

Voluntary Conservation Program for Lake Mead: Current Accounts and Observations

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Description

This is an R Markdown document. The following plots show the current status of the voluntary, credited conservation program for Lake Mead. This program is defined by the 2007 Interim Guidelines and amended by a 2019 agreement that adds mandatory conservation targets. In the voluntary conservation programs, states conserve water, store the water in Lake Mead, get credit, and withdraw the conserved water at a future date under certain restrictions. The mandatory conservation targets increase as Lake Mead level drops. Those targets can be met by converting previously conserved water in a conservation account or undertaking new conservation efforts.

1. A stacked bar chart compares voluntary conservation account balances by state and year. These balances are compared to the overall and individual state max balances allowed by the 2007 Interim Guidelines and 2019 Drought Contingency Plan (DCP).
2. A stacked bar chart compares annual voluntary conservation efforts by state. Deposits are shown as positive and withdrawals as negative. These deposits and withdrawals are compared to the maximum allowed amounts.
3. A bar plot shows the the number of years water in the conservation account can be used to make the state's mandatory target before the conservation account is depleted for three lake levels. This ratio is the conservation account balance divided by the mandatory target. This ratio assumes there is no new voluntary conservation or withdrawals during that time. The number of years fall as Lake Mead level drops and mandatory targets increase.
4. A bar plot shows the ratio of the conservation account withdrawal limit to the mandatory conservation target at three different Lake Mead water levels. If account withdrawal limits are enforced, this ratio represents the fraction of the mandatory conservation target the state could make from its conservation account each year. This ratio assumes there is sufficient water in the conservation account.
5. A bar plot shows the ratio of the conservation account deposit limit to the required mandatory conservation target at three different Lake Mead water levels. If deposit limits are enforced, this ratio shows how well a state can keep up year-to-year with its required mandatory conservation targets by continuing to conserve, add that water to its conservation account, then transfer and use the conservation account water to meet its mandatory conservation target. Conserving, adding to one's conservation account, and transferring to meet a mandatory conservation target is preferred to a new conservation. This approach is preferred because water conserved **this** year and credited to the conservation account can be used to meet this or **next** year's mandatory target. Should Lake Mead level rise during the year, the state retains access to its conserved water whereas new conservation is lost.
6. A bar plot shows each state's historical ability to meet mandatory conservation targets at three different Lake Mead water levels. Historical ability is the ratio of the largest annual deposit to a conservation

account on record to the mandatory conservation target. The historical ability shows whether a state has historically conserved at the volume to meet its mandatory conservation target. States below 100% have never before conserved at the level required by the DCP. They do not yet have a track record for water conservation.

Data from USBR annual accounting reports: <https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/wtracct.html>. Note most recent data is for 2020.

Observations

1. The water conservation accounting program for Lake Mead is popular and well used (Figures 1 and 2).
2. As of 2020, Arizona, California, and Nevada have saved and deposited ~2.8 million acre feet (MAF) – above the current 2.7 MAF maximum limit (Figure 1).
3. The states should raise their individual and combined conservation account limits to more transparently represent situation with account balances larger than the limits. At the same time, the limit on conservation account balances must stay below Lake Mead’s physical active storage so conserved water is recoverable.
4. Arizona has yet to conserve water at the annual volumes required for its mandatory conservation targets (Figures 3, 4, 5, 6). In contrast, California and Nevada already have a track record of conserving at the mandatory conservation targets.
5. Collectively, the states conserved 42,000 acre-feet less in 2020 than 2019. As the 20-year drow continues and the reservoir level draws down, each state decreased rather than increased its conservation efforts.

