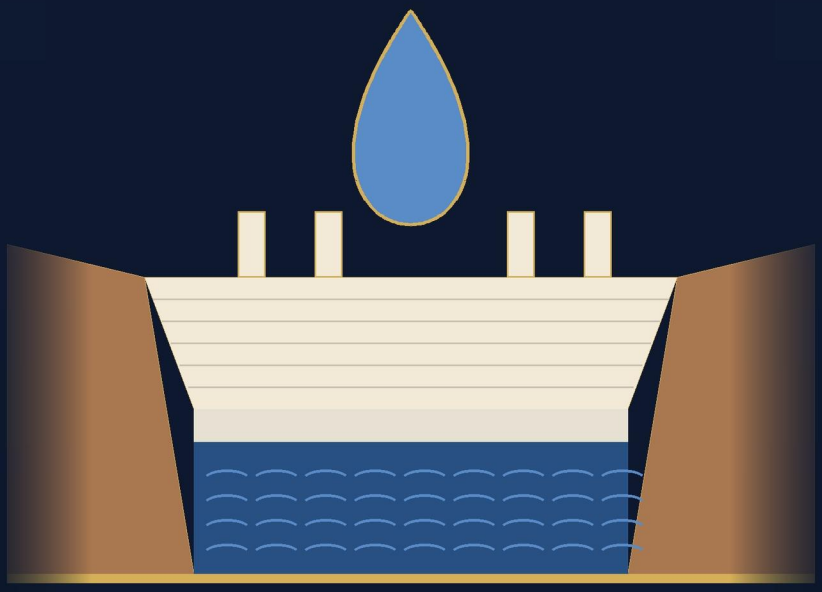
A PLAIN-ENGLISH FACT CHECK

WATER IN THE WEST

COLORADO RIVER, LAKE MEAD, NEVADA

What the Records Show



LAKE MEAD | 2026 CUTS | LAS VEGAS | TRUCKEE | CARSON

Where Our Water Comes From and Who Owns It

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY Enterprises

WATER IN THE WEST

The Colorado River, Lake Mead and Nevada

What the Records Show About Where Our Water Comes From, the 2026 Cuts and Who Owns the Water

The river compact, the 2026 federal decision, Lake Mead, Las Vegas, the Truckee and Carson rivers, Nevada water rights, and the claims people make about all of it

Andrew Dominguez

Fact Check Series

Trinfinity Enterprises

Water in the West: The Colorado River, Lake Mead and Nevada: What the Records Show About Where Our Water Comes From, the 2026 Cuts and Who Owns the Water

Copyright 2026 Andrew Dominguez.

Free to download. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews. You are welcome to download this book and read it for free.

Published by Trinfinity Enterprises, Dayton, Nevada. First edition, 2026.

The information in this book stops at November 18, 2026. Each figure comes from the newest report I could open on that date and carries the date of its source. Lake levels change every month and the river rules are set two years at a time, so check the sources named in the footnotes for newer information.

This book is for general information only. It is not legal or engineering advice or advice about any water right, and it does not tell you what policy to support.

Questions and corrections: andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com

Please read before you use this book. This book is for general information and education only. It is not legal, medical, financial, tax, or other professional advice, and reading it does not create a professional relationship of any kind. Laws, rules, prices, and research change, and every situation is different. Before you act on anything in this book, check it against current sources and talk with a lawyer, doctor, licensed professional, or other qualified expert as your situation calls for. I worked hard to get the facts right, but I can't promise that every detail is complete, correct, or current. You use this information at your own risk. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no responsibility or liability for any loss, injury, or damage of any kind that comes from using or relying on this book.

Fact check notice. The ratings and conclusions in this book are my own reading of the public record as of the date the book was finished, based on the sources it lists. Statements about named people, groups, and organizations are reported from those sources and are not new accusations. If a source is later corrected or new evidence comes out, a rating may change. If you believe something here is wrong, write to andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com and I will review it.

Contents

Introduction: How to Read This Book 5

What this book covers 5

Where the facts come from 5

Facts, interpretations and unknowns 6

The four verdicts 6

A word about units 6

Part One: The Colorado River 7

Chapter 1: The Law of the River 7

Chapter 2: Lake Mead 7

Part Two: The 2026 Decision 10

Chapter 3: Why the States Could Not Agree 10

Chapter 4: What the Federal Plan Does 11

Chapter 5: What It Means for Nevada 12

Part Three: Southern Nevada 13

Chapter 6: Where Las Vegas Gets Its Water 13

Chapter 7: Conservation and the Grass Ban 13

Part Four: Northern Nevada 15

Chapter 8: The Truckee River and Reno 15

Chapter 9: The Carson River, Carson City and Dayton 16

Part Five: Who Owns the Water 18

Chapter 10: Nevada Water Law 18

Chapter 11: Groundwater and Domestic Wells 18

Part Six: Testing the Claims 19

Chapter 12: Twelve Common Claims 19

Claim 1: "Las Vegas uses most of the Colorado River." 19

Claim 2: "Lake Mead hit a record low in 2026." 19

Claim 3: "Lake Mead is about to hit dead pool." 19
Claim 4: "Nevada's Colorado River water is being cut." 19
Claim 5: "The cut means Las Vegas will run short of water." 20
Claim 6: "Water used indoors in Las Vegas is lost for good." 20
Claim 7: "The seven states made a new deal for the river." 20
Claim 8: "Washington set fixed cuts for the next 10 years." 20
Claim 9: "Nevada's grass ban means homeowners must tear out their lawns." 21
Claim 10: "If you own land in Nevada, you own the water under it." 21
Claim 11: "Reno gets its water from Lake Tahoe." 21
Claim 12: "Northern Nevada's rivers have water to spare for new growth." 21
Part Seven: Where Things Stand 23
Chapter 13: As of November 18, 2026 23
What nobody knows yet 23
Plain steps for readers 23
Appendix A: Timeline 25
Appendix B: Glossary 26
Appendix C: Full Source List 27
Tier 1: Primary and official sources 27
Tier 2: Nonpartisan analysis 27
Tier 4: Fact-checks and journalism 28

Introduction: How to Read This Book

The information in this book stops at November 18, 2026.

Nevada is, in the words of the Legislature's own research office, "the most arid state in the nation."[1] Every glass of water here comes from somewhere specific: the Colorado River for Las Vegas, the Truckee River for Reno and Sparks, the Carson River and the wells along it for Carson City, Dayton and the valleys downstream.

In 2026, the Colorado River hit a turning point. The rules that had governed the river since 2007 expired, the seven states that share it could not agree on new ones, and Lake Mead fell to a record low. In August, the federal government set new rules on its own, including a cut to Nevada's share. At the same time, people repeat claims about the river that range from true to badly wrong.

