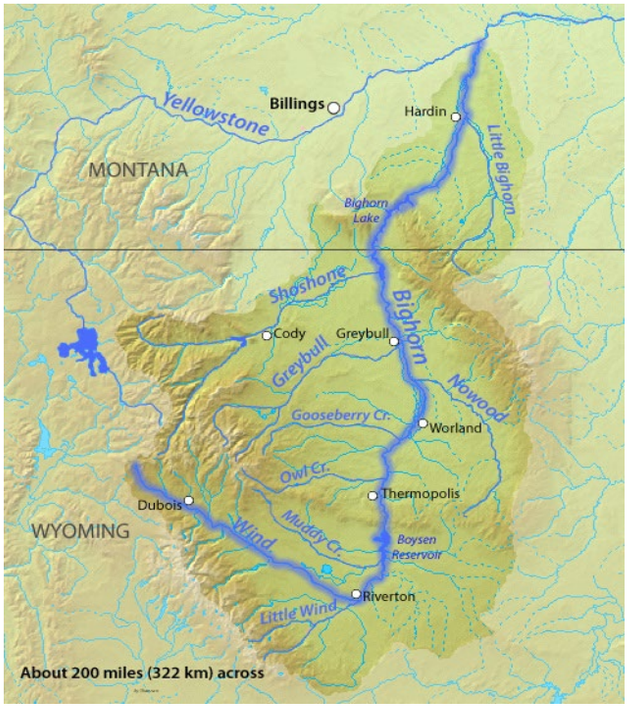
Yellowtail Dam Water Supply and Projected Operations

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

December 2025



Bighorn River Basin Map Source: DEMIS Mapserver

December Operating Range			
Forecast	**Minimum**	**Median**	**Maximum**
Monthly Average Inflow (cfs)	1,215	1,310	1,405
Monthly Average River Release (cfs)	2,060	2,060	2,060
End of December Elevation (feet)	3626.5	3627.2	3627.9

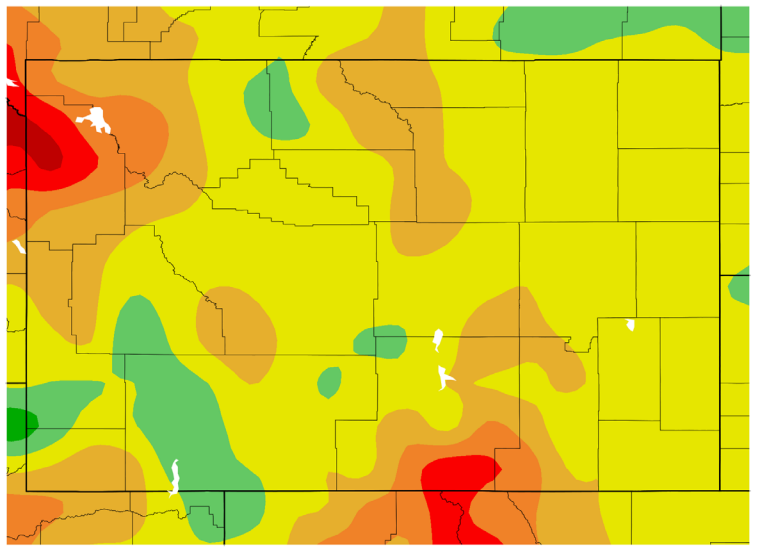
December 2025 Inflow Forecast (kaf)		
December Volume		81
Percent of Average		74
Water Year	**Historical Inflow**	**Rank**
2025	103	17
2024	153	2
2023	101	20
2022	101	19
30 Year Average	108	

