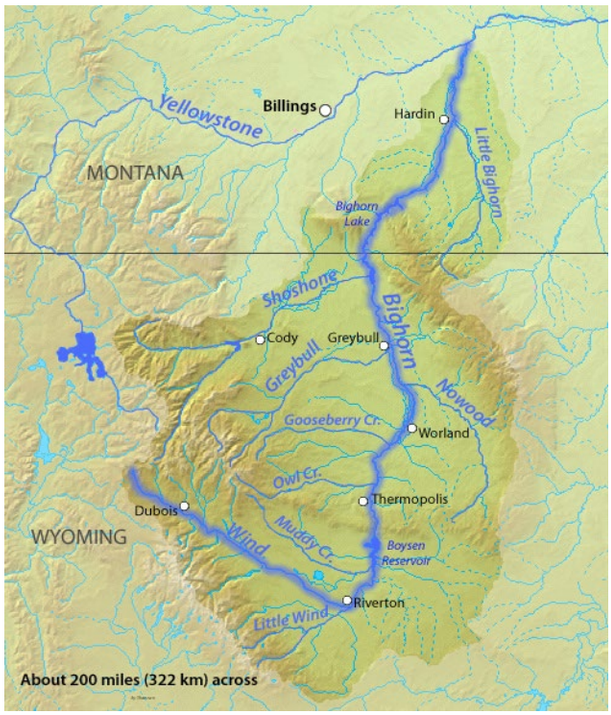
Yellowtail Dam Water Supply and Projected Operations

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

February 2026



Bighorn River Basin Map Source: DEMIS Mapserver

February Operating Range			
Forecast	**Minimum**	**Median**	**Maximum**
Monthly Average Inflow (cfs)	1,415	1,560	1,700
Monthly Average River Release (cfs)	2,060	2,060	2,060
End of February Elevation (feet)	3617.5	3618.8	3619.9

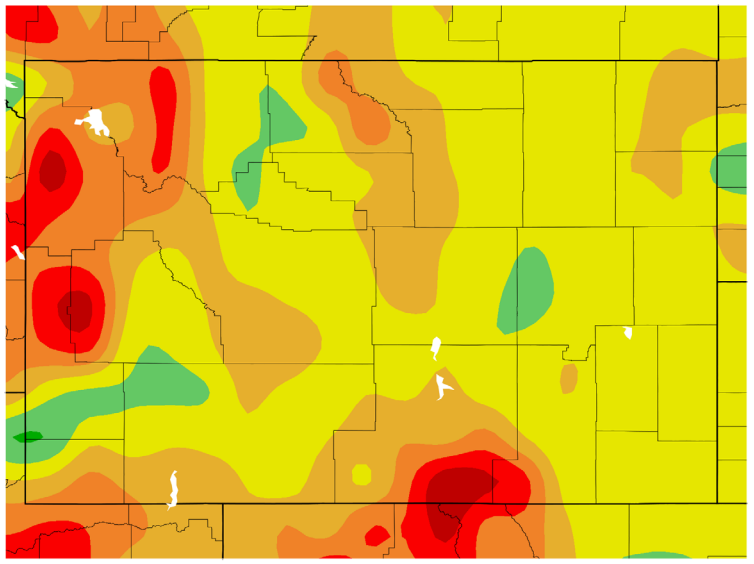
April - July 2026 Inflow Forecast (kaf)		
April - July Volume		700
Percent of Average		56
Water Year	**Historical Inflow**	**Rank**
2025	715	20
2024	1,135	15
2023	2,000	4
2022	990	19
30 Year Average	1,250	

Climate Departure from Normal

January 1 through January 31, 2025

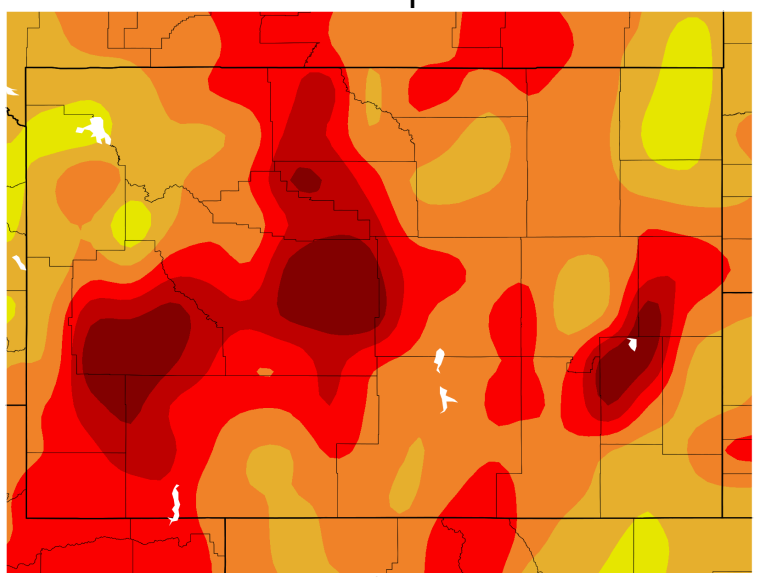
Precipitation

Departure from Normal (inches)