I wrote this book to put the records in one place. Every number traces to a source you can open and check. The book does not take a side between states, cities or farms. It lays out what the records show and lets you decide what they mean.

What this book covers

- **Part One** covers the Colorado River: the law that divides it and the state of Lake Mead.
- **Part Two** covers the 2026 federal decision and what it means for Nevada.
- **Part Three** covers Southern Nevada: where Las Vegas gets its water and how it conserves.
- **Part Four** covers Northern Nevada: the Truckee and Carson rivers.
- **Part Five** covers water rights: who owns the water in Nevada and how rights work.
- **Part Six** tests common claims and gives each one a verdict.
- **Part Seven** shows where things stand and what nobody knows yet.

Where the facts come from

Tier	What it means	Examples in this book
1. Primary and official	Government agencies and water agencies reporting their own data or decisions	U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA), Carson Water Subconservancy District (CWSD)
2. Nonpartisan and research groups	Research offices that do not lobby for a side	Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB), University of Nevada, Reno Extension, Water Education Foundation
3. Scholarly	Peer-reviewed research	None needed for this book
4. Journalism and commentary	News reports, used for recent events and local detail	8NewsNow, FOX5 Las Vegas, The Nevada Independent, Associated Press, Las Vegas

[1] Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, "Water Policy and Issues in Nevada: An Overview", December 2019. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Documents/water-overview-2019.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Tier	What it means	Examples in this book
		Review-Journal, Western Water, Colorado Politics, Engineering News-Record
5. Advocacy groups	Groups that argue a side	None used

Some of the Northern Nevada sources are several years old, because they are the newest detailed public reports I could open. Each one carries its date.

Facts, interpretations and unknowns

- **Confirmed facts** are things the records show, such as Nevada's yearly share of the Colorado River.
- **Interpretations** are what someone makes of the facts. When I give one, I say whose it is.
- **Unknowns** are things the records don't settle yet. When I could not confirm something, I mark it **[Not verified]**.

The four verdicts

- **True:** The records support the claim as stated.
- **Partly true:** Part of the claim holds up, but it leaves out something important or overstates it.
- **False:** The records contradict the claim.
- **Inconclusive:** The evidence is not strong enough to say either way, or it is too soon to know.

A word about units

An **acre-foot** is the amount of water that would cover one acre one foot deep. An acre is 43,560 square feet and a cubic foot holds about 7.48 gallons, so an acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons by my calculation. Reports often write **maf** for million acre-feet. Lake levels are given as **elevation**, in feet above sea level.

Part One: The Colorado River

Chapter 1: The Law of the River

The rules for dividing the Colorado River are known together as the Law of the River. The Bureau of Reclamation lists the main pieces:[2]

- **The Colorado River Compact, 1922.** Negotiated by the seven basin states and the federal government. At Herbert Hoover's suggestion, it split the basin into "an upper and lower half," each with the right to use 7.5 million acre-feet a year. The Upper Basin is Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. The Lower Basin is Arizona, California and Nevada.
- **The Boulder Canyon Project Act, 1928.** Ratified the Compact, authorized Hoover Dam, and divided the Lower Basin's 7.5 million acre-feet: 4.4 million to California, 2.8 million to Arizona and 0.3 million, or 300,000 acre-feet, to Nevada.
- **The Mexican Water Treaty, 1944.** "Committed 1.5 maf of the river's annual flow to Mexico."
- **Arizona v. California.** The Supreme Court decided the case in 1963 and issued its decree in 1964, settling how the Lower Basin share is divided.

Nevada's 300,000 acre-feet is about 1.8 percent of the river.[3] The deal was struck when almost nobody lived in Southern Nevada. A water official quoted by The Nevada Independent in 2019 summed up the river's problem: "there are simply more rights to water than there is water in most years."[4]

Chapter 2: Lake Mead

Lake Mead, behind Hoover Dam, stores the Lower Basin's water. Its level tells you how much is left.

Elevation	What it means
1,229 feet	Maximum water surface[5]
About 1,050 feet	Hoover Dam turbine efficiency begins to decline[6]
1,035 feet	Below this, FOX5 reports, Hoover produces less power[7]

[2] Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region, "The Law of the River", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g1000/lawofrvr.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[3] Daniel Rothberg, The Nevada Independent, "Nevada again looks to deep conservation as the Colorado River's reservoirs dwindle", September 15, 2022. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/nevada-again-looks-to-deep-conservation-as-the-colorado-river-dwindlesefbfbc. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[4] Daniel Rothberg, The Nevada Independent, "High snowpack leaves Nevada drought free with a short-term water supply boost as rivers continue to face structural issues", April 14, 2019. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/high-snowpack-leaves-nevada-drought-free-with-a-short-term-water-supply-boost-as-rivers-continue-to-face-structural-issues. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[5] Bureau of Reclamation, "Lake Mead Reservoir Capacity Allocations", November 2022. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/LakeMeadReservoirCapacityAllocations_2022.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[6] Bryan Gottlieb, Engineering News-Record, "Two Dams Now Set the Colorado River's Post-2026 Reality", January 21, 2026. https://www.enr.com/articles/62393-two-dams-now-set-the-colorado-rivers-post-2026-reality. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[7] Rachel Zalucki, FOX5 Las Vegas, "Study: Lake Mead water levels projected to drop 30 feet by 2028", June 16, 2026. https://www.fox5vegas.com/2026/06/16/study-lake-mead-water-levels-projected-drop-30-feet-by-2028/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Elevation	What it means
950 feet	Minimum power pool: the lowest level for generating power[8]
About 895 feet	Dead pool: "below which conventional releases are no longer possible"[9]

Record lows in 2026

The previous record low was about 1,040 feet, set in July 2022.[10] In August 2026, the Interior Department said both Lake Mead and Lake Powell were "hitting record lows the last few weeks."[11]

Reclamation's August 2026 forecast, reported by 8NewsNow, put Lake Mead at 1,039.47 feet, about 190 feet below full and 27 percent full. Lake Powell, upstream, was 22 percent full.[12] SNWA says Lake Mead has dropped about 160 feet since 2000.[13]

The "most probable" forecast projected:[14]

Date	Projected Lake Mead elevation
January 2027	1,034.36 feet
July 2027	1,005.63 feet
May 2028	999.07 feet
July 2028	991.68 feet

These are forecasts, not measurements. A wet winter in the Rockies would raise them, and a dry one would lower them. Even the July 2028 figure is about 40 feet above the minimum power pool and nearly 100 feet above dead pool, by my calculation.

