

Mitigation Goals as a Cornerstone of Post-2026 Guidelines

COOPERATIVE
CONSERVATION
ALTERNATIVE

Proactive Measures for a Sustainable Future

The Colorado River Basin faces pressing and evolving challenges to its ecosystems and the diverse community of sovereigns and stakeholders who call it home. The Cooperative Conservation Alternative proposes **Mitigation Goals** as a cornerstone of the post-2026 Guidelines to help advance our shared priorities.



Photo 1. Wetland restoration in Yuma, Arizona. Credit: Fred Phillips

COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

- **Stabilize storage** and avoid crisis management
- **Ensure mitigation and stewardship** is part of operations
- **Incentivize conservation** and operational flexibility
- **Maintain Cienega, Delta flows** and River connections
- **Call for parallel resilience** building processes

A proactive mitigation approach is essential to navigating the Colorado River's uncertain future, helping ensure that management decisions are both equitable and environmentally responsible. Although climate change and reservoir management decisions are impacting natural systems throughout the Basin, environmental priorities are frequently segmented from annual operations at Lakes Powell and Mead from year to year. The result has been that rules governing annual operations of the two largest reservoirs on the Colorado River system do not consider storage and release measures that could help forestall the degradation of the Basin's natural systems while working within the Law of the River.



*Acknowledging the inevitability of environmental and resource impacts due to changing water management practices, Cooperative Conservation stresses the **critical need to include comprehensive mitigation strategies** in the post-2026 Guidelines.*

The types of mitigation strategies needed will depend on the breadth and location of impacts within the Basin. Reclamation must carefully assess the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts resulting from changing water supply conditions wherever they occur in the Basin to inform appropriate mitigation measures in the post-2026 Guidelines.

Following the completion of the comprehensive impact analysis, mitigation strategies should be identified to **avoid, minimize and reduce** adverse effects. Particular focus should be given to the human environment (communities, economies, cultural values, livelihoods) and natural environment (air, vegetation, wildlife, habitats, soils, surface and groundwater sources) across the Basin.



Photo 2. Humpback chub, Colorado River, Colorado. Credit: George Adrejko, Arizona Fish and Game

Figure 1. A sampling of mitigation zones within the Colorado River Basin described to the right and shown on the map to the left, contextualized by the seven US and two Mexican states.

