

Lake Mead National Recreation Area

Sustainable Low Water Access Plan/Environmental Assessment

Newsletter – November 2022

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service (NPS) is initiating a plan and environmental assessment (EA) for Lake Mead National Recreation Area (“park”) to provide strategic direction for the future of motorized boat launching and related commercial services, facilities, and infrastructure needs at five key locations: Hemenway Harbor, Echo Bay, Callville Bay, Temple Bar, and South Cove.

The sustainable low water access plan/EA for the park is critical to protect key resources, values, and visitor experiences and provide safe and responsible access to the lake. Previous planning did not anticipate the unprecedented rapid water level decline, and as such, a new plan/EA is needed to continue providing safe and sustainable access to the lake. This newsletter describes the current planning effort, provides an overview of current and past management concepts, discusses considerations for funding uncertainties, and explains how you can participate in the park’s planning process.

The National Park Service has requested funding for Lake Mead boat access projects through the 2023 disaster supplemental appropriation request. Whether Congress will provide construction funding under that authority and if so, what time frame, is unclear. Lake Mead National Recreation Area also competes with other national park system units for annual construction funding and related appropriations.

Regardless of any potential boat ramp improvements, the park will continue to promote other recreation in the park such as nonmotorized recreation on Lake Mead. By sharing your ideas and opinions about how the park should approach low water access management, you can help us shape its future.

Sincerely,

Stan J. Austin, Acting Superintendent



NPS MISSION AND PURPOSE OF THE PARK

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.

The purpose of Lake Mead National Recreation Area is to provide diverse public recreation, benefit, and use on Lakes Mead and Mohave and surrounding lands in a manner that preserves the ecological, geological, cultural, historical, scenic, scientific, and wilderness resources of the park.



Lake Mead National Recreation Area visitor and staff member look into the horizon

PURPOSE AND NEED OF THE SUSTAINABLE LOW WATER ACCESS PLAN/EA

Lake Mead National Recreation Area is initiating a plan and environmental assessment and seeking public comments on the preliminary management concepts. The purpose of the sustainable low water access plan/EA is to develop an updated strategic direction for the future of motorized boat launching, related commercial services, facility and infrastructure needs, and related implementation actions at five priority locations. Public engagement and consultation with tribal governments is essential and will occur throughout the planning process.

This plan/EA is needed to

- fill an urgent and high-priority need to make critical decisions to inform boating needs;
- provide updated direction for natural and cultural resource programs;
- identify opportunities for nonmotorized, water-based access; and
- evaluate potential site closures and consolidation of concession operations.

RELATED PAST PLANNING

This planning effort builds on past plans, including the general management plan (GMP) and a series of low water plan amendments in 2005 and 2019. The most recent compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was an environmental assessment completed in 2019. These GMP amendments have been guiding lake access operations to a lake elevation of 950 feet.

Given the unprecedented rapid decline of lake levels and the potential implications for infrastructure, operations, concessions, and visitor experiences at Lake Mead National Recreation Area, the National Park Service is initiating a new plan/EA that will support decision-making related to adapting affected operations beginning in fiscal year 2023. The sustainable low water access plan/EA is intended to provide lower cost and more feasible alternatives to past planning guidance to address the rapid response needed for prioritizing investments based on funding levels and the sustainability of investments. The new plan/EA will prioritize facility investments across five sites—Hemenway Harbor, Echo Bay, Callville Bay, South Cove, and Temple Bar—based on desired conditions. The plan/EA will provide management concepts for the fiscal realities related to operating and completing the relocation of marinas, boat launches, and other visitor facilities, including the necessary utilities and infrastructure extensions.



DESIRED CONDITIONS

Desired conditions outline the vision for resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services that an agency strives to achieve and maintain in a particular area. Desired conditions help park managers answer the question, “What are we trying to achieve?” Desired conditions also articulate what kinds of experiences and opportunities should be provided for specific areas of the park, as described below. Previous planning and compliance documents were used to develop desired conditions.

Desired Conditions Common to All Locations (Hemenway Harbor, Echo Bay, Callville Bay, South Cove, Temple Bar)

Desired conditions in this section apply to all locations. The site-specific desired conditions are in addition to the conditions for all locations.

