

Lake Mead water level dips to record low

Tourists look out at Lake Mead from the top of the Hoover Dam on Tuesday, June 8, 2021, in Boulder City, Nev. (Benjamin Hager/Las Vegas Review-Journal) @benjaminhphoto



Lake Mead and the Hoover Dam on Tuesday, June 8, 2021, in Boulder City, Nev. (Benjamin Hager/Las Vegas Review-Journal) @benjaminhphoto

Lake Mead's water level reached a historic low late Wednesday, according to federal officials.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation data show the lake dipped below the previous record to reach 1071.56 feet about 11 p.m. The lake crept even lower Thursday morning, reaching 1,071.49 feet above sea level about 10 a.m. before ticking up slightly an hour later.

The previous low point of 1,071.61 was logged on July 1, 2016, bureau spokeswoman Patti Aaron said this week. The Bureau of Reclamation [had projected the lake would match that level](#) on Thursday.

Lake Mead is [nearing its first federally declared water shortage](#) after two decades of drought have parched the Colorado River. Water from the river serves 40 million people in seven states and Mexico.

As of Monday, Lake Mead, the country's largest reservoir, was just 36 percent full. The lake is the source of about 90 percent of Southern Nevada's water.

Aaron said the water level is expected to continue declining until November.

Runoff from snowpack in the Rocky Mountains is essentially over already, Aaron has said. Typically, the runoff season lasts from April until July, she said.

A shortage declaration will be made in August if Bureau of Reclamation water level projections released at that time show the water level below 1,075 feet at the beginning of next year.

Such a declaration would slash Nevada's allocation of 300,000 acre-feet of Colorado River water by 13,000. One acre-foot of water is about what two homes in the Las Vegas Valley use over the course of 16 months.

A cut from a shortage declaration would be in addition to an 8,000 acre-foot contribution Nevada agreed to in 2019 if the lake level was to drop below 1,090 feet, which has happened in both years since the agreement was enacted.

Southern Nevada, however, won't immediately feel the restrictions due to years of conservation efforts, water officials have said.

The Southern Nevada Water Authority has said the region already uses less water annually than what the allotment would be with cuts factored in. The agency has said it has more than 2 million acre-feet of water stored in Arizona, California, Lake Mead and Las Vegas' local aquifer.

But officials at the water authority have continued to urge the public to keep up with conservation efforts, such as adhering to a seasonal watering schedule and using a rebate program to convert grass yards to desert landscaping.

Last week, Gov. Steve Sisolak signed legislation that will require nearly a third of all of Southern Nevada's grass to be removed by the end of 2026. The water authority estimates the measure will save about 10 percent of the area's allocation of water from the river, about 30,000 acre-feet.

The law prohibits Colorado River water distributed by the water authority from being used to irrigate "nonfunctional turf" starting in 2027. This includes grass between roads and sidewalks, in medians and traffic circles and decorative grass outside businesses, housing development and similar areas. Single-family homes, golf courses and parks are exempt.