligations.

Ms. Haas explained that regarding comments on the NEPA alternatives and implementability, the No Action Alternative is insufficient and does not meet the purpose and need for the federal action, nor does an extension of the 2007 Interim Guidelines. Ms. Haas explained that of the four action alternatives, only the Basic Coordination Alternative can be implemented immediately using the Secretary of Interior's existing authorities, making it the only viable basis for a preferred alternative absent a consensus agreement. Ms. Haas explained the remaining alternatives are not implementable without new agreements among Basin States/water users and/or additional legal authorities and that there are fatal flaws associated with each of those alternatives that have been identified in our comments.

Ms. Haas discussed the mandates for the Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS and explained the Preferred Alternative must be immediately implementable and limited to the Secretary's existing authorities. Ms. Haas discussed Lower Basin reductions and explained the preferred alternative should include flexibility for the Secretary to reduce annual deliveries to the Lower Division States by up to 4 MAF as evaluated in the DEIS. Ms. Haas discussed Lake Powell releases and explained that a preferred alternative must include the full range of Secretarial authority for minimal annual releases from Lake Powell provided that such releases do not impair Upper Division States Compact obligations. The release band evaluated in the DEIS is between 4.7 MAF and 12 MAF. Ms. Haas discussed Upstream Initial Unit (UIU) releases and explained that releases from the CRSP UIU for Lake Powell protection must be limited to ensure the storage requirements under Section 602(a) of the Colorado River Basin Project Act and the Long-Range Operating Criteria (LROC) are satisfied and must be consistent with state water rights.

Ms. Haas explained that in Utah's comment letter we critiqued the scope and impact analysis and commented that the DEIS fails to perform the required "hard look" under NEPA for the impacts of proposed upstream activities, instead relying on the 2019 Drought Contingency Plans (DCPs) as a proxy. Ms. Haas explained that Utah commented that Reclamation must be consistent in its geographic scope, either by analyzing impacts of assumed actions above Lake Powell and in Mexico or by adhering strictly to the scope set in the DEIS. Ms. Haas discussed Temporal Scope and explained that if the operational period is shortened from 20 years, as Reclamation suggested it could be, Reclamation must complete a new impact analysis, as a shorter timeframe could result in different impacts.

Ms. Haas discussed the DROA Plan Development and explained that Reclamation is contemplating a DROA release from the upstream initial units and that Blue Mesa, Navajo and Flaming Gorge will all be considered per DROA. Ms. Haas explained that Reclamation is developing a draft Plan with input from the Advisors from each Upper Division State and the UCRC. Ms. Haas explained the plan is modeled after the template for the 2022 DROA Plan which resulted in a release from Flaming Gorge of 463 KAF before the release was halted due to favorable hydrology. Ms. Haas explained the April 24-month study will determine the volume of water to be released for a 2026 plan, and that we won't have preliminary April 24-month study numbers until April 8th. Ms. Haas explained that we will not be able to assess the effectiveness of the DROA plan until we know how Reclamation intends to operate under a 2024 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Ms. Haas stated that DROA release will likely begin on May 1st and will extend through April 2027 and that for Flaming Gorge they will be timed to optimize planned fish experiment releases under the 2006 FG ROD.

6. 2026 Utah Legislative Outcomes – Cody Stewart, Director of Strategic Engagement

Mr. Stewart discussed HB 473 – Colorado River Authority Amendments and discussed the key changes. Mr. Stewart explained key changes are: sharpens the Authority mission; Authority moves from the Governor's Office to the Department of Natural Resources; authorizes the Authority to coordinate with the Attorney General to prepare for potential litigation; empowers the Authority to assist the State Water Agent; expands the Board from 7 to 10 members eliminating the Governor's representative seat and adds two non-voting ex officio positions; the River Commissioner becomes a stand-alone Board position; future appointments of the River Commissioner shift from authority-elected to direct gubernatorial appointment with Senate consent; and future terms for the River Commissioner and appointed members are reduced from 6 to 4 years. Mr. Stewart explained other legislation allocated \$5M to the DNR purportedly for litigation preparation. Mr. Stewart discussed the new Board composition and explained two seats must be filled before July 1: Central Utah Area Representative and Southeastern Area Representative. Mr. Stewart explained that the two new ex officio members, the Executive Director of DNR (non-voting) and the State Engineer (nonvoting), both assume seats on July 1, 2026. Cody discussed the a potential recommendation for staggering future Board terms.

Ms. Haas discussed HB 348, Dedicated Water Amendments, which she explained has implications for DMPP. State Engineer Wilhelmsen explained she is hopeful this provides additional flexibility to accommodate the leasing process. Ms. Haas discussed HB187 which she explained is focused on water on the Lower Basin and establishes new provisions and modifies regulations for change applications. Mr. Renstrom explained there is a unique set of circumstances in the Lower Basin portion of Utah, and this will provide more flexibility in managing water. Mr. Renstrom explained that HB 187 is unique to the Lower Basin portion of Utah, which he explained has a unique set of circumstances and the bill provides water districts more flexibility on how they can use water, which he stated he is grateful for.

Kael Weston, a member of the public, introduced himself as a former candidate for federal office and asked two questions regarding the Post-2026 negotiations which Mr. Shawcroft responded to.

7. Quarterly Budget Update – Logan Anderson, Manager of Finance & Administration

Mr. Anderson explained the Authority was given ongoing funds of \$1M in this session and thanked Board Member Ferry for his efforts in obtaining this. Mr. Anderson provided a FY2026

Budget Update and explained everything looks healthy as we are approximately 50% expensed and are three-quarters of the way through the fiscal year.