Climate Departure from Normal

November 1 through November 30, 2025

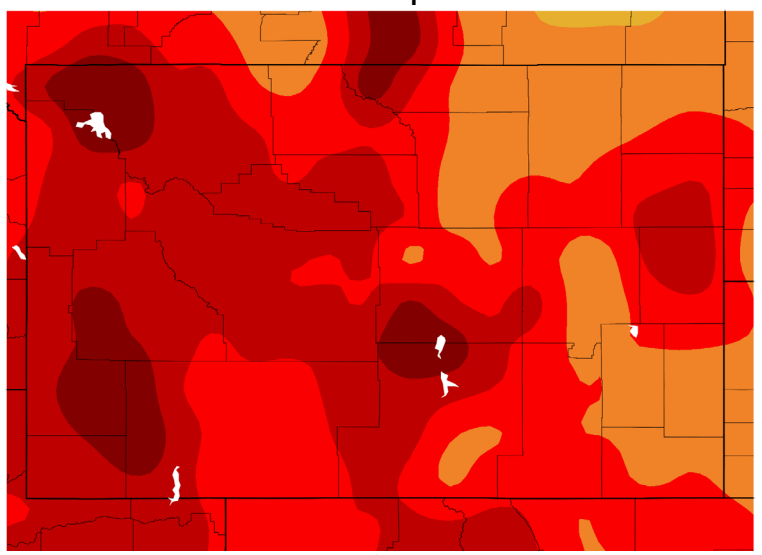
Precipitation

Departure from Normal (inches)



Departure from Normal (°F)

Temperature



HPRCC using provisional data from NOAA Regional Climate Centers

CLIMATE SUMMARY

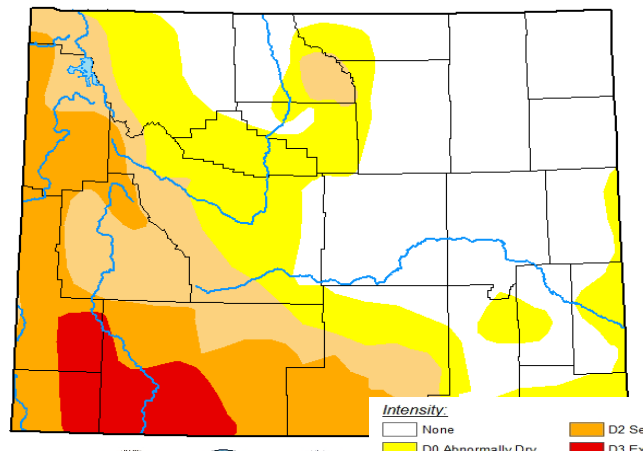
Precipitation in the Bighorn River basin above Yellowtail Dam was below average during November except for a small area in the most northern part of the basin, which was above average. The average temperature for November was above average for the basin.

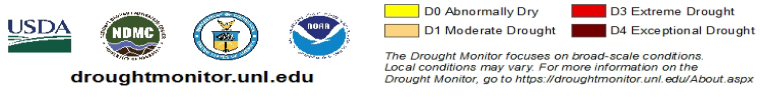
Based on the climate outlook for December, there is a 33-50% chance that precipitation will be above average for the basin. There is a 33 to 40 percent chance the temperature will be above average in the upper Bighorn River basin. There is an equal chance that temperature will be above, below, or near average in the lower portion of the basin.

Drought conditions in the Bighorn River basin range from none to severe.

