

THE BATHTUB RING

Shrinking Lake Mead: Impacts on Water Supply, Hydropower, Recreation and the Environment



NING JIANG | SEASON MARTIN | JULIA MORTON | SKYLER MURPHY
 Faculty Advisor: Naomi Tague



OVERVIEW OF THE BASIN AND LAKE MEAD

The Colorado River is the water supply for approximately 40 million people, irrigating over 5.5 million acres of land across seven states and two countries. Virtually every drop of the Colorado River is allocated to a consumptive use. In addition to supplying water, the Colorado River is an important source of hydroelectricity, water recreation, tourism and ecological habitat.

Increasing demand combined with prolonged multi-year climate drought has led to precipitously low reservoir levels in Lake Mead, which is impounded behind Hoover Dam. If the drought continues, Lake Mead will likely drop below 1075', triggering the first set of mandated water delivery curtailments set forth in the Interim Guidelines.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

We examined physical and economic impacts to water deliveries, hydropower generation, recreation, and the environment as Lake Mead levels drop to the key elevations identified in the Interim Guidelines: 1075', 1050', 1025', and 1000'.



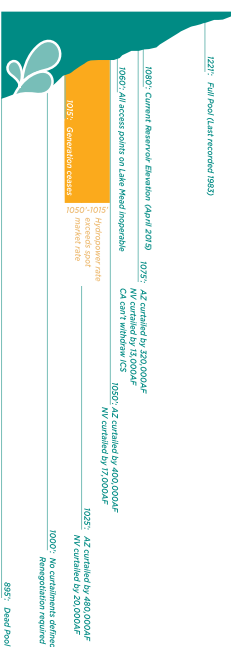
KEY FINDINGS

Vulnerability varies by state due to differences in the magnitude of curtailments and water uses. Although attention is paid to the impacts of water delivery curtailments, there are substantial economic losses associated with changes to recreation, hydropower generation, and downstream ecosystems.



IMPACTS BY ELEVATION

This analysis doesn't project when Lake Mead will reach the curtailment elevations, but instead provides both quantitative and qualitative frameworks to support decision-making as shortages occur. The following Graphic depicts a handful of impacts by elevation, providing an understanding of potential tradeoffs between stakeholder needs.



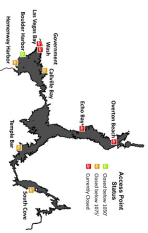
ANNUAL VISITATION COULD BE REDUCED BY ALMOST HALF

Currently, the National Park Service predicts that no access points will be operable below 1060' despite an additional infrastructure investment of \$5 million in 2015.

Visitation is projected to drop from:

7 → 4 MILLION

The decrease will be compounded by the inoperability of access points.



WATER CURTAILMENT DOESN'T PREDICT VULNERABILITY

While it is generally assumed that Nevada water users are among the most vulnerable to water supply curtailments, and California users are not vulnerable, there are compelling reasons to conclude that the opposite is true. Impacts to Central Arizona Project users, as expected, will be significant, but will be confined to agricultural users, not municipal or tribal water users.

CALIFORNIA: HIGH VULNERABILITY

- California receives no curtailments due to their senior status.
- Municipal/Industrial water users are vulnerable because they lose the ability to divert intentionally created surplus water.

NEVADA: LOW VULNERABILITY

- The Southern Nevada Water Authority return flow credit program allows Nevada to keep their consumptive water use below their allotment.
- A third-party inside in Lake Mead allows SNWA to withdraw water below 1000' eliminating the concern that Nevada won't be able to access their water supply.

ARIZONA MAINSTEM: LOW VULNERABILITY

- Arizona Mainstem users that would be impacted by curtailments currently do not use enough of their entitlement to share in shortages.

CENTRAL ARIZONA PROJECT: HIGH VULNERABILITY

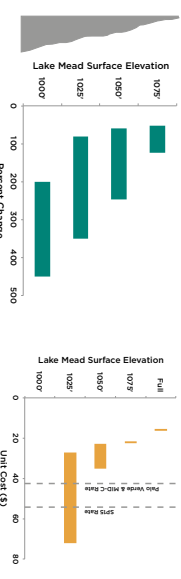
- CA currently bears oil shortages applied to Arizona.
- Water used for groundwater recharge will be the first cut, followed by agricultural water users.
- At current water use levels, municipal/industrial and tribal water users are unaffected by curtailments.



COST OF HYDROPOWER COULD ROUGHLY QUINTUPLE

Hydropower generation will decline as Lake Mead shrinks. Increasing energy costs. Costs paid by contractors for hydropower and spot market power will roughly double at 1075', triple at 1050', quadruple at 1025' and quintuple at 1000'. Though hydropower rates will surpass spot market rates at lower elevations, Hoover customers are contractually bound to purchase Hoover power until 2067.

With each 25' drop, total costs increase by roughly 100% compared to a full reservoir.



CROSS SECTOR INTERACTIONS

Increased costs will be borne by urban residents, farmers, and commercial operators. CAP's and MWDS's pumping costs will increase, causing increased water rates.

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THE GREATEST ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ARE INDIRECT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of many individuals, which include our client Doug Kennedy at the Western Water Policy Program, our faculty advisor Naomi Tague, our external advisors Ken Novotik and Bob Wilkinson as well as professionals throughout the Colorado River Basin who provided essential knowledge and guidance for our project.