---

[8] Bureau of Reclamation, "Lake Mead Reservoir Capacity Allocations", November 2022. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/LakeMeadReservoirCapacityAllocations_2022.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026. Bryan Gottlieb, Engineering News-Record, "Two Dams Now Set the Colorado River's Post-2026 Reality", January 21, 2026. https://www.enr.com/articles/62393-two-dams-now-set-the-colorado-rivers-post-2026-reality. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[9] Bryan Gottlieb, Engineering News-Record, "Two Dams Now Set the Colorado River's Post-2026 Reality", January 21, 2026. https://www.enr.com/articles/62393-two-dams-now-set-the-colorado-rivers-post-2026-reality. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[10] Rachel Zalucki, FOX5 Las Vegas, "Study: Lake Mead water levels projected to drop 30 feet by 2028", June 16, 2026. https://www.fox5vegas.com/2026/06/16/study-lake-mead-water-levels-projected-drop-30-feet-by-2028/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[11] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[12] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[13] Southern Nevada Water Authority, "Where Water Comes From", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.snwa.com/water-resources/where-water-comes-from/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[14] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

The Record of Decision noted that combined storage in Lake Powell and Lake Mead had fallen to 12.5 million acre-feet, "a low that has not been seen since before Lake Powell began filling in 1963."[15]

[15] Bureau of Reclamation, "Record of Decision, Post-2026 Colorado River Reservoir Operations Final Environmental Impact Statement", August 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/decision-doc/P26_RecordofDecision_Final.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Two: The 2026 Decision

Chapter 3: Why the States Could Not Agree

The rules that governed shortages on the river since 2007 were written to expire after 2026. The seven states spent years trying to agree on what comes next. They did not.

Reclamation set a November 11, 2025, deadline for the states to agree on a framework. They missed it.[16] Colorado Politics summed up the dispute: "The divisions between the Upper and Lower basins center on how much each will contribute during a drought."[17]

- The **Upper Basin** states said they "already take significant mandatory and uncompensated reductions, averaging about 1.3 million acre-feet per year," because in dry years there is less water to take from the mountains.[18]
- The **Lower Basin** states use more of the river and depend on releases from Lake Powell to Lake Mead.
- Colorado's negotiator, Becky Mitchell, put the Upper Basin view this way: "There's an important difference between protecting lawful uses and asking the rest of the Basin to subsidize continued overuse."[19]

Reclamation released a draft plan on January 9, 2026, with five options and no preferred choice.[20] Public comments ran from January 16 to March 2, 2026.[21] The final plan was published July 31, 2026. Western Water reported that "The seven states and Mexico still have not reached a consensus deal, so the federal government acted to have rules ready by October 1, 2026."[22]

---

[16] Marianne Goodland, Colorado Politics, "With guidelines expiring, federal agency releases draft plan for Colorado River operations", January 19, 2026. https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/01/19/with-guidelines-expiring-federal-agency-releases-draft-plan-for-colorado-river-operations/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[17] Marianne Goodland, Colorado Politics, "With guidelines expiring, federal agency releases draft plan for Colorado River operations", January 19, 2026. https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/01/19/with-guidelines-expiring-federal-agency-releases-draft-plan-for-colorado-river-operations/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[18] Marianne Goodland, Colorado Politics, "With guidelines expiring, federal agency releases draft plan for Colorado River operations", January 19, 2026. https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/01/19/with-guidelines-expiring-federal-agency-releases-draft-plan-for-colorado-river-operations/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[19] Marianne Goodland, Colorado Politics, "With guidelines expiring, federal agency releases draft plan for Colorado River operations", January 19, 2026. https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/01/19/with-guidelines-expiring-federal-agency-releases-draft-plan-for-colorado-river-operations/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[20] Marianne Goodland, Colorado Politics, "With guidelines expiring, federal agency releases draft plan for Colorado River operations", January 19, 2026. https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/01/19/with-guidelines-expiring-federal-agency-releases-draft-plan-for-colorado-river-operations/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[21] Bureau of Reclamation, "Record of Decision, Post-2026 Colorado River Reservoir Operations Final Environmental Impact Statement", August 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/decision-doc/P26_RecordofDecision_Final.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[22] Western Water, "Colorado River Plan sets framework for post-2026 cuts", July 31, 2026. https://www.western-water.com/2026/07/31/colorado-river-plan-sets-framework-for-post-2026-cuts/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Chapter 4: What the Federal Plan Does

On August 21, 2026, the Interior Department issued its Record of Decision, "establishing a 10-year Decision Framework," and the first set of operating rules, for 2027 and 2028.[23]

- **A framework, not fixed cuts.** Western Water reported that "The plan does not lock in one fixed set of cuts for the next ten years."[24] The framework runs through 2036, and the specific rules are set two years at a time.[25] Interior said the framework "can be scaled longer depending on evolving Basin circumstances," and that the states can still reach their own deal and fold it in.[26]
- **Lower Basin cuts for 2027 and 2028.** Lake Mead deliveries are cut by 1.25 million acre-feet a year for two years: 760,000 for Arizona, 440,000 for California and 50,000 for Nevada.[27] Interior tied these figures to the Lower Basin states carrying out "their proposed sharing agreement."[28]
- **Extra conservation.** The Lower Basin states are also to "voluntarily conserve and store at least 700,000 acre-feet" over the two years.[29]
- **Protecting Lake Powell.** The rules aim to keep Lake Powell at or above 3,510 feet.[30] In spring 2026, Reclamation increased releases from Flaming Gorge Reservoir upstream and cut Glen Canyon Dam releases to 6.0 million acre-feet for the year.[31]

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum noted the stakes: "Forty million people, millions of acres of farmland and ranchland" depend on the river.[32]

---

[23] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[24] Western Water, "Colorado River Plan sets framework for post-2026 cuts", July 31, 2026. https://www.western-water.com/2026/07/31/colorado-river-plan-sets-framework-for-post-2026-cuts/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[25] Bureau of Reclamation, "Record of Decision, Post-2026 Colorado River Reservoir Operations Final Environmental Impact Statement", August 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/decision-doc/P26_RecordofDecision_Final.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026. Western Water, "Colorado River Plan sets framework for post-2026 cuts", July 31, 2026. https://www.western-water.com/2026/07/31/colorado-river-plan-sets-framework-for-post-2026-cuts/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[26] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[27] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[28] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[29] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[30] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[31] Bureau of Reclamation, "Record of Decision, Post-2026 Colorado River Reservoir Operations Final Environmental Impact Statement", August 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/decision-doc/P26_RecordofDecision_Final.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Chapter 5: What It Means for Nevada

Nevada will give up 50,000 acre-feet a year in 2027 and 2028, starting January 1, 2027. 8NewsNow reported that this is "about 17%" of the state's Colorado River allocation.[33] By my calculation, 50,000 out of 300,000 is 16.7 percent, which matches.

Is that enough to cause shortages at the tap? Here is what SNWA said:

- SNWA spokesman Bronson Mack: "Last year, our water usage was 198,000 acre-feet."[34]
- Mack said Nevada would keep a cushion of about 65,000 acre-feet after the cut, counting Muddy and Virgin River supplies.[35]
- SNWA General Manager John Entsminger: "Our conservation achievements are unmatched." He also said Nevada "will fight to protect our community's water supply."[36]

By SNWA's numbers, Southern Nevada already uses far less than its allocation. Deeper cuts after 2028 would be set in the next round of two-year rules, and what they will be is **[Not verified]**.