Departure from Normal (°F)

Temperature



HPRCC using provisional data from NOAA Regional Climate Centers

CLIMATE SUMMARY

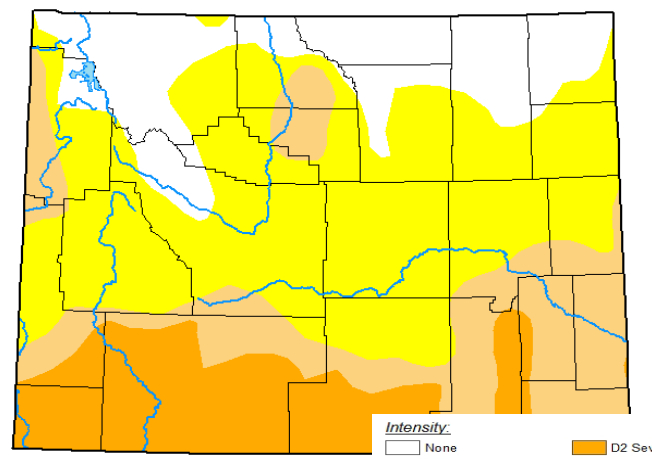
Precipitation in the Bighorn River basin above Yellowtail Dam was mostly below average in January while the average temperature was above average.

Based on the climate outlook for February, there is a 33-40% chance that precipitation will be below average for the upper part of the basin. There is an equal chance that precipictation will be above, below, or near average in the lower part of the basin. There is an equal chance that temperature will be above, below, or near average in the basin.