8. Hydrology and System Status Update – Marc Stilson, Principal Engineer & Amanda Daniels, Senior Project Engineer

Ms. Daniels discussed precipitation for the month and water year to date which shows we were well below 50% of normal for March. Ms. Daniels discussed Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) which she explained is the lowest recorded SWE across the Upper Colorado River Region. Ms. Daniels discussed temperatures which were 8.5 degrees higher than normal for February, and we are setting temperature records daily while 100% of the Colorado River Basin is experiencing some level of drought. Ms. Daniels explained the 8-14 day temperature and precipitation outlook are not looking good. Ms. Daniels discussed system storage as of March 22nd and explained Flaming Gorge is at 82%; Fontenelle is at 46%, Lake Powell is 25%; Navajo is 61%; Morrow Point is 97% and Bue Mesa is 50% full. Ms. Daniels discussed system storage and explained Lake Powell is 25% full and Lake Mead is 33% full for total system content of 37%, which she explained was 41% at this time last year. Ms. Daniels discussed the Lake Powell water year unregulated inflow explaining that the mid-month most probable inflow forecast dropped approximately 550k AF.

9. Demand Management Pilot Program Update – Marc Stilson

Mr. Stilson explained that the purpose of the Demand Management Pilot Program is to maintain viable agricultural communities by facilitating temporary, voluntary, compensated, and protected conservation of water use via a reduction of water depletion by water users, with the ultimate goal of ensuring continued Colorado River Compact compliance. Mr. Stilson discussed each of the objectives of the program and explained that collaboration is needed to meet each objective. Mr. Stilson discussed conditions for participation and explained this includes water users with available water to lease and the flexibility to enroll it in a conservation program. Mr. Stilson discussed “Reducing Ag Water Depletion” and explained that the Utah DMPP has shown that agricultural water depletions can be reduced through storage forbearance agreements and resting crop land for either a full season or partial season with depletion savings being delivered to Lake Powell. Mr. Stilson discussed “Quantify Actual Water Depletion Savings with Multiple Methods” including OpenET/ eeMETRIC and Utah Flux Network working with Jacobs, USU, Division of Water Rights. Mr. Stilson discussed “Identify State & Federal Regulatory Processes for Distribution & Accounting” which he explained includes fixed-time change applications (8 of 17 have been approved), Distribution Plans, Implementation & Accounting, and Provisional Accounting MOU. Mr. Stilson Discussed “Determine Feasibility of Storing Water” and explained that Starvation and Scofield can store water during the irrigation season and release water during the winter season, East Park is unable to store past the 1st release of the season and recognized storage in Lake Powell for these projects is yet to be determined. Mr. Stilson discussed a provisional summary of the DMPP 2025 cycle that included four projects. Mr. Stilson discussed each project in detail. Mr. Stilson discussed the initial aggregate Utah Demand Management Pilot Program conserved consumptive use water and transit loss reductions measured by gages through the system for water delivered to Lake Powell. Mr. Stilson discussed the Utah Diversion Measurement & Telemetry Program which he explained is a collaborative initiative between the Upper Colorado River Commission and the Colorado River Authority of Utah leveraging \$3M of federal funding from the Bureau of Reclamation through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs At (IIJA).

Mr. Stilson discussed the Batch One application cycle from November 10, 2025 through January 15, 2026 and explained that 45 applications were received, 27 projects were selected with the estimated cost being approximately \$931,890.

Kael Weston asked questions about other Upper Division States conservation projects and funding which Mr. Shawcroft and Ms. Haas responded to.

10. Remarks from the Board

Mr. Williams discussed several water conservation bills that passed legislation including one targeted to certify landscapers requiring them to have an hour of education on conservation principles and another bill requiring all new construction on state property landscaping systems to be at 75% conservation.

Mr. Humphrey stated that his area is very dry and that runoff occurred 3 weeks early this year.

Mr. Larson stated that his area is dry, dry, dry.

Mr. Renstrom stated that it is hotter and drier than normal in St. George.

11. Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Next Meeting: April 21, 2026 1:00 pm World Trade Center 1st Floor Conference Room, 60 East South Temple, Salt Lake City, UT 84111

13. Closed Session as needed to discuss interstate claims to the use of water from the Colorado River system and to protect classified records, legal strategy, or the ability of the state to carry out negotiations (UCA 52-4-205(2)(e)).

A motion was made by Mr. Humphrey to close the meeting pursuant to Utah Code section 52-4-205 to discuss interstate claims to the use of water from the Colorado River system and to protect classified records, legal strategy, or the ability of the state to carry out negotiations. The motion was seconded by Mr. Larsen. Ms. Coleman took a roll call vote from each Board Member; the motion to enter a Closed Session passed unanimously.

14. Adjourn

The Board return to open session and voted to adjourn the meeting at 3:05 pm.

March 24, 2026

Colorado River Authority of Utah Board Meeting – VIRTUAL ONLY

Board Member Attendees:

Gene Shawcroft, Chair
Joel Williams
Dan Larsen
Jay Mark Humphrey
Zach Renstrom

Attendees:

Amy Haas
Betsy Coleman
Emma Epperson
Wendy Crowther
Marc Stilson
Logan Anderson
Amanda Daniels
Cody Stewart
Gordon Rowe
Bart Leeflang, CUWCD
Teresa Wilhelmsen, State Engineer
John Laursen, Uintah County Commissioner
Kael Weston
Cody Allred
Blake Buehler, CUWCD
Joel Brown
John Berggren
Sonja Norton
Willis Lefevre
Tom Bruton
Roger Pearson
Eric Holmstead
Ric Cantrell
Duane Houston
Michael Drake
Kael Weston
Sarah Shechter
Brooke Larsen, The Salt Lake Tribune
Ben Winslow, Fox 13 News