---

[32] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[33] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[34] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[35] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[36] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Three: Southern Nevada

Chapter 6: Where Las Vegas Gets Its Water

SNWA says "Southern Nevada gets about 90 percent of its water supply from the Colorado River." The other 10 percent or so comes from groundwater under the Las Vegas Valley.[37] Las Vegas accounts for more than 90 percent of Nevada's Colorado River use.[38]

Return-flow credits

Water used indoors in Las Vegas, in sinks, showers, toilets and washing machines, goes down the drain, is treated and flows back to Lake Mead through the Las Vegas Wash. SNWA explains: "Every gallon of water that is returned to the Colorado River through return-flow credits allows Southern Nevada to take another gallon out."[39] Nevada's 300,000 acre-feet is a limit on **consumptive use**, the water that does not come back. With return flows, Nevada can withdraw more than 300,000 acre-feet a year.[40]

In 2021, for example, Nevada pulled more than 480,000 acre-feet from Lake Mead and returned about half of it through the wash.[41]

The practical lesson: water used outdoors, on lawns and in evaporative coolers, is mostly lost to the air. Water used indoors mostly comes back. That is why Southern Nevada's conservation rules focus on the outdoors.

Chapter 7: Conservation and the Grass Ban

In June 2021, Governor Steve Sisolak signed a law, Assembly Bill (AB) 356, that made Nevada "the first in the nation to enact a permanent ban on certain categories of grass," according to the Associated Press.[42]

- **What it covers.** "Non-functional turf," such as grass at "office parks, in street medians and at entrances to housing developments."[43] A 2023 change, AB 220, extended it to any parcel "not

---

[37] Southern Nevada Water Authority, "Where Water Comes From", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.snwa.com/water-resources/where-water-comes-from/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[38] Daniel Rothberg, The Nevada Independent, "Nevada again looks to deep conservation as the Colorado River's reservoirs dwindle", September 15, 2022. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/nevada-again-looks-to-deep-conservation-as-the-colorado-river-dwindlesefbfbc. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[39] Southern Nevada Water Authority, "Where Water Comes From", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.snwa.com/water-resources/where-water-comes-from/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[40] Southern Nevada Water Authority, "Where Water Comes From", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.snwa.com/water-resources/where-water-comes-from/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[41] Daniel Rothberg, The Nevada Independent, "Nevada again looks to deep conservation as the Colorado River's reservoirs dwindle", September 15, 2022. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/nevada-again-looks-to-deep-conservation-as-the-colorado-river-dwindlesefbfbc. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[42] Sam Metz, Associated Press, "Drought-stricken Nevada enacts ban on 'non-functional' grass", June 7, 2021. https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/politics/2021/06/07/drought-stricken-nevada-enacts-ban-on-non-functional-grass/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Barbara Holland, Las Vegas Review-Journal, "Water district clarifies new grass restrictions", August 24, 2025. https://www.reviewjournal.com/homes/homes-columns/barbara-holland/water-district-clarifies-new-grass-restrictions-3429267. Accessed November 18, 2026.

used exclusively as a single-family residence," such as common-area strips in homeowner associations.[44]

- **What it does not cover.** Single-family homes, parks and golf courses.[45] Grass between the sidewalk and a single-family home can stay.[46]
- **Where.** Only within SNWA's area, which covers Las Vegas and nearby communities.[47] It does not apply in Northern Nevada.
- **When.** The ban takes effect January 1, 2027.[48]
- **How much.** About 31 percent of the grass in the Las Vegas area. The AP reported the goal of saving 10 percent of the area's Colorado River supply, about 11 gallons per person per day.[49]

SNWA's plan also includes moving away from evaporative cooling and limiting pool sizes, and it set a target to cut use from about 110 gallons per person per day to 86 by 2035.[50] That is a target, not a result. The current figure is **[Not verified]**.

---

[43] Sam Metz, Associated Press, "Drought-stricken Nevada enacts ban on 'non-functional' grass", June 7, 2021. https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/politics/2021/06/07/drought-stricken-nevada-enacts-ban-on-non-functional-grass/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[44] Barbara Holland, Las Vegas Review-Journal, "Water district clarifies new grass restrictions", August 24, 2025. https://www.reviewjournal.com/homes/homes-columns/barbara-holland/water-district-clarifies-new-grass-restrictions-3429267. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[45] Sam Metz, Associated Press, "Drought-stricken Nevada enacts ban on 'non-functional' grass", June 7, 2021. https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/politics/2021/06/07/drought-stricken-nevada-enacts-ban-on-non-functional-grass/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[46] Barbara Holland, Las Vegas Review-Journal, "Water district clarifies new grass restrictions", August 24, 2025. https://www.reviewjournal.com/homes/homes-columns/barbara-holland/water-district-clarifies-new-grass-restrictions-3429267. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[47] Sam Metz, Associated Press, "Drought-stricken Nevada enacts ban on 'non-functional' grass", June 7, 2021. https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/politics/2021/06/07/drought-stricken-nevada-enacts-ban-on-non-functional-grass/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[48] Barbara Holland, Las Vegas Review-Journal, "Water district clarifies new grass restrictions", August 24, 2025. https://www.reviewjournal.com/homes/homes-columns/barbara-holland/water-district-clarifies-new-grass-restrictions-3429267. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[49] Sam Metz, Associated Press, "Drought-stricken Nevada enacts ban on 'non-functional' grass", June 7, 2021. https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/politics/2021/06/07/drought-stricken-nevada-enacts-ban-on-non-functional-grass/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[50] Daniel Rothberg, The Nevada Independent, "Nevada again looks to deep conservation as the Colorado River's reservoirs dwindle", September 15, 2022. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/nevada-again-looks-to-deep-conservation-as-the-colorado-river-dwindlesefbfbc. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Four: Northern Nevada

Chapter 8: The Truckee River and Reno

The Truckee River flows into and out of Lake Tahoe and runs about 145 miles to Pyramid Lake, about 40 miles northeast of Reno. Its basin is closed, with "no natural outlet to rivers or oceans."[51] The river is the main drinking water source for the Reno area.[52]

- **How the river is fed.** About 90 percent of the river's flow starts above the Farad gauge near the California line. Releases from Lake Tahoe supply about 30 percent of the flow at the state line, and other reservoirs, such as Boca, Stampede, Prosser Creek, Donner and Independence, supply about 40 percent.[53]
- **No spare water.** Reclamation's 2015 basin study put it plainly: "The Truckee River has never had surplus water: each drop from its headwaters at Lake Tahoe to its terminus at Pyramid Lake is fully appropriated."[54]
- **Farms downstream.** In 1902, the federal government started what became the Newlands Project, building Derby Dam and the Truckee Canal to move Truckee water to farms near Fallon.[55]
- **The operating agreement.** The Truckee River Operating Agreement, which governs how the river's reservoirs are run, "took 27 years to negotiate."[56]

Drought planning

The Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) told The Nevada Independent in 2018 that its customers used about 80,000 acre-feet a year and that its plan had enough reserves for a "back-to-back, two-decade drought."[57] A TMWA hydrologist said in 2019 that one good snow year gives the area a supply for about three years, even under drought.[58] These are older figures. TMWA's current numbers are **[Not verified]**.