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

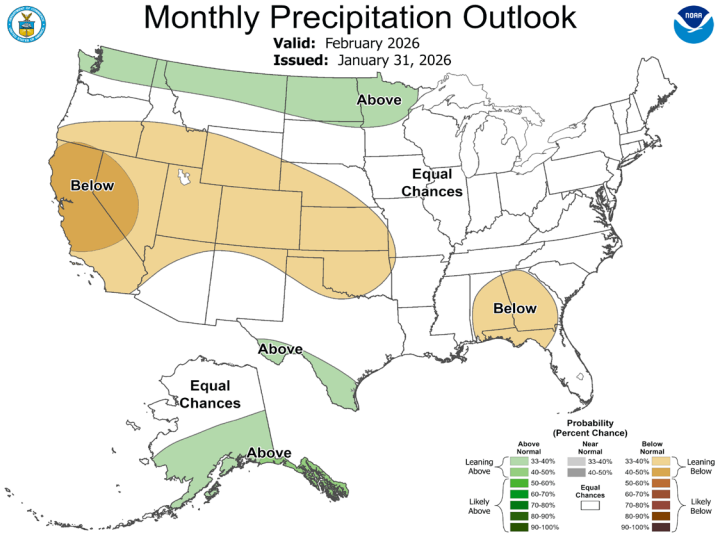
Wyoming Drought Monitor Map

January 27, 2026

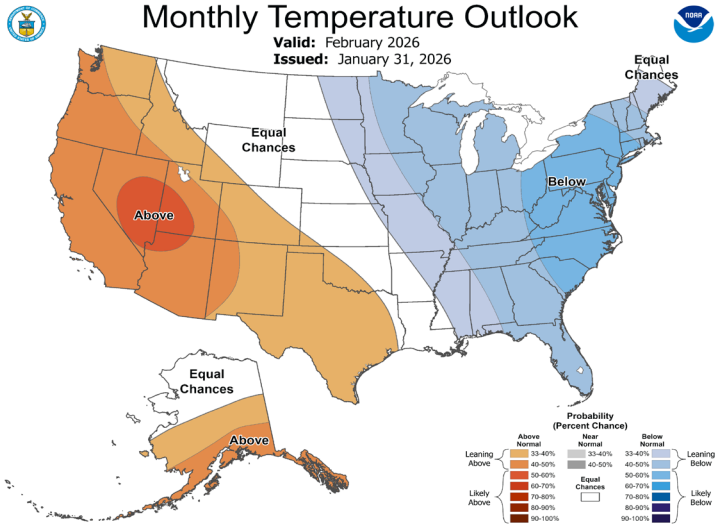


February Climate Outlook

Precipitation



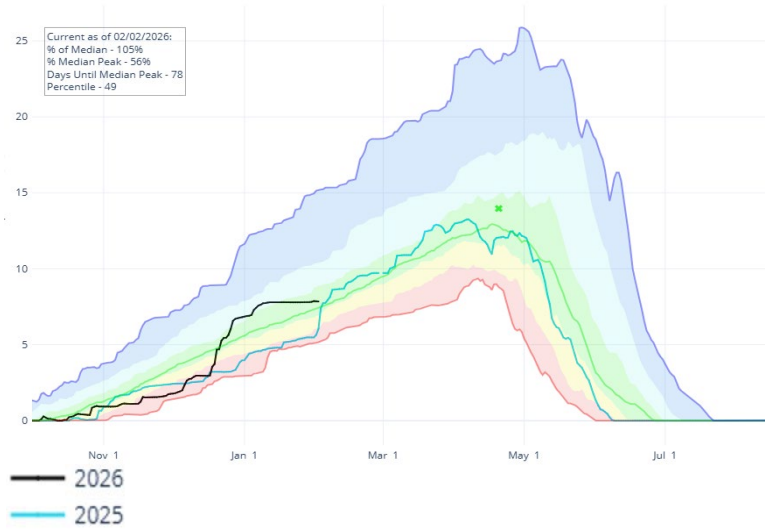
Temperature

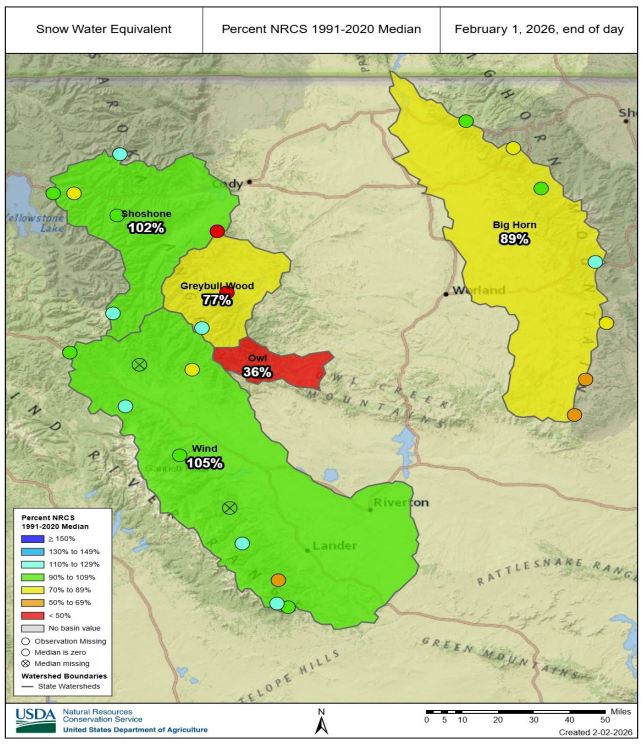


SNOWPACK SUMMARY

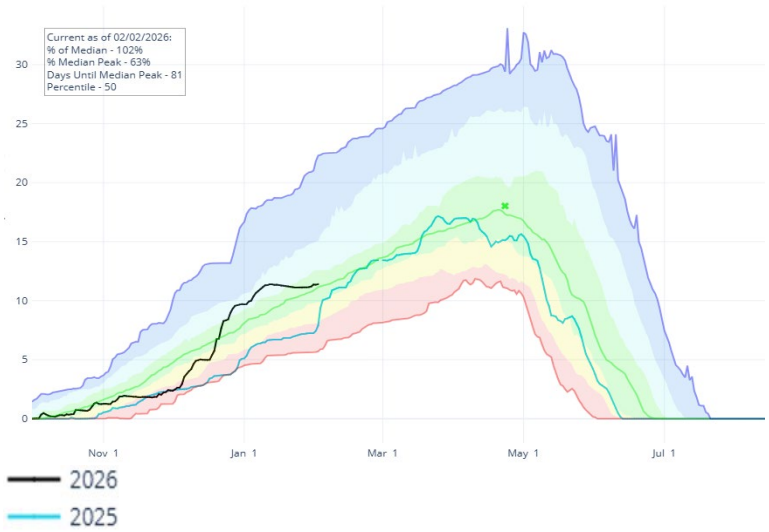
The snow water equivalent (SWE) graphs are a composite of SNOTEL sites within the Bighorn River Basin managed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Wind River