Visitors will

- have opportunities for nonmotorized, water-based recreational experiences that are safe and enjoyable;
- have access to consistent, clear, and effective messaging to understand the “why” and “how” of Lake Mead decision-making and can manage expectations to make proactive and effective trip-planning decisions; and
- have access to up-to-date trip planning information that describes services and opportunities that are available.

Natural resources will

- be enhanced from changes in infrastructure in targeted areas to preserve water quality and aquatic habitats that support aquatic ecosystems, and

- be protected and preserved as much as possible from recreational pressure, including the landscape around the shorelines.

Cultural resources will be

- protected and preserved as much as possible from recreational pressure, including the landscape around the shoreline; and
- evaluated for preservation and potential rehabilitation to accommodate a compatible contemporary use, including structures in historic districts that can tell the stories of Lake Mead National Recreation Area’s history and desert landscapes.

Facilities and infrastructure will

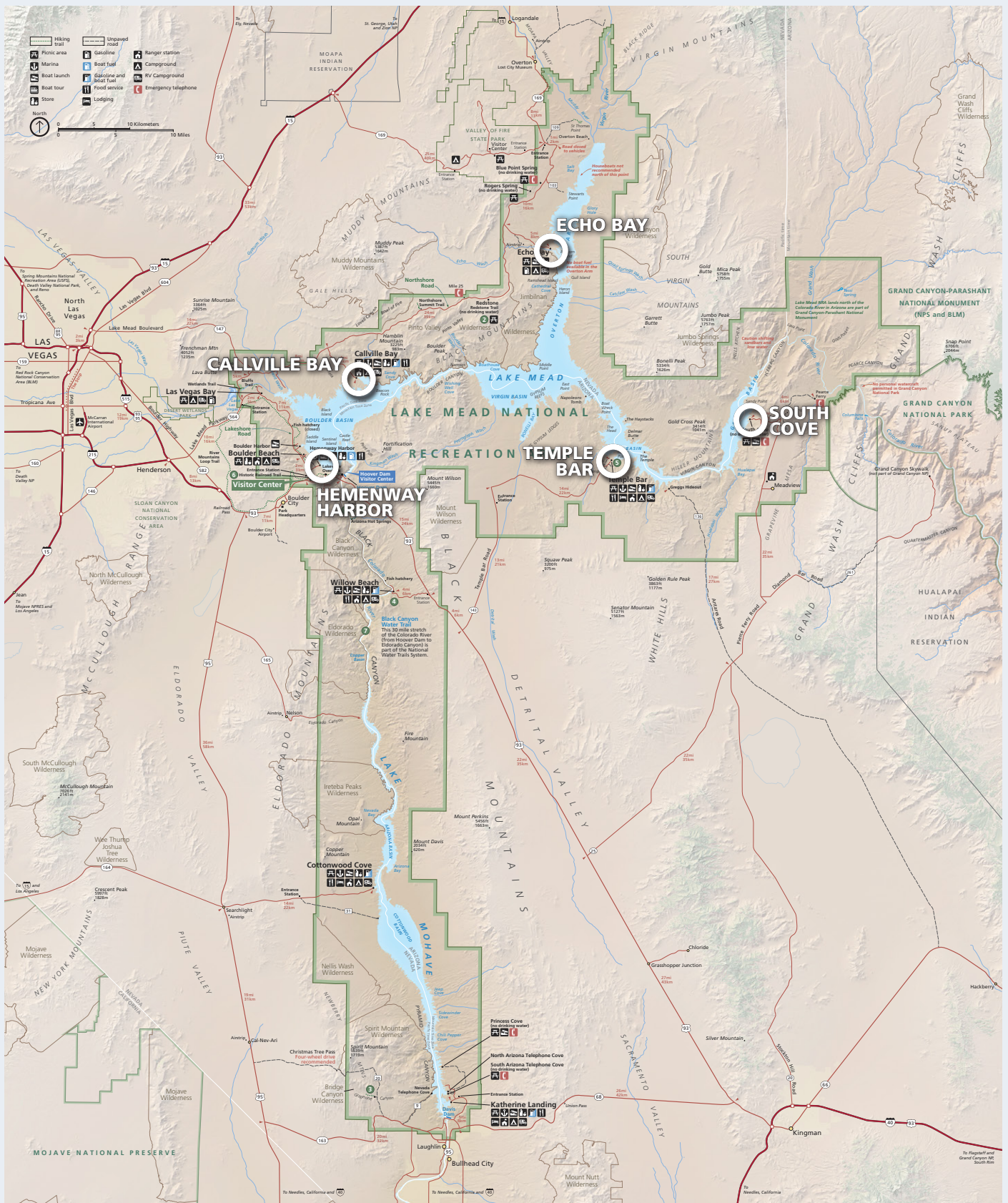
- be supported by a variety of reliable services at key locations to benefit visitors and park operations;
- be at a level that is sustainably designed, feasibly maintained, and sustainably managed and sized to address visitor needs; and
- be improved efficiently—for example, if boat launches are consolidated, facilities will be simultaneously restored and maintained.