---

[51] Water Education Foundation, "Aquapedia: Truckee River", February 11, 2014. https://www.watereducation.org/aquapedia/truckee-river. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[52] Water Education Foundation, "Aquapedia: Truckee River", February 11, 2014. https://www.watereducation.org/aquapedia/truckee-river. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[53] Bureau of Reclamation, "Truckee Basin Study, Executive Summary", August 2015. https://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/bsp/docs/finalreport/truckee/tbsbasinstudyexecutivesummary.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026. Water Education Foundation, "Aquapedia: Truckee River", February 11, 2014. https://www.watereducation.org/aquapedia/truckee-river. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[54] Bureau of Reclamation, "Truckee Basin Study, Executive Summary", August 2015. https://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/bsp/docs/finalreport/truckee/tbsbasinstudyexecutivesummary.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[55] Water Education Foundation, "Aquapedia: Truckee River", February 11, 2014. https://www.watereducation.org/aquapedia/truckee-river. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[56] The Nevada Independent, "Study: Truckee River Basin may soon need more water storage", September 4, 2018. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/study-truckee-river-basin-may-soon-need-more-water-storage. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[57] The Nevada Independent, "Study: Truckee River Basin may soon need more water storage", September 4, 2018. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/study-truckee-river-basin-may-soon-need-more-water-storage. Accessed November 18, 2026.

The long-range concern is warmth, not just dryness. Reclamation's study projected the upper Truckee basin could warm by up to 5 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100.[59] A Reclamation study manager said in 2018: "we are getting less snow and earlier runoff."[60]

Chapter 9: The Carson River, Carson City and Dayton

The Carson River starts in the Sierra snowpack of Alpine County, California. Its East and West forks join near Genoa, and the river runs to the Carson Sink.[61] Along the way it passes through five groundwater basins: Carson Valley, Eagle Valley, Dayton Valley, Churchill Valley and the Carson Desert.[62]

- **Who depends on it.** Water systems in Douglas County, Carson City, Storey County, Lyon County (including Dayton, Stagecoach and Silver Springs) and Churchill County.[63]
- **Fully allocated.** CWSD says: "Both surface water and groundwater in the watershed are fully allocated; any new demands for water must come from existing sources."[64]
- **The Alpine Decree.** The Alpine Decree "has ruled on the use of all surface water associated with the Carson River" and divides the river into eight segments.[65]
- **Wells and the river.** There are "thousands of wells" in the watershed.[66] USGS built a groundwater model for Eagle, Dayton and Churchill valleys to study how pumping affects the river, noting that demand "is increasing due to steady population growth."[67] Since 2017, Nevada law has let the State Engineer manage surface water and groundwater together.[68]

---

[58] Daniel Rothberg, The Nevada Independent, "High snowpack leaves Nevada drought free with a short-term water supply boost as rivers continue to face structural issues", April 14, 2019. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/high-snowpack-leaves-nevada-drought-free-with-a-short-term-water-supply-boost-as-rivers-continue-to-face-structural-issues. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[59] Bureau of Reclamation, "Truckee Basin Study, Executive Summary", August 2015. https://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/bsp/docs/finalreport/truckee/tbsbasinstudyexecutivesummary.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[60] The Nevada Independent, "Study: Truckee River Basin may soon need more water storage", September 4, 2018. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/study-truckee-river-basin-may-soon-need-more-water-storage. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[61] Carson Water Subconservancy District, "Regional Water Supply", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.cwsd.org/water-supply/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[62] Carson Water Subconservancy District, "Regional Water Supply", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.cwsd.org/water-supply/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[63] Carson Water Subconservancy District, "Regional Water Supply", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.cwsd.org/water-supply/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[64] Carson Water Subconservancy District, "Regional Water Supply", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.cwsd.org/water-supply/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[65] Carson Water Subconservancy District, "Regional Water Supply", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.cwsd.org/water-supply/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[66] Carson Water Subconservancy District, "Regional Water Supply", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.cwsd.org/water-supply/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[67] U.S. Geological Survey, Nevada Water Science Center, "Evaluation of Groundwater Flow in the Middle Carson River Basin, Eagle, Dayton, and Churchill Valleys, Nevada", April 8, 2024. https://www.usgs.gov/centers/nevada-water-science-center/science/evaluation-groundwater-flow-middle-carson-river-basin. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[68] Ed James, General Manager, Carson Water Subconservancy District, "The Carson River Watershed 30-Year Drought and Water Sustainability Plan (presentation)", December 17, 2025. https://www.cwsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Wrap_up_30-

The 30-year plan

In December 2025, CWSD presented a 30-year drought and water plan for the watershed:[69]

- "All 9 purveyors have adequate water rights and water quality to support regional growth in the upper and middle Carson Watershed."
- "All the Major Water Purveyors Currently can meet their water demands in dry years."
- Some areas in Douglas County, such as Johnson Lane and Ruhenstroth, face possible shortages, and Minden and the Gardnerville Ranchos will need more wells by 2051.
- Stagecoach and Silver Springs have enough well capacity through 2051, but growth there is "limited by the perennial yield of their respective basins."
- River flows from 1940 to 2018 "showed a slight overall decline."

The plan did not give separate drought findings for Dayton, and CWSD noted that the study "did not evaluate system constraints."[70]

Unlike the Truckee, the Carson has no Colorado River connection. The 2026 Colorado River cuts do not apply to it.