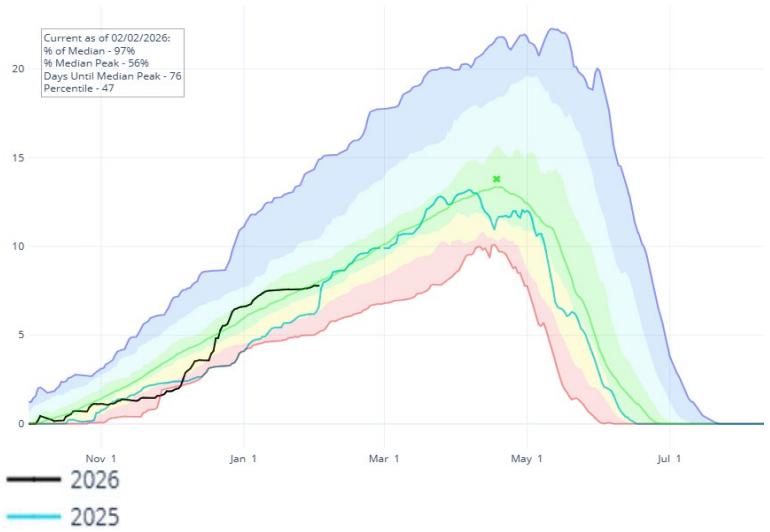




Shoshone River

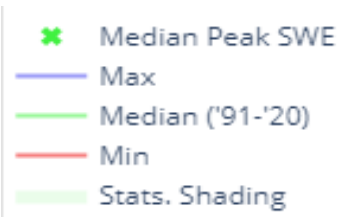


Bighorn River



NRCS Montana Snow Survey Website: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mt/snow/

Statistical shading breaks at 10th, 30th,50th, 70th, and 90th Percentiles
Normal ('91-'20) – Official median calculated from 1991-2020 data
Normal (POR) – Unofficial mean calculated from Period of Record data

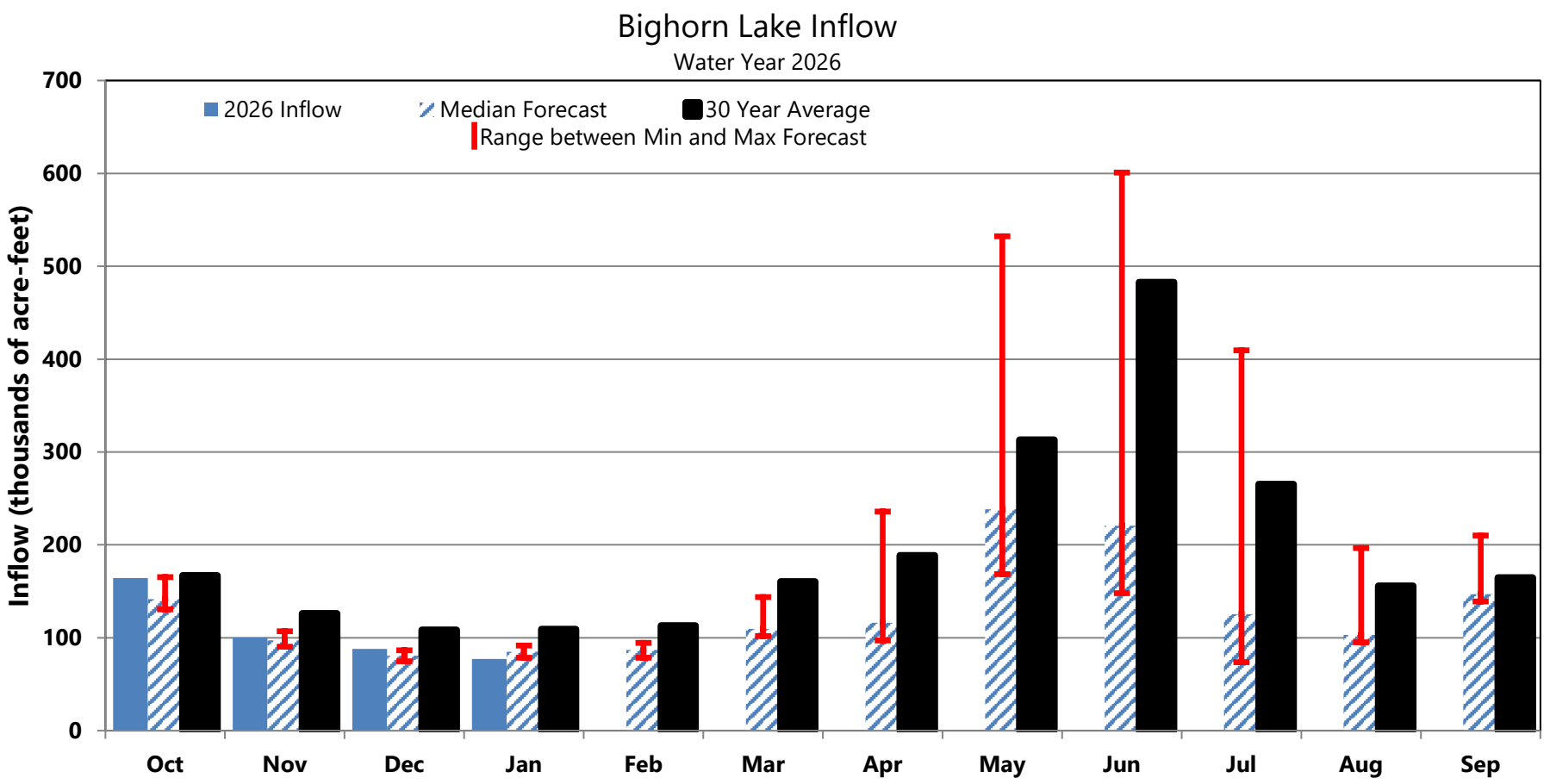


FORECAST SUMMARY

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 January inflows were less than the minimum inflow forecast. The April through July inflow forecast for February 1 is below the minimum fill volume.