Hemenway Harbor

See also the desired conditions for visitor experience and natural and cultural resources for all locations.

Facilities and infrastructure will

- support expanded shoreline access, providing access for nonmotorized, water-based activities;
- support visitor access to the water-based recreation activities in a sustainable manner;
- support a variety of reliable services that benefit visitors as well as Lake Mead operations; and
- improve through innovative design what supports visitor enjoyment of the resources.



Lake Mead National Recreation Area overview map



Echo Bay

See also the desired conditions for natural resources, cultural resources, facilities, and infrastructure for all locations.

Visitors will

- have an opportunity to experience the natural resources of the area, such as the razorback sucker, birding opportunities, the dark night sky, and high-quality, natural sounds.

Callville Bay

See also the desired conditions for visitor experience and cultural resources for all locations.

Natural resources will

- have opportunities for restoration of shoreline landscapes to support desert ecosystems and habitats, with special concern for the state listed, critically endangered three-corner milkvetch (*Astragalus geyeri*) population found at Sandy Cove.

Facilities and infrastructure will

- be provided to support visitor access to the lake in a sustainable manner.

South Cove

See also the desired conditions for cultural resources and natural resources for all locations.

Visitors will

- continue to have primitive experience opportunities to enjoy the area where the Colorado River meets Lake Mead and embrace the desert in these far stretches.

Natural resources will

- be maintained to provide a scenic experience.

Temple Bar

See also the desired conditions for visitor experience, cultural resources, natural resources, facilities, and infrastructure for all locations.

Natural resources will

- be maintained as a phenomenal viewshed.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Key issues have been identified for visitor use and experience, changing commercial services and visitor use, socioeconomic concerns related to gateway and park communities, changing tourism, visitor-caused impacts on natural and cultural resources, and abandoned facilities management.

These issues are expected to continue and are likely intensify into the future if no action is taken.

Diminished Quality of Visitor Experience

Five formal motorized launch ramps were identified as key concerns related to low water levels: Hemenway Harbor, Callville Bay, Echo Bay, Temple Bar, and South Cove. However, due to the combination of extremely low water levels and topographical constraints, only one formal launch area and two launch lanes at Hemenway Harbor remain open on Lake Mead, leading to concentrated use. Longer wait times and congestion; extreme temperatures; and minimal facilities, such as portable restrooms, can lead to increased visitor conflict and compromise visitor and employee experience and well-being.

Changing Commercial Services and Visitor Use

There are a total of nine concession contracts at Lake Mead National Recreation Area; however, only five operate in the project area at Hemenway Harbor, Temple Bar, Echo Bay, and Callville Bay. Launch ramp and marina closures related to low water levels have



necessitated a change in commercial services and visitor use, as past services and uses are no longer possible at some locations. Commercial service operators encounter challenges in securing adequate utilities and infrastructure, including potable water, needed to support commercial services. Financially viable opportunities for concessioners and impacts on commercial service operators continue to evolve as water levels change. In addition, changes in visitor use create challenges for proactively identifying new commercial service opportunities.

Socioeconomic Concerns Related to Gateway and Park Communities

Socioeconomic concerns at Lake Mead are present when thinking about park interactions with gateway communities, commercial services operating in the park, and changing visitor use trends. Gateway communities have expressed concerns with changing visitor access and changing visitation trends as a result of the low water. Public awareness of water issues, providing access to the water, and predicting future implications of any changes is a challenge given the rapidly declining lake water levels. Potable water is

a key concern for housing availability, specifically in Echo Bay and Callville Bay. Without potable water, employee housing at each marina could not operate in the future.