Year_Plan_Pres-EJ-.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[69] Ed James, General Manager, Carson Water Subconservancy District, "The Carson River Watershed 30-Year Drought and Water Sustainability Plan (presentation)", December 17, 2025. https://www.cwsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Wrap_up_30-Year_Plan_Pres-EJ-.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[70] Ed James, General Manager, Carson Water Subconservancy District, "The Carson River Watershed 30-Year Drought and Water Sustainability Plan (presentation)", December 17, 2025. https://www.cwsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Wrap_up_30-Year_Plan_Pres-EJ-.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Five: Who Owns the Water

Chapter 10: Nevada Water Law

- **The public owns the water.** Nevada law says the water of all sources within the state "belongs to the public."[71] What a person or company owns is a **right to use** a set amount for a set purpose.
- **First in time, first in right.** "Like 17 other western states, Nevada has adopted the prior appropriation doctrine."[72] UNR Extension explains: "Prior appropriation grants priority based on the date use begins." In a shortage, the oldest rights are served first.[73]
- **Beneficial use.** A right covers the amount "necessary to meet the stated use."[74]
- **Use it or lose it.** Rights can be forfeited if not put to beneficial use. Some rights can be forfeited if the full amount is not used over five years.[75]
- **The State Engineer.** The office, created in 1903 and now part of the Division of Water Resources, "is responsible for the administration of Nevada water law."[76]

Chapter 11: Groundwater and Domestic Wells

Nevada's groundwater is divided into 256 hydrographic basins. As of 2019, "50% are fully or over-committed," meaning the rights already granted equal or exceed the perennial yield, the amount the basin can supply year after year.[77]

A household well generally does not need a water right permit and may use up to two acre-feet a year. A 2019 law, AB 95, lets a metered domestic well that is cut back by priority still pump 0.5 acre-feet a year.[78] If you are on a well, check with the Division of Water Resources about the rules in your basin.

---

[71] Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, "Water Policy and Issues in Nevada: An Overview", December 2019. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Documents/water-overview-2019.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[72] Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, "Water Policy and Issues in Nevada: An Overview", December 2019. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Documents/water-overview-2019.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[73] University of Nevada, Reno Extension (Hockaday and Ormerod), "Western Water Law: Understanding the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation (IP-20-01)", 2020. https://extension.unr.edu/small-business-education/pub.aspx?PubID=3750. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[74] University of Nevada, Reno Extension (Hockaday and Ormerod), "Western Water Law: Understanding the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation (IP-20-01)", 2020. https://extension.unr.edu/small-business-education/pub.aspx?PubID=3750. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[75] University of Nevada, Reno Extension (Hockaday and Ormerod), "Western Water Law: Understanding the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation (IP-20-01)", 2020. https://extension.unr.edu/small-business-education/pub.aspx?PubID=3750. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[76] Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, "Water Policy and Issues in Nevada: An Overview", December 2019. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Documents/water-overview-2019.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[77] Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, "Water Policy and Issues in Nevada: An Overview", December 2019. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Documents/water-overview-2019.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[78] Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, "Water Policy and Issues in Nevada: An Overview", December 2019. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Documents/water-overview-2019.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Six: Testing the Claims

Chapter 12: Twelve Common Claims

Each claim below is stated the way it usually appears, followed by the verdict and the evidence.

Claim 1: "Las Vegas uses most of the Colorado River."

Verdict: False.

Nevada's share is 300,000 acre-feet, about 1.8 percent of the river.[79] California's share is 4.4 million and Arizona's is 2.8 million.[80]

Claim 2: "Lake Mead hit a record low in 2026."

Verdict: True.

Interior said in August 2026 that Lake Mead had reached a record-low elevation, below the old record of about 1,040 feet from July 2022.[81]

Claim 3: "Lake Mead is about to hit dead pool."

Verdict: False for the next two years, based on the August 2026 forecast.

The most probable forecast's lowest point through July 2028 was 991.68 feet.[82] Dead pool is about 895 feet, and the minimum power pool is 950 feet.[83] A run of very dry years could change this.

Claim 4: "Nevada's Colorado River water is being cut."

Verdict: True.

---

[79] Daniel Rothberg, The Nevada Independent, "Nevada again looks to deep conservation as the Colorado River's reservoirs dwindle", September 15, 2022. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/nevada-again-looks-to-deep-conservation-as-the-colorado-river-dwindlesefbfbc. Accessed November 18, 2026. Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region, "The Law of the River", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g1000/lawofrvr.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[80] Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region, "The Law of the River", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g1000/lawofrvr.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[81] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026. Rachel Zalucki, FOX5 Las Vegas, "Study: Lake Mead water levels projected to drop 30 feet by 2028", June 16, 2026. https://www.fox5vegas.com/2026/06/16/study-lake-mead-water-levels-projected-drop-30-feet-by-2028/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[82] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[83] Bryan Gottlieb, Engineering News-Record, "Two Dams Now Set the Colorado River's Post-2026 Reality", January 21, 2026. https://www.enr.com/articles/62393-two-dams-now-set-the-colorado-rivers-post-2026-reality. Accessed November 18, 2026. Bureau of Reclamation, "Lake Mead Reservoir Capacity Allocations", November 2022. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/LakeMeadReservoirCapacityAllocations_2022.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Nevada will receive 50,000 acre-feet less in each of 2027 and 2028, about 17 percent of its allocation.[84] Interior tied the state-by-state figures to the Lower Basin's sharing agreement.[85]

Claim 5: "The cut means Las Vegas will run short of water."

Verdict: False for 2027 and 2028, based on SNWA's figures.

SNWA said it used 198,000 acre-feet last year and expects a cushion of about 65,000 acre-feet after the cut.[86] Cuts after 2028 are not yet set.

Claim 6: "Water used indoors in Las Vegas is lost for good."

Verdict: False.

Indoor water is treated and returned to Lake Mead, and each gallon returned lets Southern Nevada take another gallon out.[87]

Claim 7: "The seven states made a new deal for the river."

Verdict: False.

The states and Mexico did not reach a consensus deal, so the federal government set the rules.[88]

Claim 8: "Washington set fixed cuts for the next 10 years."

Verdict: False.

The decision sets a 10-year framework, but the actual cuts are set two years at a time. Only 2027 and 2028 have been set.[89]

---

[84] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026. 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[85] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[86] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[87] Southern Nevada Water Authority, "Where Water Comes From", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.snwa.com/water-resources/where-water-comes-from/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[88] Western Water, "Colorado River Plan sets framework for post-2026 cuts", July 31, 2026. https://www.western-water.com/2026/07/31/colorado-river-plan-sets-framework-for-post-2026-cuts/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Marianne Goodland, Colorado Politics, "With guidelines expiring, federal agency releases draft plan for Colorado River operations", January 19, 2026. https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/01/19/with-guidelines-expiring-federal-agency-releases-draft-plan-for-colorado-river-operations/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[89] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026. Western Water, "Colorado River Plan sets framework for post-2026 cuts", July 31, 2026. https://www.western-water.com/2026/07/31/colorado-river-plan-sets-framework-for-post-2026-cuts/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Claim 9: "Nevada's grass ban means homeowners must tear out their lawns."

Verdict: False.

The ban, effective January 1, 2027, covers non-functional grass in the Las Vegas area. It excludes single-family homes, parks and golf courses.[90] It does not apply in Northern Nevada.[91]

Claim 10: "If you own land in Nevada, you own the water under it."

Verdict: False.

The water belongs to the public. Owners hold rights to use it, granted by priority. A domestic well may use up to two acre-feet a year without a permit.[92]

Claim 11: "Reno gets its water from Lake Tahoe."