Wyoming Drought Monitor Map

November 25, 2025

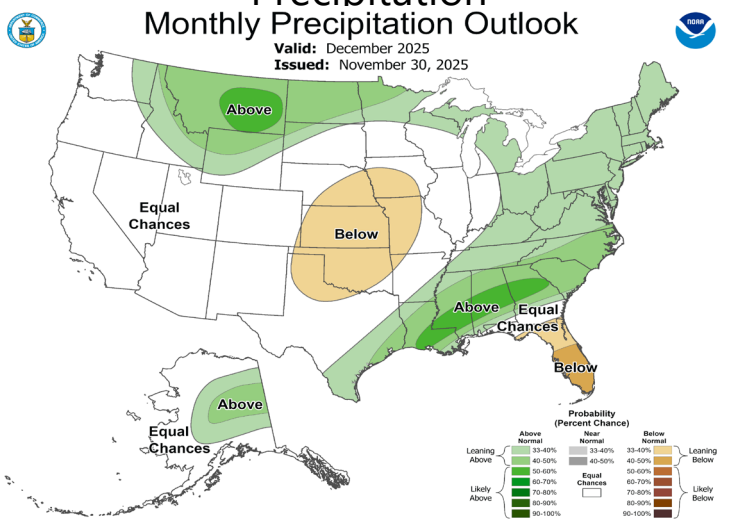




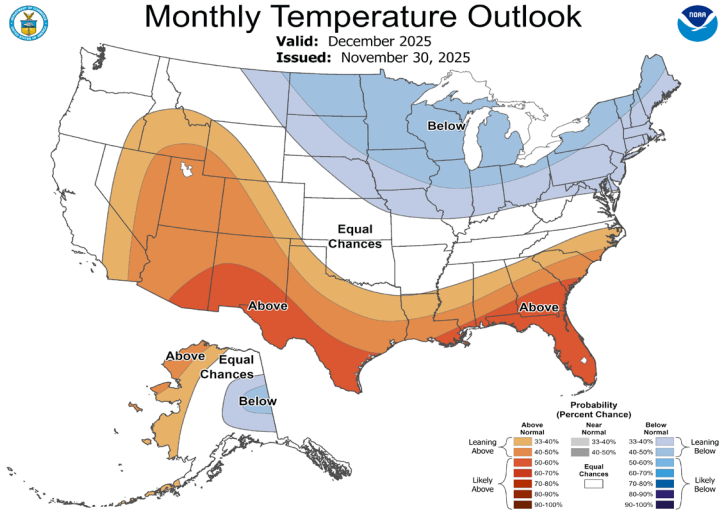
droughtmonitor.unl.edu

December Climate Outlook

Precipitation



Temperature

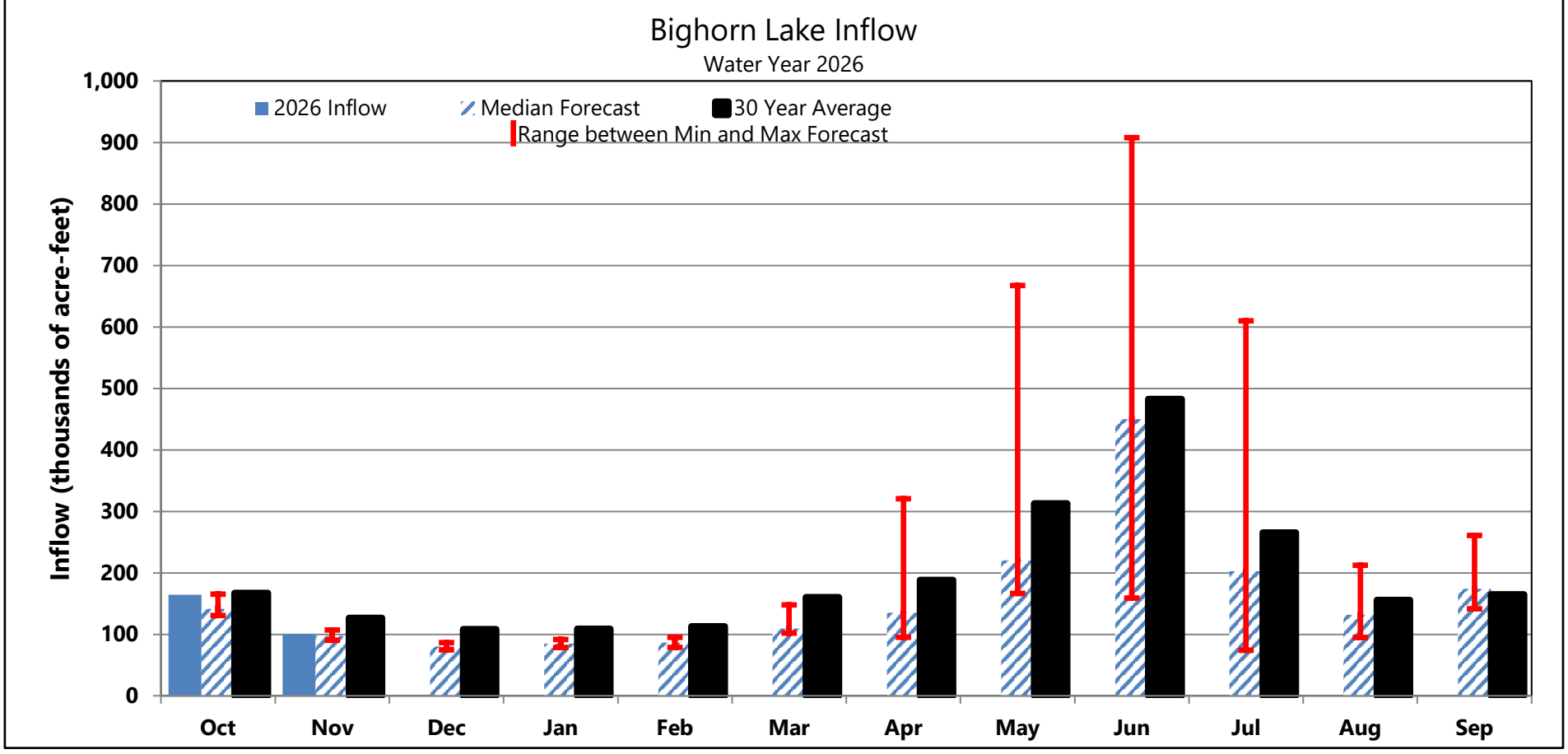


FORECAST SUMMARY

NRCS SNOTEL data, streamflow data, climate data, and planned releases