January Forecast Review

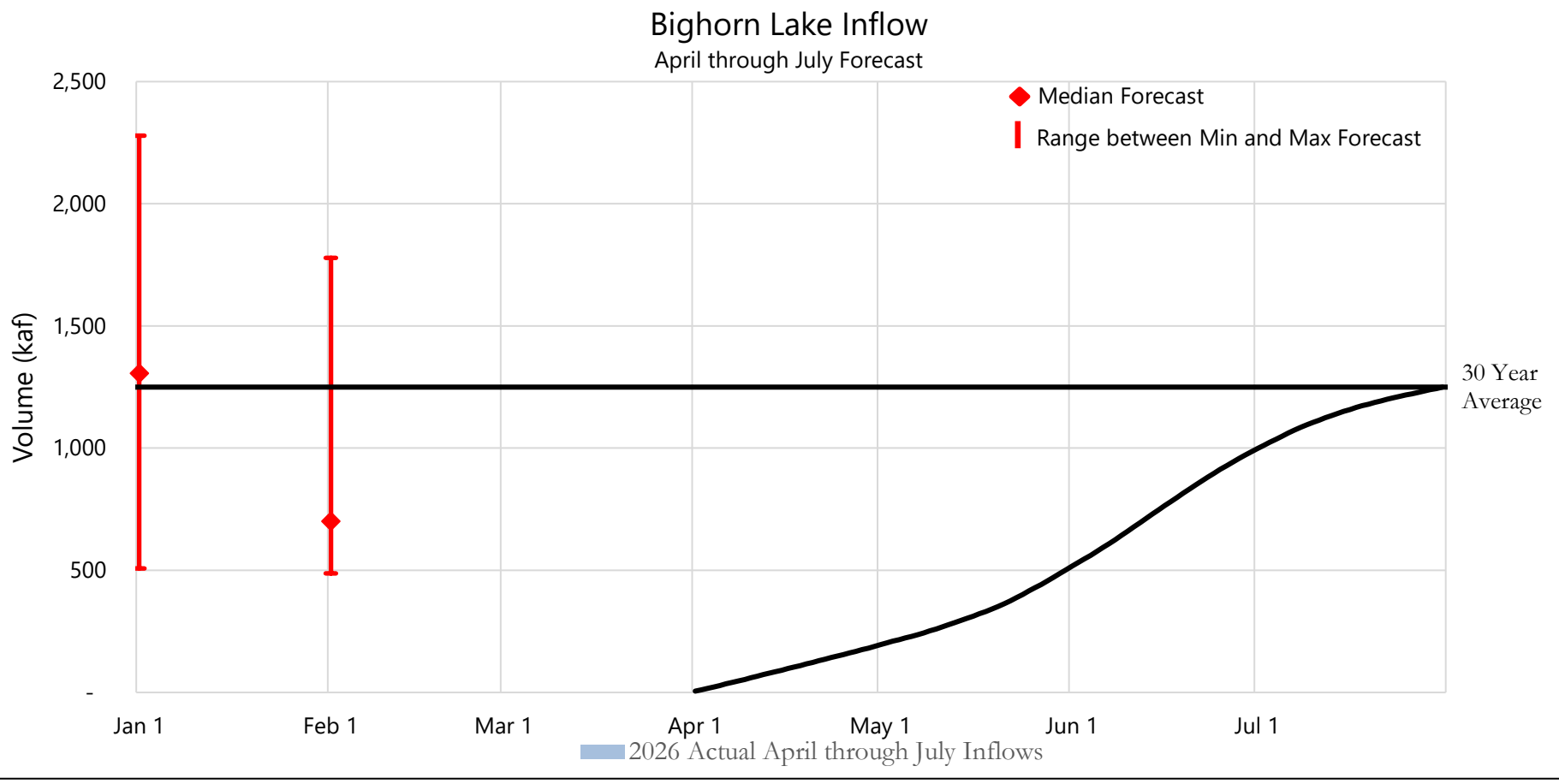
	Median Forecast (kaf)	Actual (kaf)	Difference (kaf)	Actual (% of Avg)
January Inflow	85.0	77.2	(7.8)	71