Verdict: Partly true.

The Truckee River flows out of Lake Tahoe and supplies the Reno area, but Tahoe releases are only about 30 percent of the flow at the state line. Other reservoirs supply about 40 percent.[93]

Claim 12: "Northern Nevada's rivers have water to spare for new growth."

Verdict: False.

Reclamation says every drop of the Truckee is fully appropriated, and CWSD says the Carson's surface water and groundwater are fully allocated. New demand must come from existing rights.[94] CWSD's 2025 plan found its nine water systems have enough rights for regional growth, which means growth is served by rights they already hold.[95]

---

[90] Sam Metz, Associated Press, "Drought-stricken Nevada enacts ban on 'non-functional' grass", June 7, 2021. https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/politics/2021/06/07/drought-stricken-nevada-enacts-ban-on-non-functional-grass/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Barbara Holland, Las Vegas Review-Journal, "Water district clarifies new grass restrictions", August 24, 2025. https://www.reviewjournal.com/homes/homes-columns/barbara-holland/water-district-clarifies-new-grass-restrictions-3429267. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[91] Sam Metz, Associated Press, "Drought-stricken Nevada enacts ban on 'non-functional' grass", June 7, 2021. https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/politics/2021/06/07/drought-stricken-nevada-enacts-ban-on-non-functional-grass/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[92] Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, "Water Policy and Issues in Nevada: An Overview", December 2019. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Documents/water-overview-2019.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[93] Water Education Foundation, "Aquapedia: Truckee River", February 11, 2014. https://www.watereducation.org/aquapedia/truckee-river. Accessed November 18, 2026. Bureau of Reclamation, "Truckee Basin Study, Executive Summary", August 2015. https://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/bsp/docs/finalreport/truckee/tbsbasinstudyexecutivesummary.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[94] Bureau of Reclamation, "Truckee Basin Study, Executive Summary", August 2015. https://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/bsp/docs/finalreport/truckee/tbsbasinstudyexecutivesummary.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026. Carson Water Subconservancy District, "Regional Water Supply", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.cwsd.org/water-supply/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[95] Ed James, General Manager, Carson Water Subconservancy District, "The Carson River Watershed 30-Year Drought and Water Sustainability Plan (presentation)", December 17, 2025. https://www.cwsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Wrap_up_30-

Year_Plan_Pres-EJ-.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Part Seven: Where Things Stand

Chapter 13: As of November 18, 2026

- **The river:** a federal 10-year framework is in place, with rules for 2027 and 2028.[96]
- **Lake Mead:** hit a record low in 2026 and is forecast to keep falling through mid-2028.[97]
- **Nevada:** gives up 50,000 acre-feet a year in 2027 and 2028.[98]
- **Las Vegas:** gets about 90 percent of its water from the river and used 198,000 acre-feet last year, by SNWA's account.[99]
- **Grass ban:** takes effect January 1, 2027, in the Las Vegas area.[100]
- **Truckee and Carson:** fully appropriated and not part of the Colorado River cuts.[101]

What nobody knows yet

- How much snow will fall in the Rockies this winter, which drives next year's lake levels.
- What cuts will be set for 2029 and 2030.
- Whether the seven states will still reach their own deal.

Plain steps for readers

1. When you hear a Lake Mead number, check the date and whether it is a measurement or a forecast.
2. When you hear Nevada "uses too much," remember its share is about 1.8 percent of the river.
3. Save water outdoors first. Indoor water in Las Vegas mostly returns to the lake; outdoor water mostly does not.

---

[96] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[97] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026. 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[98] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[99] Southern Nevada Water Authority, "Where Water Comes From", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.snwa.com/water-resources/where-water-comes-from/. Accessed November 18, 2026. 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[100] Barbara Holland, Las Vegas Review-Journal, "Water district clarifies new grass restrictions", August 24, 2025. https://www.reviewjournal.com/homes/homes-columns/barbara-holland/water-district-clarifies-new-grass-restrictions-3429267. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[101] Bureau of Reclamation, "Truckee Basin Study, Executive Summary", August 2015. https://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/bsp/docs/finalreport/truckee/tbsbasinstudyexecutivesummary.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026. Carson Water Subconservancy District, "Regional Water Supply", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.cwsd.org/water-supply/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

4. If you are on a domestic well, know your limit and your basin's status with the Division of Water Resources.

Appendix A: Timeline

Date	Event
1902	Newlands Project begins on the Truckee and Carson rivers.[102]
1903	Nevada State Engineer's office created.[103]
1922	Colorado River Compact divides the river between the Upper and Lower basins.[104]
1928	Boulder Canyon Project Act sets Nevada's share at 300,000 acre-feet.[105]
1944	Treaty commits 1.5 million acre-feet a year to Mexico.[106]
1963 and 1964	Arizona v. California decided and decree issued.[107]
2021	First Colorado River shortage declaration.[108]
June 2021	Nevada enacts non-functional grass ban.[109]
July 2022	Lake Mead reaches about 1,040 feet, then a record low.[110]
November 11, 2025	States miss Reclamation's deadline for a framework.[111]
December 17, 2025	CWSD presents Carson River 30-year plan.[112]

[102] Water Education Foundation, "Aquapedia: Truckee River", February 11, 2014. https://www.watereducation.org/aquapedia/truckee-river. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[103] Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, "Water Policy and Issues in Nevada: An Overview", December 2019. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Documents/water-overview-2019.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[104] Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region, "The Law of the River", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g1000/lawofrvr.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[105] Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region, "The Law of the River", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g1000/lawofrvr.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[106] Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region, "The Law of the River", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g1000/lawofrvr.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[107] Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region, "The Law of the River", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g1000/lawofrvr.html. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[108] Southern Nevada Water Authority, "Where Water Comes From", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.snwa.com/water-resources/where-water-comes-from/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[109] Sam Metz, Associated Press, "Drought-stricken Nevada enacts ban on 'non-functional' grass", June 7, 2021. https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/politics/2021/06/07/drought-stricken-nevada-enacts-ban-on-non-functional-grass/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[110] Rachel Zalucki, FOX5 Las Vegas, "Study: Lake Mead water levels projected to drop 30 feet by 2028", June 16, 2026. https://www.fox5vegas.com/2026/06/16/study-lake-mead-water-levels-projected-drop-30-feet-by-2028/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[111] Marianne Goodland, Colorado Politics, "With guidelines expiring, federal agency releases draft plan for Colorado River operations", January 19, 2026. https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/01/19/with-guidelines-expiring-federal-agency-releases-draft-plan-for-colorado-river-operations/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Date	Event
January 9, 2026	Reclamation releases draft plan.[113]
July 31, 2026	Final plan published.[114]
August 21, 2026	Interior issues Record of Decision and 2027-2028 rules.[115]
January 1, 2027	Nevada's 50,000 acre-foot cut and the Las Vegas grass ban begin.[116]

Appendix B: Glossary

Acre-foot: Water covering one acre one foot deep, about 326,000 gallons.