from Boysen and Buffalo Bill Reservoirs are used to compute an inflow forecast for Bighorn Lake. Actual November inflows were greater than the median inflow forecast.

November Forecast Review

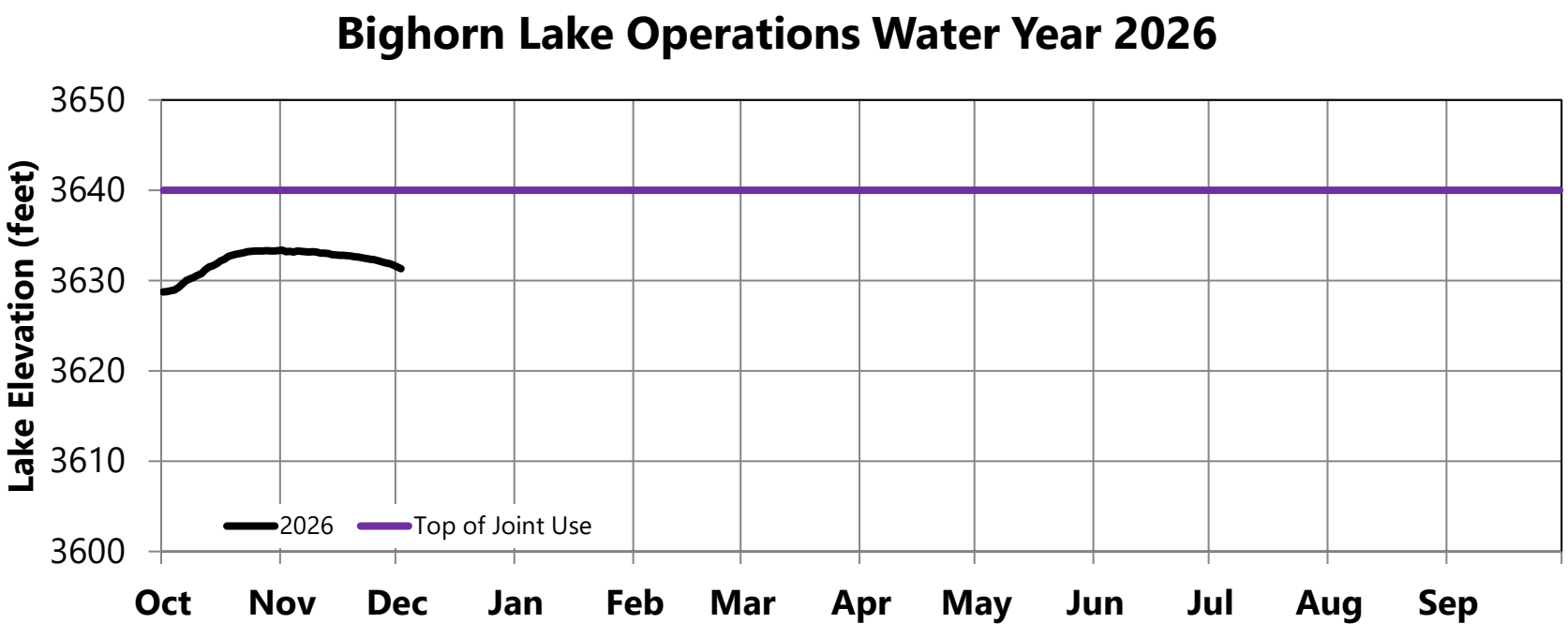
	Median Forecast (kaf)	Actual (kaf)	Difference (kaf)	Actual (% of Avg)
November Inflow	97.2	100.1	2.9	79