Requested Citation

David E. Rosenberg (2021), “Intentionally Created Surplus for Lake Mead: Current Accounts and Observations.” Utah State University. Logan, Utah. <https://github.com/dzeke/ColoradoRiverFutures/tree/master/ICS>

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## [1] "Voluntary conservation account balance as fraction of Mead storage"
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## [1] "23.3%"
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## [1] "Percent of Upper Colorado River Basin of entire continental US"
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## [1] "3.5%"
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Figure 1. Lake Mead conservation account balances

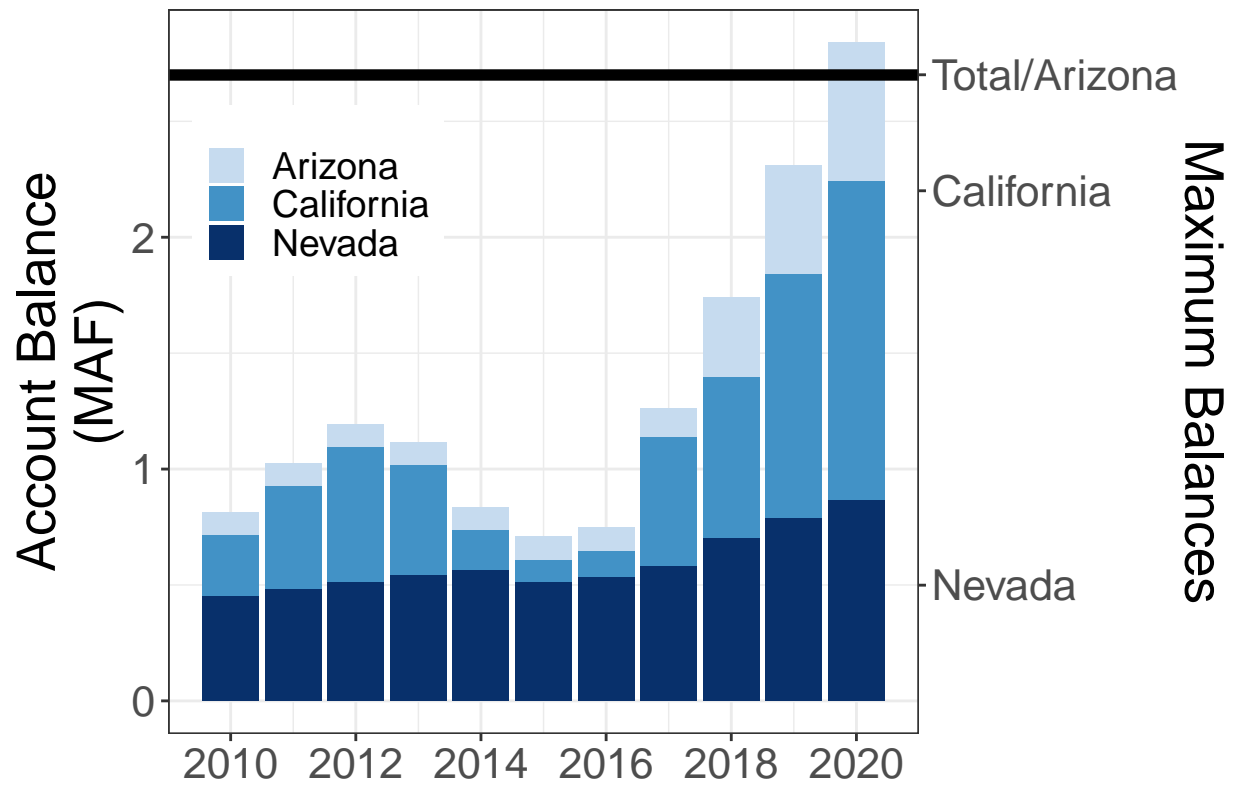


Figure 2. Lake Mead conservation account deposits and withdrawals

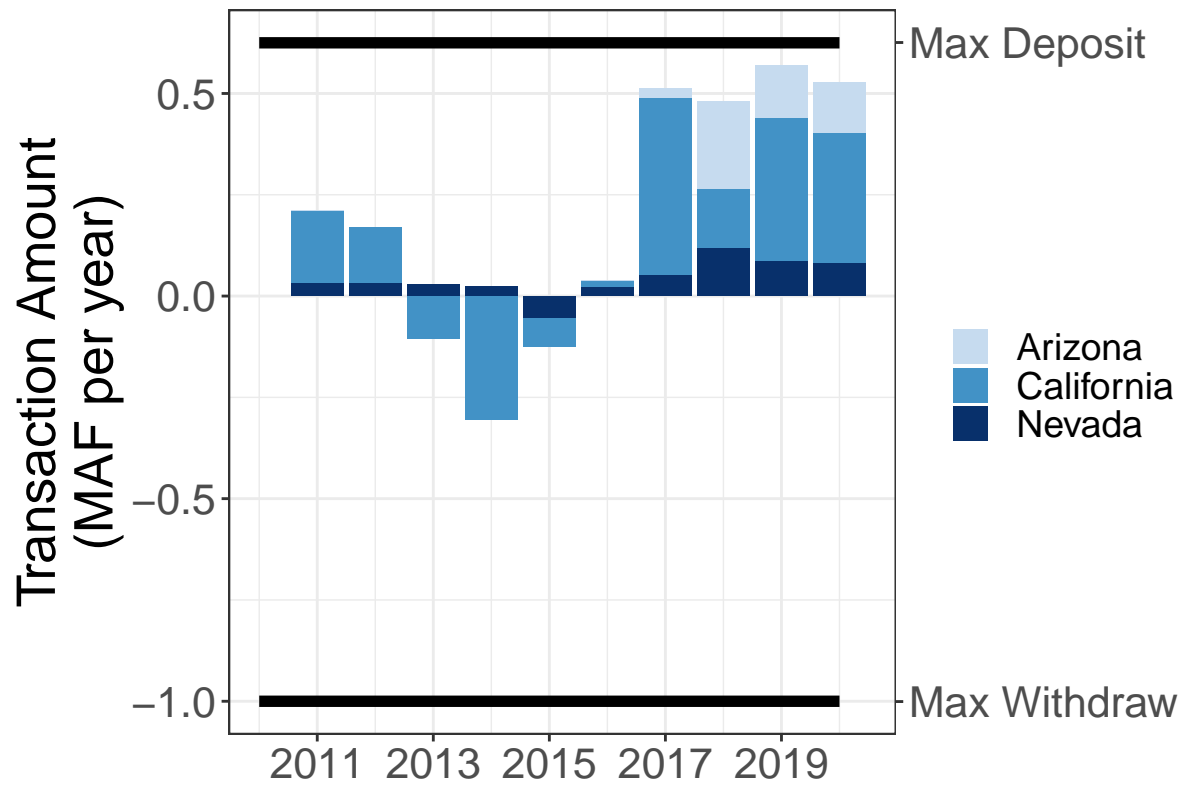


Figure 3. Years 2020 conservation account balance can fund mandatory conservation targets. Dashed red line indicates 2 years.