Consumptive use: Water that is used up and does not return to the river.

Dead pool: The lake level below which water can no longer be released by normal means.

Minimum power pool: The lowest lake level at which a dam can generate power.

Perennial yield: The amount of groundwater a basin can supply year after year.

Prior appropriation: The rule that the oldest water rights are served first.

Record of Decision: A federal agency's formal final decision after an environmental study.

Return-flow credit: Credit for treated water returned to the river, which allows more to be withdrawn.

---

[112] Ed James, General Manager, Carson Water Subconservancy District, "The Carson River Watershed 30-Year Drought and Water Sustainability Plan (presentation)", December 17, 2025. https://www.cwsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Wrap_up_30-Year_Plan_Pres-EJ-.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[113] Marianne Goodland, Colorado Politics, "With guidelines expiring, federal agency releases draft plan for Colorado River operations", January 19, 2026. https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/01/19/with-guidelines-expiring-federal-agency-releases-draft-plan-for-colorado-river-operations/. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[114] Western Water, "Colorado River Plan sets framework for post-2026 cuts", July 31, 2026. https://www.western-water.com/2026/07/31/colorado-river-plan-sets-framework-for-post-2026-cuts/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Bureau of Reclamation, "Record of Decision, Post-2026 Colorado River Reservoir Operations Final Environmental Impact Statement", August 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/decision-doc/P26_RecordofDecision_Final.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[115] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations. Accessed November 18, 2026.

[116] 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/. Accessed November 18, 2026. Barbara Holland, Las Vegas Review-Journal, "Water district clarifies new grass restrictions", August 24, 2025. https://www.reviewjournal.com/homes/homes-columns/barbara-holland/water-district-clarifies-new-grass-restrictions-3429267. Accessed November 18, 2026.

Appendix C: Full Source List

Every source cited in this book is listed here once, grouped by the five tiers explained in the Introduction. Sources were read on November 18, 2026.

Tier 1: Primary and official sources

- Bureau of Reclamation, "Lake Mead Reservoir Capacity Allocations", November 2022. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/LakeMeadReservoirCapacityAllocations_2022.pdf.
- Bureau of Reclamation, "Record of Decision, Post-2026 Colorado River Reservoir Operations Final Environmental Impact Statement", August 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/decision-doc/P26_RecordofDecision_Final.pdf.
- Bureau of Reclamation, "Truckee Basin Study, Executive Summary", August 2015. https://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/bsp/docs/finalreport/truckee/tbsbasinstudyexecutivesummary.pdf.
- Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region, "The Law of the River", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g1000/lawofrvr.html.
- Carson Water Subconservancy District, "Regional Water Supply", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.cwsd.org/water-supply/.
- Ed James, General Manager, Carson Water Subconservancy District, "The Carson River Watershed 30-Year Drought and Water Sustainability Plan (presentation)", December 17, 2025. https://www.cwsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Wrap_up_30-Year_Plan_Pres-EJ-.pdf.
- Southern Nevada Water Authority, "Where Water Comes From", no date on page; read November 18, 2026. https://www.snwa.com/water-resources/where-water-comes-from/.
- U.S. Department of the Interior, "Interior Department Finalizes Plans for 2027-2028 Colorado River Operations", August 21, 2026. https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-plans-2027-2028-colorado-river-operations.
- U.S. Geological Survey, Nevada Water Science Center, "Evaluation of Groundwater Flow in the Middle Carson River Basin, Eagle, Dayton, and Churchill Valleys, Nevada", April 8, 2024. https://www.usgs.gov/centers/nevada-water-science-center/science/evaluation-groundwater-flow-middle-carson-river-basin.

Tier 2: Nonpartisan analysis

- Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, "Water Policy and Issues in Nevada: An Overview", December 2019. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Documents/water-overview-2019.pdf.
- University of Nevada, Reno Extension (Hockaday and Ormerod), "Western Water Law: Understanding the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation (IP-20-01)", 2020. https://extension.unr.edu/small-business-education/pub.aspx?PubID=3750.

- Water Education Foundation, "Aquapedia: Truckee River", February 11, 2014. https://www.watereducation.org/aquapedia/truckee-river.

Tier 4: Fact-checks and journalism

- 8NewsNow (KLAS-TV, Las Vegas), "Nevada losing 17% of Colorado River supply for 2 years; Lake Mead outlook grim", August 21, 2026. https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/nevada-losing-17-of-colorado-river-supply-for-2-years-lake-mead-outlook-grim/.

- Barbara Holland, Las Vegas Review-Journal, "Water district clarifies new grass restrictions", August 24, 2025. https://www.reviewjournal.com/homes/homes-columns/barbara-holland/water-district-clarifies-new-grass-restrictions-3429267.

- Bryan Gottlieb, Engineering News-Record, "Two Dams Now Set the Colorado River's Post-2026 Reality", January 21, 2026. https://www.enr.com/articles/62393-two-dams-now-set-the-colorado-rivers-post-2026-reality.

- Daniel Rothberg, The Nevada Independent, "High snowpack leaves Nevada drought free with a short-term water supply boost as rivers continue to face structural issues", April 14, 2019. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/high-snowpack-leaves-nevada-drought-free-with-a-short-term-water-supply-boost-as-rivers-continue-to-face-structural-issues.

- Daniel Rothberg, The Nevada Independent, "Nevada again looks to deep conservation as the Colorado River's reservoirs dwindle", September 15, 2022. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/nevada-again-looks-to-deep-conservation-as-the-colorado-river-dwindlesefbfbc.

- Marianne Goodland, Colorado Politics, "With guidelines expiring, federal agency releases draft plan for Colorado River operations", January 19, 2026. https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/01/19/with-guidelines-expiring-federal-agency-releases-draft-plan-for-colorado-river-operations/.

- Rachel Zalucki, FOX5 Las Vegas, "Study: Lake Mead water levels projected to drop 30 feet by 2028", June 16, 2026. https://www.fox5vegas.com/2026/06/16/study-lake-mead-water-levels-projected-drop-30-feet-by-2028/.

- Sam Metz, Associated Press, "Drought-stricken Nevada enacts ban on 'non-functional' grass", June 7, 2021. https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/politics/2021/06/07/drought-stricken-nevada-enacts-ban-on-non-functional-grass/.

- The Nevada Independent, "Study: Truckee River Basin may soon need more water storage", September 4, 2018. https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/study-truckee-river-basin-may-soon-need-more-water-storage.

- Western Water, "Colorado River Plan sets framework for post-2026 cuts", July 31, 2026. https://www.western-water.com/2026/07/31/colorado-river-plan-sets-framework-for-post-2026-cuts/.