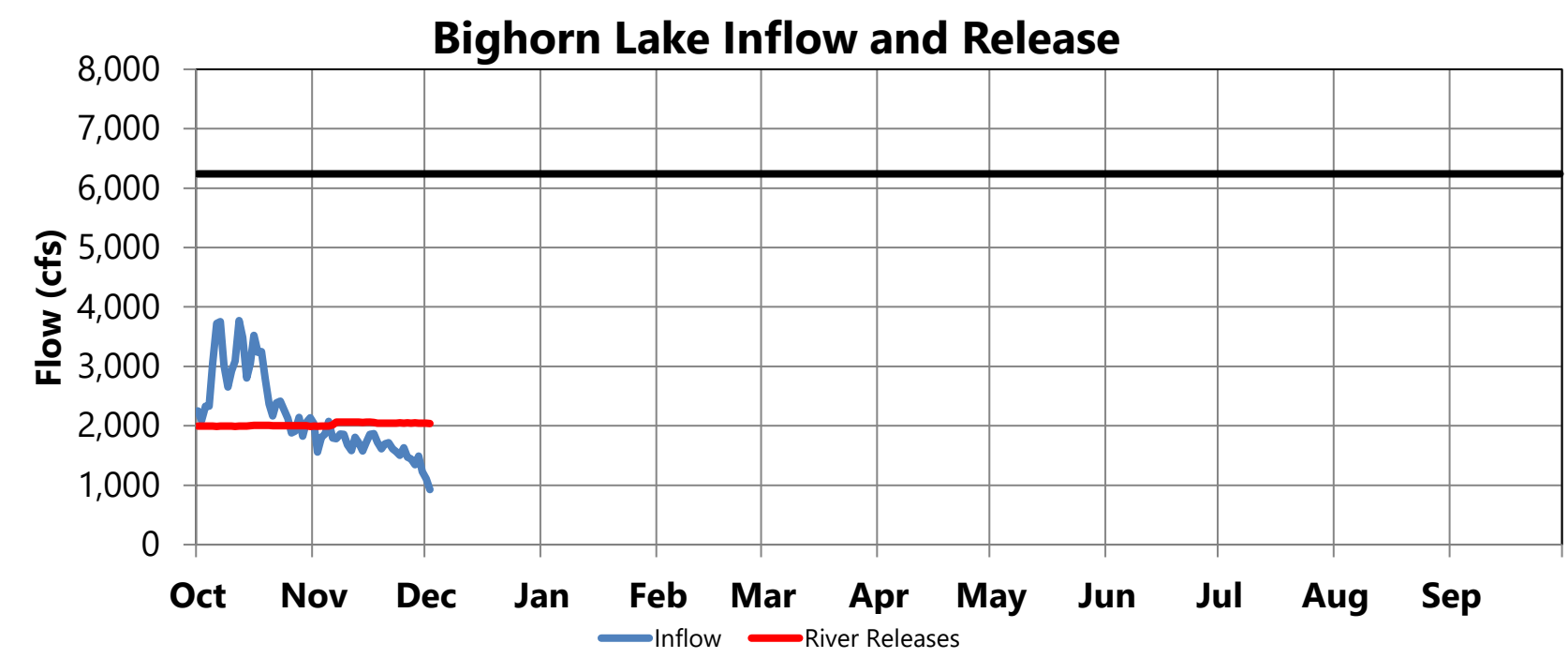
OPERATIONS REVIEW (October 1, 2025 through November 30, 2025)