April through July Inflow Forecast for February 1

	Median Forecast (kaf)	% of Average	Minimum Forecast (kaf)	Maximum Forecast (kaf)
April through July Inflow	700	56	487	1,779

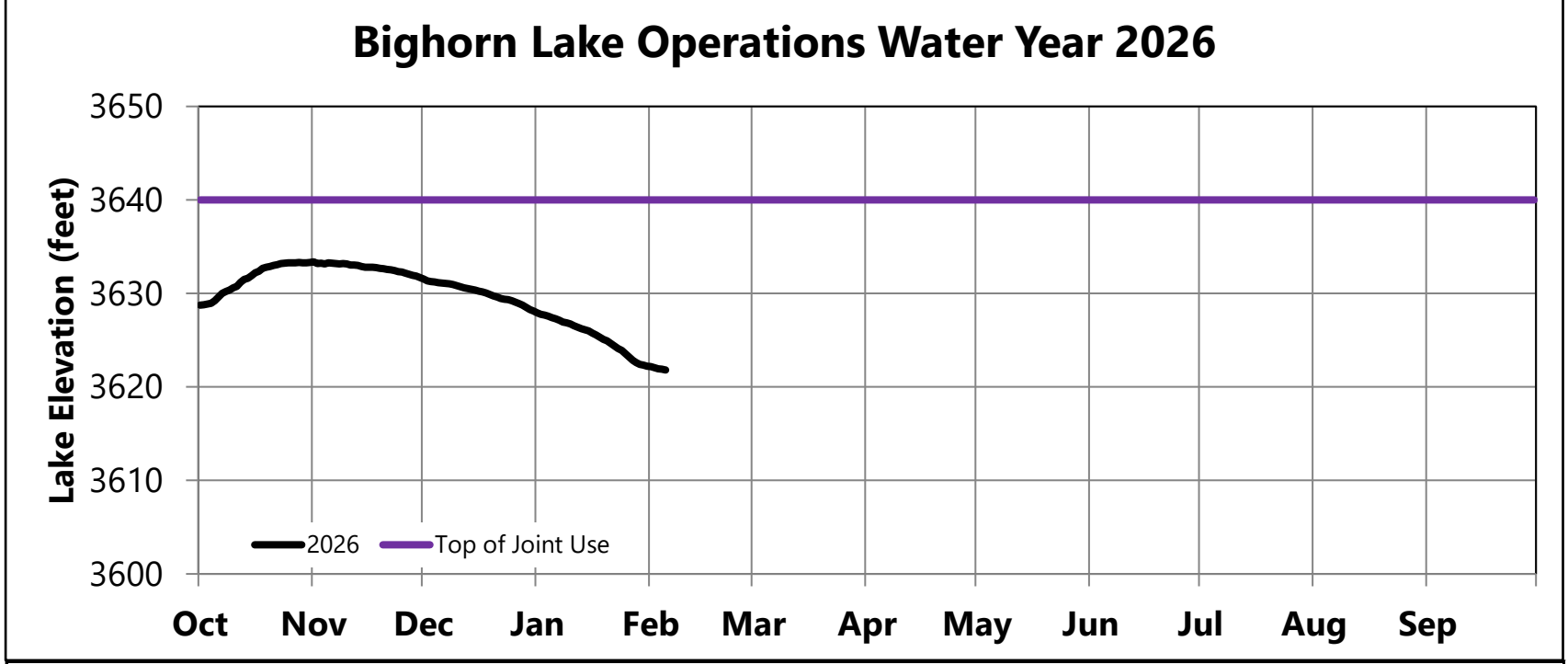
Historic Maximum (2017)	2,953 kaf	**Historic Minimum (2004)**	392 kaf	**Average**	1,250