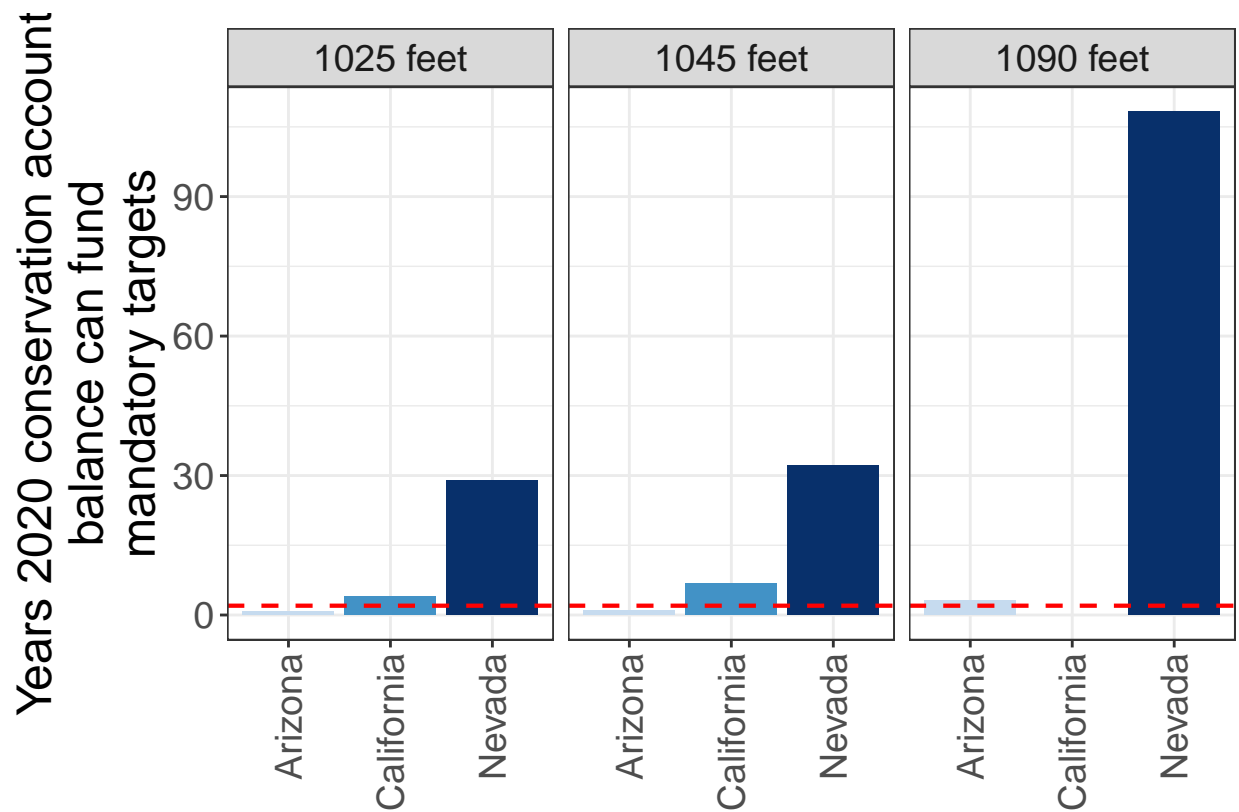


Figure 4. Ratio of conservation account max withdrawal limit to mandatory target. Dashed red line indicates max withdraw limit equals mandatory target.