Visitor-Caused Impacts on Natural Resources

Increased visitor use in the park is resulting in impacts on natural resources, specifically on terrestrial and aquatic vegetation, wildlife, and federally listed species. For example, wildlife populations may shift as animals such as ravens and coyotes begin frequenting the developed areas due to the increased presence of humans and food.

Visitor-Caused Impacts on Cultural Resources

Lands that were previously under water are increasingly traversed by visitors seeking land-based recreation or attempting to launch watercraft in unauthorized areas along the shoreline. The park is under increased pressure to protect and preserve archeological resources (submerged and terrestrial), historic structures, and cultural landscapes from impacts associated with marina relocations.



Aerial view of Hemenway Harbor, Las Vegas Boat Harbor, and Lake Mead Marina



A recreational visitor on the historic Railroad Trail



Abandoned Facilities Management

Past marina and asset relocations have left behind existing infrastructure, creating operational, financial, and safety constraints for park visitors and park management. Abandoned NPS and concessions facilities and infrastructure are at risk of vandalism, theft, and destruction, which may present additional environmental and safety hazards (e.g., stripping copper and pulling hot wire in locations that have not been deenergized).

MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS WITH ASSOCIATED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Three preliminary management concepts are being explored. Each concept is subject to available funding, financial viability, safety and operational assessments, and technological capabilities at the park. Before the National Park Service can implement the listed actions, water levels need to be sustained based on steady water level projections from the Bureau of Reclamation. While the park manages recreation and access to the site, the Bureau of Reclamation oversees the water levels daily and decides when to release or retain water. Consequently, the plan/EA provides preliminary

management concepts for potential scenarios park staff can implement, assuming funding aligns with the time line of Bureau of Reclamation water levels. The scenario planning concepts include water levels of varying elevations across the locations, which are influenced by shoreline topography and bathymetry.

Based on the above considerations, three preliminary management concepts are being explored at each priority location. The “current management” concept 1 describes how the areas are currently being managed, while concepts 2 and 3 explore different approaches to managing motorized boat launching and commercial services. These concepts are outlined in the tables below and compared to the 2019 low water plan/EA actions. Together, the suite of management concepts, including actions from the 2019 low water plan/EA, provide the park with a full range of strategies to adapt to changing conditions.

During the planning process, the team identified adaptive management actions that may be implemented if monitoring suggests that the identified actions and strategies are not achieving the purpose and need of the plan/EA.

The following management actions are common to all locations and concepts:

- Evaluate the financial viability of concessioner-managed launch ramps and operations with 22 ft × 75 ft boat size limits (Superintendent’s Compendium).
- Consider using temporary and flexible materials if water is rising, in support of recreation and motorized access.
- Conduct cultural resource surveys.
- Conduct a terrestrial archeological survey.
- Conduct a submerged resources survey.



Temple Bar, July 2022



- Support new and existing land- and water-based sustainable recreational opportunities, such as kayaking, paddleboarding, biking, hiking, swimming, and camping.
- Evaluate and develop reservation options for launching and retrieving boats. Consider

combining vessel permits with timed entry options (adaptive management action).

- Communicate with the public and stakeholders frequently regarding available services and any operational changes.

Table 1. Hemenway Harbor Management Concepts

AREA	2019 LOW WATER PLAN ACTIONS	CURRENT MANAGEMENT CONCEPT 1	CONCEPT 2	CONCEPT 3
LAUNCH RAMP AND MARINA	Extend the marina operations and launch ramp to an elevation of approximately 950 feet. Below approximately 1,000 feet, relocate the launch ramp and marina facilities to deeper water closer to the Hemenway wall with associated roads and utilities.	Extend to an elevation of approximately 1,000 feet. Relocate when water levels are below approximately 1,000 feet. Above approximately 1,000 feet, evaluate the existing launch ramp location for reopening.	Same as current management concept.	No future concrete launch ramp extensions or relocations will be made; evaluate motorized vessel access for safe and operational feasibility.
CONCESSION SERVICES	N/A	Maintain concessions operations to match lake levels.	Same as current management concept.	No services will be available; close all related facilities and infrastructure related to the marina.
FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE	N/A	Maintain the parking lot and continue to support facilities associated with the marina.	Same as current management concept. Evaluate abandoned infrastructure for operational and financial feasibility and safety and remove where appropriate. Stop maintaining structures that are unsafe and no longer necessary.	Infrastructure remains until funding is available for its removal.
POTABLE WATER	N/A	Potable water is supplied by Boulder City.	Same as current management concept.	Same as current management concept.