Releases to the Bighorn River were increased to 2,050 cfs during November based on winter release criteria. The elevation of Bighorn Lake decreased by 1.6 feet during November.

December 1 Storage Conditions	Elevation feet	Storage acre-feet	Percent of Average	Percent Full
Bighorn Lake	3631.7	912,994	104	90
Buffalo Bill	5355.0	368,312	83	57
Boysen	4711.9	518,797	91	70



Average November Inflow	Monthly Avg cfs	Percent of Average	Average November Release	Monthly Avg cfs	Percent of Average
Bighorn Lake	1,685	79	Bighorn River	2,040	83
Buffalo Bill	485	117	Buffalo Bill Total Release	155	47
Boysen	710	85	Boysen Release	615	76



OPERATIONS OUTLOOK (December 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026)

Winter releases to the Bighorn River were set in early November at 2,050 cfs and will be adjusted to 2,060 cfs on December 8 based on actual November inflows. The winter release is based on storage in Bighorn Lake, end of March 2026 storage target of 3617 feet, planned releases from Boysen and Buffalo Bill, and forecasted gains. Releases to the Bighorn River will be adjusted up and down through the winter based on actual inflows into Bighorn Lake.

Median Inflow Conditions

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Boysen Release (cfs)	600	600	600	600
Buffalo Bill Release (cfs)	153	153	155	153
Tributary Gain (cfs)	556	629	808	1,028
Monthly Inflow (cfs)	1,309	1,382	1,563	1,781
Monthly Inflow (kaf)	80.5	85.0	86.8	109.5
Monthly Release (kaf)	126.5	126.7	114.4	138.3
Afterbay Release (cfs)	2,058	2,060	2,060	2,250
River Release (cfs)	2,058	2,060	2,060	2,250
End-of-Month Content (kaf)	871.3	833.9	810.2	785.7
End-of-Month Elevation (feet)	3627.2	3622.4	3619.1	3615.2

Minimum Inflow Conditions

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Boysen Release (cfs)	600	600	600	600
Buffalo Bill Release (cfs)	155	155	157	155
Tributary Gain (cfs)	460	522	661	903
Monthly Inflow (cfs)	1,215	1,277	1,418	1,658
Monthly Inflow (kaf)	74.7	78.5	78.7	101.9
Monthly Release (kaf)	126.5	123.0	107.7	109.4
Afterbay Release (cfs)	2,058	2,000	1,940	1,780
River Release (cfs)	2,058	2,000	1,940	1,780
End-of-Month Content (kaf)	865.5	825.3	800.2	797.0
End-of-Month Elevation (feet)	3626.5	3621.3	3617.5	3617.0

Maximum Inflow Conditions

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Boysen Release (cfs)	600	600	600	1,099
Buffalo Bill Release (cfs)	155	155	157	155
Tributary Gain (cfs)	652	735	954	1,150
Monthly Inflow (cfs)	1,407	1,490	1,711	2,404
Monthly Inflow (kaf)	86.5	91.6	95.0	147.8
Monthly Release (kaf)	126.5	130.4	121.1	214.7
Afterbay Release (cfs)	2,058	2,120	2,180	3,492
River Release (cfs)	2,058	2,120	2,180	3,492
End-of-Month Content (kaf)	877.3	842.9	820.7	758.1
End-of-Month Elevation (feet)	3627.9	3623.6	3620.6	3610.5

OPERATIONS OUTLOOK (December 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026)

There is approximately 70 cfs of gain between Yellowtail Dam and Yellowtail Afterbay Dam from springs flowing into Yellowtail Afterbay. Total release from Yellowtail Dam is 70 cfs less than total release from Yellowtail Afterbay Dam.