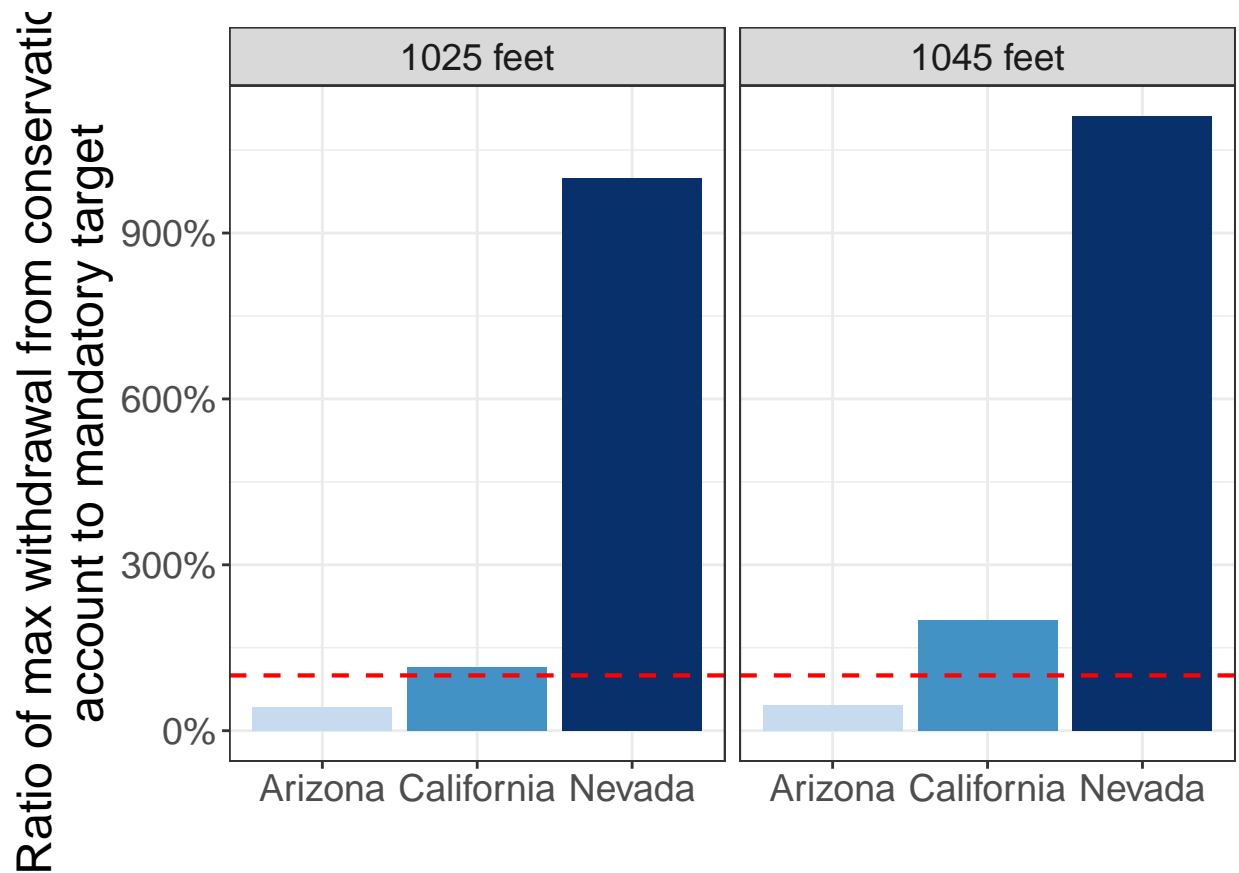


Figure 5. Ratio of max conservation account deposit to mandatory target. Dashed red line (100%) indicates max deposit equals mandatory target.

