


Drain Lake Powell? It's a bad idea that ignores reality!

In 1996 the Sierra Club and the Glen Canyon Institute (environmental groups) proposed draining Lake Powell and possibly removing Glen Canyon Dam. They claim, among other things, the U.S. government misled its citizens about environmental damage more than 40 years ago when it constructed Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River that formed the vast lake in Utah and Arizona. The proposal is an irresponsible and bad idea that ignores reality. Here are some reasons why.

Adverse economic and recreation impacts would be staggering.

- More than 2.5 million people visit the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and Lake Powell each year, generating more than \$400 million annually to the local and regional economies. Boating days number about 500,000 annually. More than 700 houseboats and smaller water craft are rented each year, and 2,000 private boats are berthed at Lake Powell. Thousands of private boats and personal water craft are trailered to the lake for use each year. Such easy access allows young, old, disabled and other recreationists the opportunity to enjoy the environs of Lake Powell. This would be lost if the lake were drained.
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- Boating on Lake Powell
- The world-class blue ribbon trout fishery below Glen Canyon Dam that provides 30,000 angler-days yearly would disappear.
 - The Navajo Nation could be significantly impacted because the Navajo Power Generation Station would be shut down unless a new source of cooling water could be found for the plant. This jeopardizes 1,900 jobs at the plant and power for operation of the Central Arizona Project. The Navajo Nation also holds mineral development rights to much of the area now inundated by the lake. The Navajos have expressed an interest in developing these mineral rights if the lake is drained, which might provide some economic benefit, but would have environmental consequences.
 - Modifying Glen Canyon Dam to allow Lake Powell to be safely drained would cost millions of dollars.

Claims of environmental benefits from draining Lake Powell have been overstated.

- Riparian conditions in the Grand Canyon below Glen Canyon Dam appear no worse and may be better now than before the dam was constructed, but they are different. The biodiversity of the ecosystem below the dam has increased from pre-dam conditions. A refuge for birds with regional significance has been created below the dam. When the dam was built a world-class blue ribbon trout fishery was created on the Colorado River below Lake Powell that didn't exist before. The river today is well regulated with high bio-diversity. This would be lost if the lake were drained.



Rainbow Bridge National Monument

- The March 1995 U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Final Environmental Impact Statement on the operation of Glen Canyon Dam, that took more than 10 years to prepare and cost more than \$80 million, attempted to answer many of the questions about what is happening to the environment in the Grand Canyon and what, if any, changes can be made to the operation of the dam to minimize its impact and enhance the environment. As a result of this study, the Glen Canyon Adaptive Management Program is being implemented today to reduce the impacts of dam operations and maximize benefits to the Grand Canyon environment.
- If the proposal to drain Lake Powell is pursued, another very lengthy and costly Environmental Impact Statement will be required to formally study the impact to the environment and regional economy.
- No one can honestly believe that after draining Lake Powell the vistas once enjoyed by a few hardy hikers and courageous boaters will be the same. The visual memory to future visitors to the Lake Powell area, at least for decades, will be an ugly “bathtub ring” and sediment-filled canyons. Much of the sediment that has been deposited in the reservoir will dry along the rock walls and become airborne during windstorms causing dust and air quality problems in the area for years.

Benefits derived by the basin states from Lake Powell would be dramatically affected.

- Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Powell allow the Upper Basin states to meet their water delivery requirements to the Lower Basin and still be able to develop and put to use their allocations of Colorado River water. This flexibility would be lost if the lake were drained.
- Because of disruption to the balance that has been struck under the Law of the River, Upper Colorado River Basin states would be further constrained from developing their remaining Colorado River Compact allocations.
- Lake Mead would fill with sediment at a faster rate and its life expectancy would decrease.
- Important flood control benefits to the Lower Colorado River Basin states and Mexico would be lost.
- Construction of the Lake Powell pipeline to deliver water to southwest Utah would not be feasible.

The important power supply from Glen Canyon Dam would be lost.

- The 1,350 megawatt capacity of the generators at Glen Canyon Dam would be totally lost, as would the 3,500 gigawatt hours of electrical energy used extensively by over 100 cities, towns and Indian communities in the upper and lower basins of the Colorado River. Power generation revenues amount to approximately \$80 million annually to the U.S. Treasury. This power would have to be replaced by other generating facilities, most likely burning fossil fuels.
- Revenue from the sale of power from Glen Canyon is committed to repay most of the \$1.5 billion invested by the federal government in participating



Glen Canyon Dam

irrigation projects authorized by the Colorado River Storage Project Act. This repayment is currently scheduled during the 2016 - 2063 time frame. Congress would have to make provisions to forgive this debt.

Solving legal and political issues would be costly and time consuming.

- Federal legislation would be required to drain Lake Powell. The delicate balance of water rights and water supply between the Upper and Lower Colorado River Basin states that has taken so long to accomplish could be destroyed. There is no question the proposal to drain Lake Powell would result in costly, long-term litigation in which there would be no real winners.

Remember, 50 years ago conservation groups (including the Sierra Club), water users, federal agencies, Congress and basin states negotiated an agreement to build Glen Canyon Dam and Reservoir. Whatever their perspectives may have been of the agreement that was reached, the results of the project have been positive. When considered against the enormous economic, recreation, legal and political benefits that have been produced and are flourishing, the proposal to return to pre-dam days can't be justified. As stated in a recent editorial in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, it is "Dam Foolishness." It is a bad idea that will cost Americans hundreds of millions of dollars in legal, environmental and study costs if the environmental groups are successful. There appears to be no middle ground (a win-win solution) to the proposal. There must be more productive ways to spend our time, efforts and environmental funds than to argue for years about destroying one of the most popular and beautiful recreation areas in the U.S.

This document can be found on the Utah Division of Water Resources web page at WWW.NR.STATE.UT.US then click Division of Water Resources then click Interstate Streams then click Draining Lake Powell or type WWW.NR.STATE.UT.US/WTRRESC/INTERSTATE/LAKEPOW.PDF