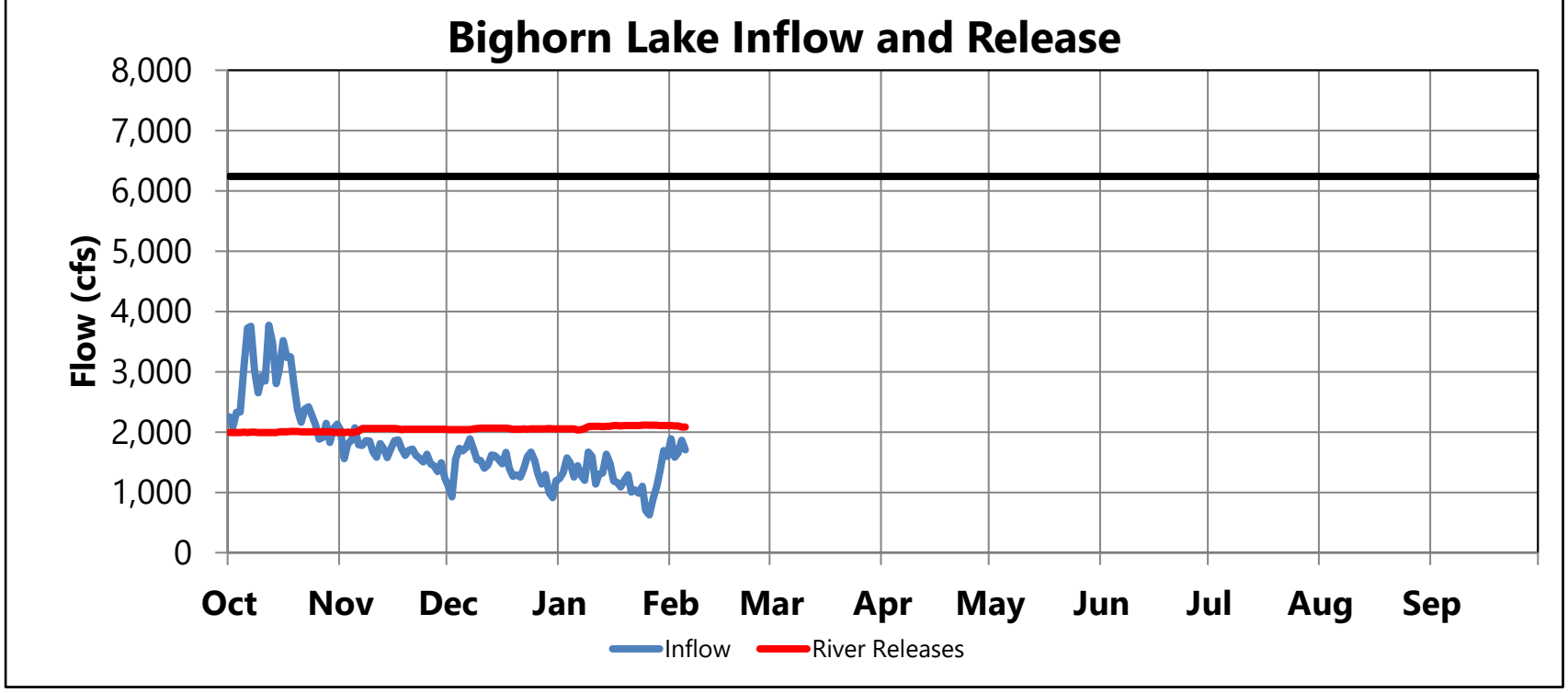
OPERATIONS REVIEW (October 1, 2025 through January 31, 2026)

Releases to the Bighorn River were increased to 2,110 cfs during January based on winter release criteria. The elevation of Bighorn Lake decreased by 5.9 feet during January.

February 1 Storage Conditions	Elevation feet	Storage acre-feet	Percent of Average	Percent Full
Bighorn Lake	3622.2	832,158	102	82
Buffalo Bill	5358.7	391,857	89	61
Boysen	4711.9	519,662	94	70



Average January Inflow	Monthly Avg cfs	Percent of Average	Average January Release	Monthly Avg cfs	Percent of Average
Bighorn Lake	1,255	71	**Bighorn River**	2,090	84
Buffalo Bill	295	116	**Buffalo Bill Total Release**	160	56
Boysen	575	93	**Boysen Release**	600	77



OPERATIONS OUTLOOK (February 1, 2026 through July 31, 2026)

Winter releases to the Bighorn River were set in early November at 2,050 cfs. 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. Releases will be decreased to 2,040 cfs during February based on January inflows being less than forecasted.

Median Inflow Conditions (April through July Inflow: 700 kaf)

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Boysen Release (cfs)	600	600	1,000	1,099	1,539	1,351
Buffalo Bill Release (cfs)	153	153	717	2,782	2,615	2,588
Tributary Gain (cfs)	808	1,028	232	-2	-449	-1,901
Monthly Inflow (cfs)	1,562	1,781	1,949	3,879	3,705	2,038
Monthly Inflow (kaf)	86.7	109.5	116.0	238.5	220.5	125.3
Monthly Release (kaf)	114.4	123.0	125.0	144.5	142.8	150.6
Afterbay Release (cfs)	2,060	2,000	2,100	2,350	2,400	2,450
River Release (cfs)	2,060	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
End-of-Month Content (kaf)	808.4	799.2	794.4	892.7	974.5	953.5
End-of-Month Elevation (feet)	3618.8	3617.4	3616.6	3629.6	3637.2	3635.4

Minimum Inflow Conditions (April through July Inflow: 487 kaf)