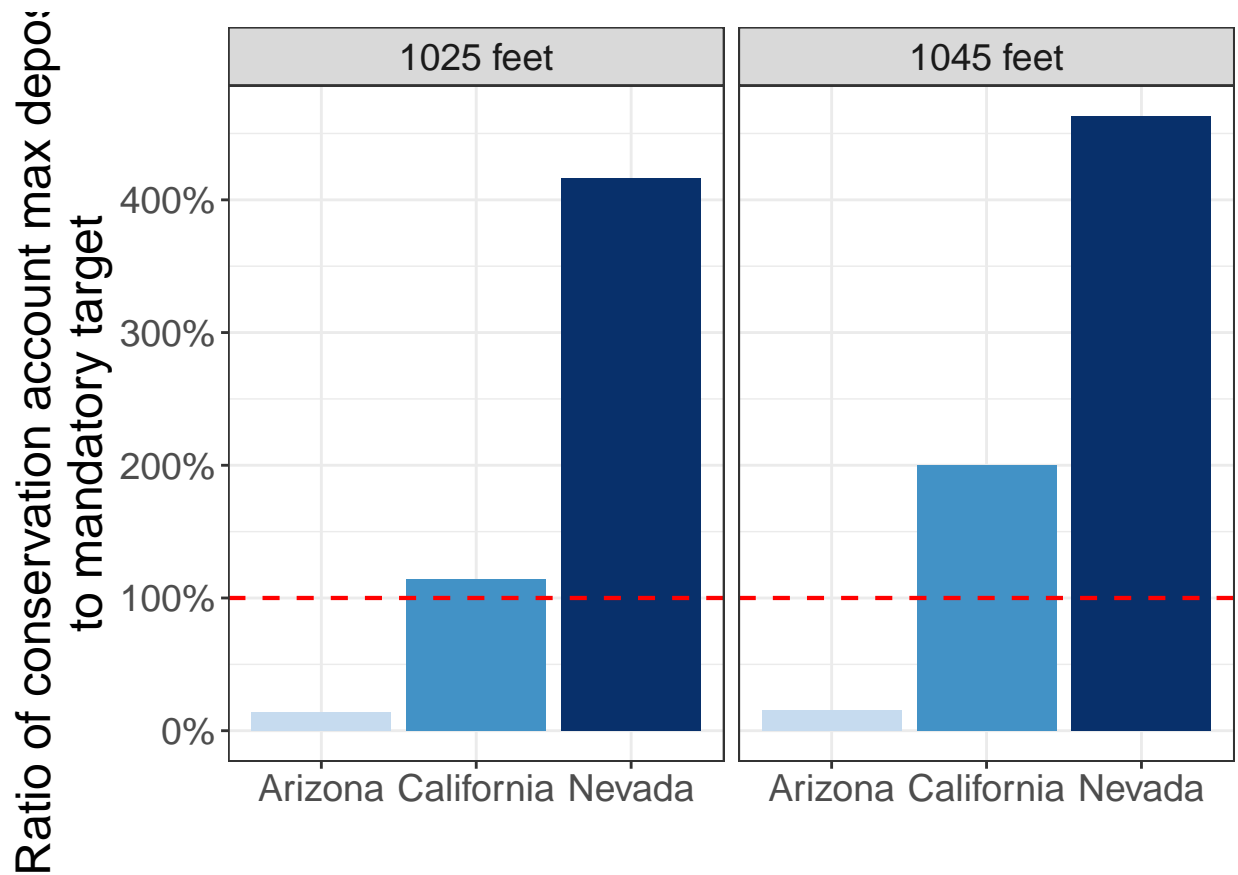


Figure 6. Ratio of largest historical conservation account deposit to mandatory target

States less than 100% (dashed red line) have yet to conserve at the mandatory target.

