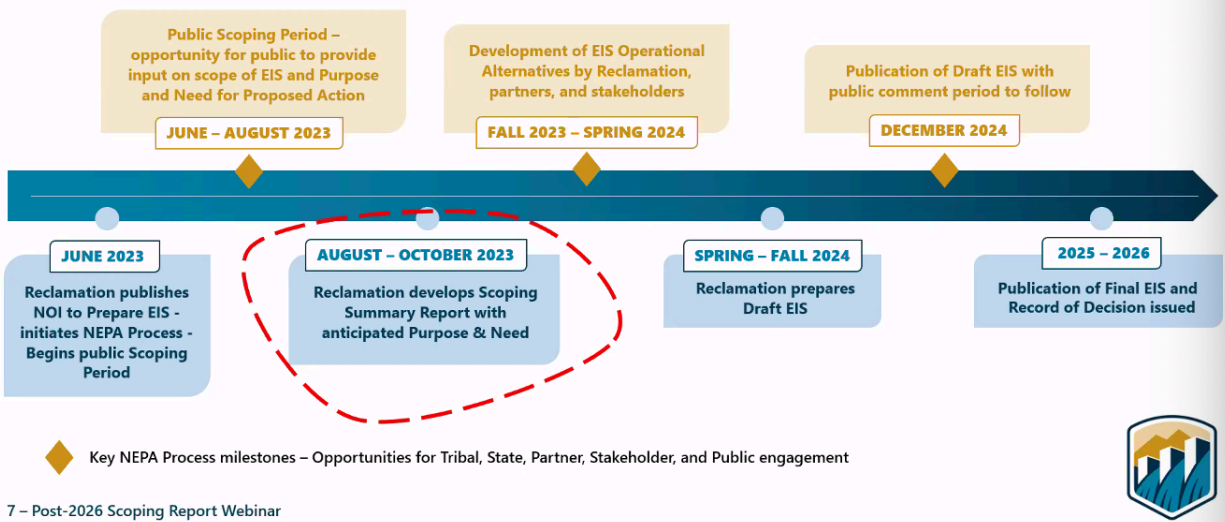


# Bureau of Reclamation Scoping Report and Federal Register Notice Webinar October 24, 2023

## Introduction – Amanda Erath (Reclamation), Meg Perry (SWCA)

- Reclamation is hoping to fully pivot their efforts towards the post-2026 process, because the SEIS currently under development will take pressure off in the meantime.
- Reclamation initially published their Post-2026 NOI on June 16, 2023. The public scoping comment period ended August 15<sup>th</sup>, and Reclamation released a Scoping Report and Federal Register Notice on October 20<sup>th</sup>.

## Post-2026 Process Schedule



- The above slide shows a very high-level timeline of the post-2026 EIS development process. With the release of the Scoping Report and Preliminary Proposed Federal Action, the circled section is completed. The next step is the middle tan rectangle, which is the development of EIS Operational Alternatives by Reclamation and stakeholders.

## Scoping Process and Comments – Amanda Erath (Reclamation)

- Reclamation received 24,290 comment submissions. 318 of these were unique submissions received from Federal, State, Tribal, and local entities, in addition to various NGOs. The remaining comments were copies of various form letters.

- These comments were analyzed and grouped into topics. Reclamation then identified ten key themes of comments across all letters: Supply and Demand Imbalance, Holistic Approach, Scope of Federal Action, Term or Duration, Roles of Upper and Lower Basins, Operational Strategies, Tribal Rights, Conservation and Storage, Augmentation, and Parallel Processes.
- Another key overarching theme in all comments was that the post-2026 guidelines need to provide *more* flexibility, be *more* robust, and do *more* to help the river system.

### **Purpose and Need – Russ Callejo (Reclamation)**

- Identification of purpose and need are required by the National Environmental Policy Act, but this identification also helps provide direction to those developing a NEPA document.
- The needs for the post-2026 EIS are, among other things:
  - The fact that the 2007 Interim Guidelines are expiring.
  - The fact that the 2007 Interim Guidelines did not do enough to slow the decline of the Colorado River reservoirs.
  - The Secretary’s responsibility to responsibly coordinate Colorado River operations.
- The purposes for the post-2026 EIS are:
  - To update and expand the Colorado River reservoir management guidelines, particularly for Lake Powell and Lake Mead.
  - To provide Colorado River users with a greater deal of operational predictability.

### **Proposed Federal Action – Carly Jerla (Reclamation)**

- Reclamation is seeking to develop specific operational guidelines that describe how to manage the Colorado River whether the reservoirs are completely full or all the way down to completely empty.
- Part of the anticipated Federal Action would allow for the storage and recovery of conserved water in Lake Powell and Lake Mead. This mechanism is similar to the existing ICS mechanism but is expanded to allow the use of Lake Powell for this purpose if it is deemed feasible.

- These guidelines are anticipated to be interim and are expected to last at least 20 years. However, no specific term is being identified at this time.
  
- Reclamation plans to develop a very broad range of reasonable alternatives in collaboration with various stakeholders. Part of this process will involve the use of the Post-2026 Operations Exploration Web Tool, which is being released in mid-to-late November. This tool will help stakeholders to develop their own alternatives to suggest to Reclamation. More information about the development of this tool can be found at: <https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/post2026/itew.html>

**Q & A – Meg Perry (SWCA), Reclamation Staff**

- Someone asked if a “one-dam solution” will be explored as an alternative. Reclamation staff said that they are not ruling out any possible alternatives at this time, and that such a solution may be considered if it is found to meet the full purpose and need.
  
- Someone else asked if evaluation of evaporation and system losses will be looked at in the alternatives. Reclamation staff said that such an evaluation would fit within the proposed federal action, and may be considered within the alternatives.