Table 2. Echo Bay Management Concepts

AREA	2019 LOW WATER PLAN ACTIONS	CURRENT MANAGEMENT CONCEPT 1	CONCEPT 2	CONCEPT 3
LAUNCH RAMP AND MARINA	Analyze reestablishing full-service marina operations. Extend marina operations and the launch ramp to an elevation of approximately 1,000 feet if reestablished. Below approximately 1,050 feet, launch ramp and marina operations (if reestablished) will be relocated north to Pumphouse Bay with associated new roads and utilities.	Maintain launch ramp closure.	Relocate launch ramp to approximately 1,000 feet.	No NPS future launch ramp extensions or relocations.
CONCESSION SERVICES	N/A	Maintain concessions amendment to operate land fuel, retail, recreational vehicle (RV), and trailer village with no on-water operations.	Discontinue concessions below approximately 1,000 feet, and close the trailer village and comfort station and related wastewater treatment. Buildings in this area are not viable for repurposing. Opportunities will be considered and evaluated if water levels rise beyond approximately 1,000 feet.	No amenities or services provided. Close the trailer village and comfort station and related wastewater treatment.
FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE	N/A	N/A	Below approximately 1,000 feet, maintain primitive campground, including RV sites without potable water. Evaluate abandoned infrastructure for operational and financial feasibility and safety and remove where appropriate. Evaluate historic structures that are unsafe and no longer needed and are part of the historic district.	Infrastructure remains until funding is available for removal.
POTABLE WATER	N/A	Continue pursuing current project to move water intake barge to provide potable water until 980 feet.	Provide potable water using existing infrastructure to approximately 980 feet. Below approximately 980 feet, potable water would no longer be maintained.	No potable water.

Table 3. Callville Bay Management Concepts

AREA	2019 LOW WATER PLAN ACTIONS	CURRENT MANAGEMENT CONCEPT 1	CONCEPT 2	CONCEPT 3
LAUNCH RAMP AND MARINA	Extend marina operations and launch ramp to an elevation of approximately 950 feet. Below approximately 1,065 feet, extend launch ramp and marina facilities farther into the lake or relocate to Swallow Bay with associated new road and utilities.	Maintain closure of the existing launch ramp when water levels are at or below approximately 1,065 feet; the concessioner maintains the temporary ramp. Test and evaluate the portable launch ramp maintained by the concessioner.	Relocate the launch ramp to extend to 950 feet, as funding allows; close the launch ramp below approximately 950 feet; and reopen the launch ramp above approximately 1,065 feet. Test and evaluate the portable launch ramp maintained by concessioner.	No future NPS launch ramp extensions or relocations. Test and evaluate the portable launch ramp maintained by concessioner.
CONCESSION SERVICES	N/A	Maintain full concession services.	Discontinue concession services; close the marina; end the concessions contract; and close the trailer village, restaurant, boat shop, comfort stations, and all other infrastructure. All concessions infrastructure will be removed. Opportunities for commercial services will be considered and evaluated above approximately 1,065 feet.	No amenities or services provided. Discontinue concession services; close the marina; end the concessions contract; and close the trailer village, restaurant, boat shop, comfort stations, and all other infrastructure.
FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE	N/A	Complete the design of all supporting infrastructure (e.g., roads, parking lot, utilities).	Facilities would be evaluated and removed if unsafe or operationally infeasible for motorized use. Once potable water can no longer be maintained with current infrastructure, remove concessions infrastructure, employee housing, and other NPS facilities. Reevaluate the longevity of overnight use given the lack of potable water. Evaluate abandoned infrastructure for operational and financial feasibility and safety and remove where appropriate.	Infrastructure remains until funding is available for removal. Reevaluate the longevity of overnight use given the lack of potable water.
POTABLE WATER	N/A	Continue to extend and replace intake barge and potable water infrastructure as funds are available.	As current infrastructure allows, potable water is maintained.	No potable water.