Irrigation Demands Outlook

Bighorn Canal (cfs)

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median Forecast	0	0	0	0
Minimum Forecast	0	0	0	0
Maximum Forecast	0	0	0	0

Power Generation Outlook

Current Number of Units Available: 4 of 4
Approximate Yellowtail Powerplant Turbine Capacity: 8,200 cfs
Approximate Yellowtail Powerplant Scheduled Generation Limit: 6,240 cfs

Yellowtail Powerplant Release (cfs)

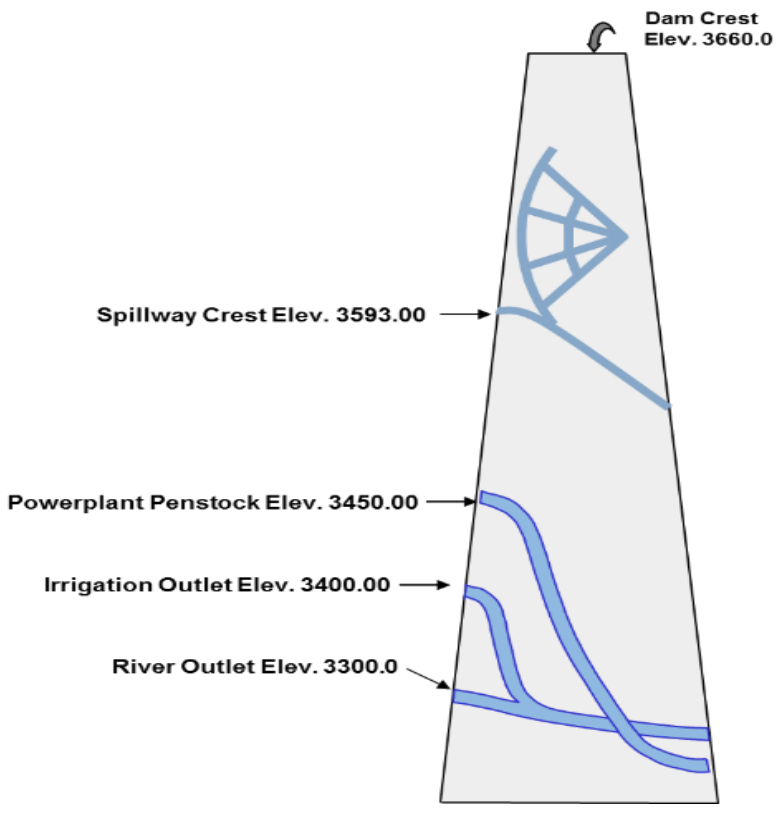
	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median Forecast	1,988	1,990	1,990	2,180
Minimum Forecast	1,988	1,930	1,870	1,710
Maximum Forecast	1,988	2,050	2,110	3,422

Yellowtail Powerplant Generation (gwh)

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median Forecast	45	45	41	49
Minimum Forecast	45	44	38	39
Maximum Forecast	45	46	43	77

Yellowtail Spill (cfs)

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median Forecast	0	0	0	0
Minimum Forecast	0	0	0	0
Maximum Forecast	0	0	0	0