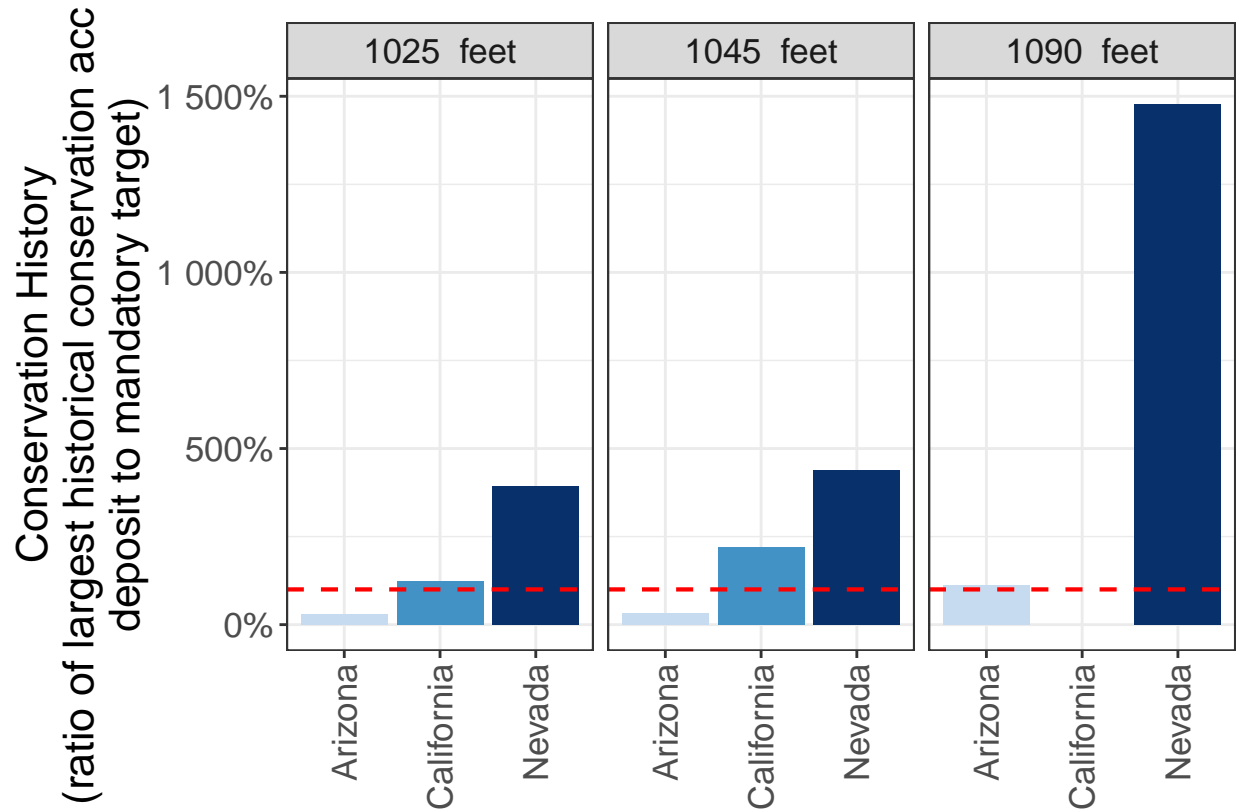


Figure 7. Years to draw down conservation account balance to zero at maximum withdraw limit. Dashed red line indicates 1 year.