Table 4. South Cove Management Concepts

AREA	2019 LOW WATER PLAN ACTIONS	CURRENT MANAGEMENT CONCEPT 1	CONCEPT 2	CONCEPT 3
LAUNCH RAMP AND MARINA	Launching would continue to be authorized at the end of a park-approved road.	Support launch access as topography allows. Below approximately 1,035 feet, prohibit new launch ramps and launch access. Above approximately 1,070 feet, open the concrete ramp.	Same as current management concept.	No future NPS launch ramp extensions or relocations.
CONCESSION SERVICES	N/A	No amenities or services provided.	Same as current management concept.	Same as current management concept.
FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE	N/A	No new roads constructed.	Same as current management concept. Evaluate abandoned infrastructure for operational and financial feasibility and safety and remove where appropriate.	Same as current management concept.
POTABLE WATER	N/A	No potable water.	Same as current management concept.	Same as current management concept.

Table 5: Temple Bar Management Concepts

AREA	2019 LOW WATER PLAN ACTIONS	CURRENT MANAGEMENT CONCEPT 1	CONCEPT 2	CONCEPT 3
LAUNCH RAMP AND MARINA	Extend marina operations and launch ramp to an elevation of 950 feet. Below 1,050 feet, relocate the launch ramp farther into the lake to the northeast with associated new roads and utilities.	Maintain the closure of the existing NPS launch ramp. Test and evaluate the portable launch ramp maintained by the concessioner.	Close the marina and launch ramp. Above approximately 1,070 feet, open the boat launch to motorized access at the existing location. Test and evaluate the portable launch ramp maintained by the concessioner.	No future NPS launch ramp extensions or relocations. Test and evaluate the portable launch ramp maintained by concessioner.
CONCESSION SERVICES	N/A	Maintain current concessions.	Concession services will be discontinued and closed, including the trailer village, restaurant, boat shop, comfort stations, and all associated infrastructure.	No amenities or services provided.
FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE	N/A	Maintain NPS campground operations, including land and water fuel stations and the RV and trailer village.	Manage fuel for administrative, operational, and emergency use. Reevaluate the longevity and viability of overnight use given the lack of potable water. Evaluate abandoned infrastructure for operational and financial feasibility and safety and remove where appropriate.	Infrastructure remains until funding is available for removal.
POTABLE WATER	N/A	Potable water will remain available by a shallow well as water table levels and funding allow.	Same as current management concept.	No potable water.



PLANNING TIME LINE

MILESTONE	COMPLETION DATE	PUBLIC INPUT
BEGIN NEPA	Fall 2022	
HOST PUBLIC SCOPING	◀ WE ARE HERE ▶	Attend in-person and/or virtual public meetings and provide comments; attendance is not required to provide input.
PREPARE SUSTAINABLE LOW WATER ACCESS PLAN/EA	Winter 2022	Review the plan/EA, provide comments.
INITIATE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	Spring 2022	Attend in-person and/or virtual public meetings and provide comments; attendance is not required to provide input.
PREPARE DECISION DOCUMENT	Spring/Summer 2023	

Review project documents and provide feedback by visiting the park’s planning site at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/LAKE-Low-Water-Access> or by scanning the QR code.



INVITATION TO MEETINGS

The National Park Service will host three in-person public meetings and one virtual public meeting in December 2022. The purpose of these meetings is to share information about the plan/EA and planning process, gather input, and answer questions from the public. Please consider attending one of the following public meetings:

DATE	TIME	LOCATION
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2022	5:00 – 7:00 MST	Meadview Civic Association Building 247 E. Meadview Blvd. Meadview, AZ 86444
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2022	12:00 – 2:00 p.m. PDT	Bureau of Reclamation Conference and Training Center 500 Date Street Building 100 Boulder City, NV 89005
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2022	5:00 – 7:00 MST	Kingman Office of Tourism 120 W. Andy Devine Ave. <i>Powerhouse Conference Room</i> Kingman, AZ 86401
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2022	4:00 – 6:00 p.m. PDT	Virtual meeting https://tinyurl.com/LAKE-Dec-Public-Meeting

KEY PARK CONTACTS

If you have questions about this plan/EA or upcoming public meetings, please send an email to LAKE_Public_Affairs@nps.gov.