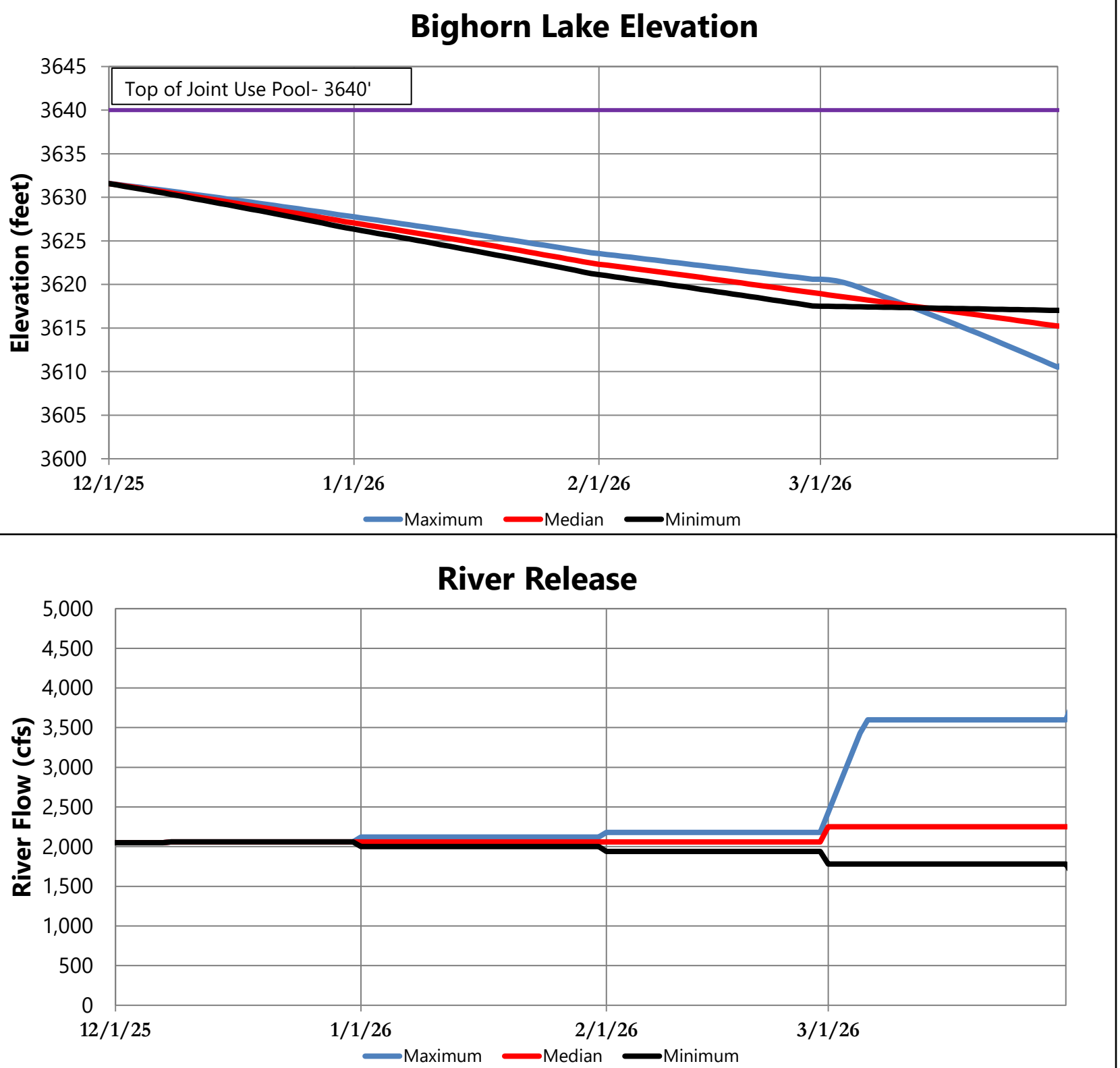


Release Outlook by Outlet

Yellowtail Powerplant bypass releases are not anticipated through the end of March 2026 under all three inflow forecasts.

OPERATIONS OUTLOOK (December 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026)

Projected elevations and the range of river releases are based on the median, minimum, and maximum inflow forecasts. End-of-month elevations and river releases vary based on the difference between forecasted inflow scenarios.



Contact Us

J. Brooks Stephens
jbstephens@usbr.gov
406-247-7318

Clayton Jordan
cjordan@usbr.gov
406-247-7334

Chris Gomer
cgomer@usbr.gov
406-247-7307

Monthly Operating Plans, Current Conditions, Snowpack and Other Water Management Information
https://www.usbr.gov/gp/lakes_reservoirs/wareprts/main_menu.html