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Boysen Release (cfs)	600	600	701	1,025	1,200	1,150
Buffalo Bill Release (cfs)	153	153	717	1,762	1,864	1,989
Tributary Gain (cfs)	661	903	213	-47	-576	-1,940
Monthly Inflow (cfs)	1,414	1,656	1,631	2,740	2,487	1,199
Monthly Inflow (kaf)	78.5	101.8	97.1	168.5	148.0	73.7
Monthly Release (kaf)	114.4	102.1	107.7	126.7	125.6	129.7
Afterbay Release (cfs)	2,060	1,660	1,810	2,060	2,110	2,110
River Release (cfs)	2,060	1,660	1,660	1,660	1,660	1,660
End-of-Month Content (kaf)	800.2	804.2	797.7	843.8	870.5	818.7
End-of-Month Elevation (feet)	3617.5	3618.1	3617.1	3623.8	3627.1	3620.3

Maximum Inflow Conditions (April through July Inflow: 1,779 kaf)

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Boysen Release (cfs)	600	1,000	1,501	3,300	3,454	3,246
Buffalo Bill Release (cfs)	153	153	1,880	4,501	4,602	4,557
Tributary Gain (cfs)	949	1,186	583	855	2,044	-1,143
Monthly Inflow (cfs)	1,702	2,339	3,965	8,657	10,099	6,660
Monthly Inflow (kaf)	94.5	143.8	235.9	532.3	600.9	409.5
Monthly Release (kaf)	114.4	187.2	269.6	538.6	385.7	367.7
Afterbay Release (cfs)	2,060	3,044	4,531	8,760	6,483	5,980
River Release (cfs)	2,060	3,044	4,531	8,560	6,183	5,530
End-of-Month Content (kaf)	816.2	777.1	747.6	745.5	964.9	1,011.0
End-of-Month Elevation (feet)	3619.9	3613.8	3608.6	3608.2	3636.4	3640.0

OPERATIONS OUTLOOK (February 1, 2026 through July 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)

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Median Forecast	0	0	100	350	400	450
Minimum Forecast	0	0	150	400	450	450
Maximum Forecast	0	0	0	200	300	450

Power Generation Outlook

Current Number of Units Available: 3 of 4
Approximate Yellowtail Powerplant Turbine Capacity: 6,150 cfs
Approximate Yellowtail Powerplant Scheduled Generation Limit: 4,160 cfs

Yellowtail Powerplant Release (cfs)

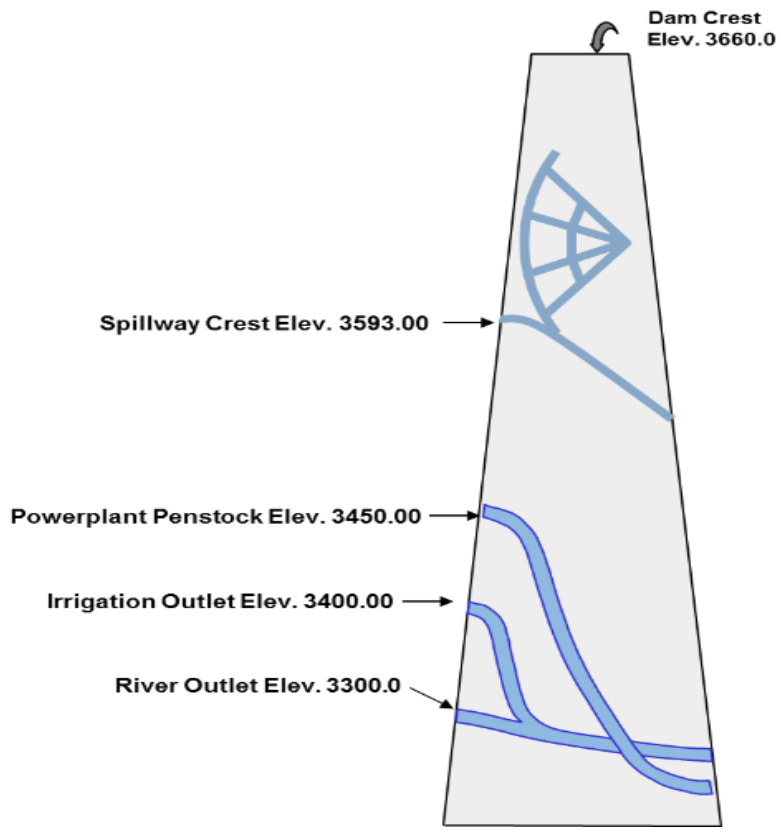
	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Median Forecast	1,990	1,930	2,030	2,280	2,330	2,380
Minimum Forecast	1,990	1,590	1,740	1,990	2,040	2,040
Maximum Forecast	1,990	2,974	4,461	6,210	6,240	5,628

Yellowtail Powerplant Generation (gwh)

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Median Forecast	41	44	44	51	51	54
Minimum Forecast	41	36	38	45	45	46
Maximum Forecast	41	67	97	140	136	127

Yellowtail Spill (cfs)

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Median Forecast	0	0	0	0	0	0
Minimum Forecast	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum Forecast	0	0	0	2,480	173	282

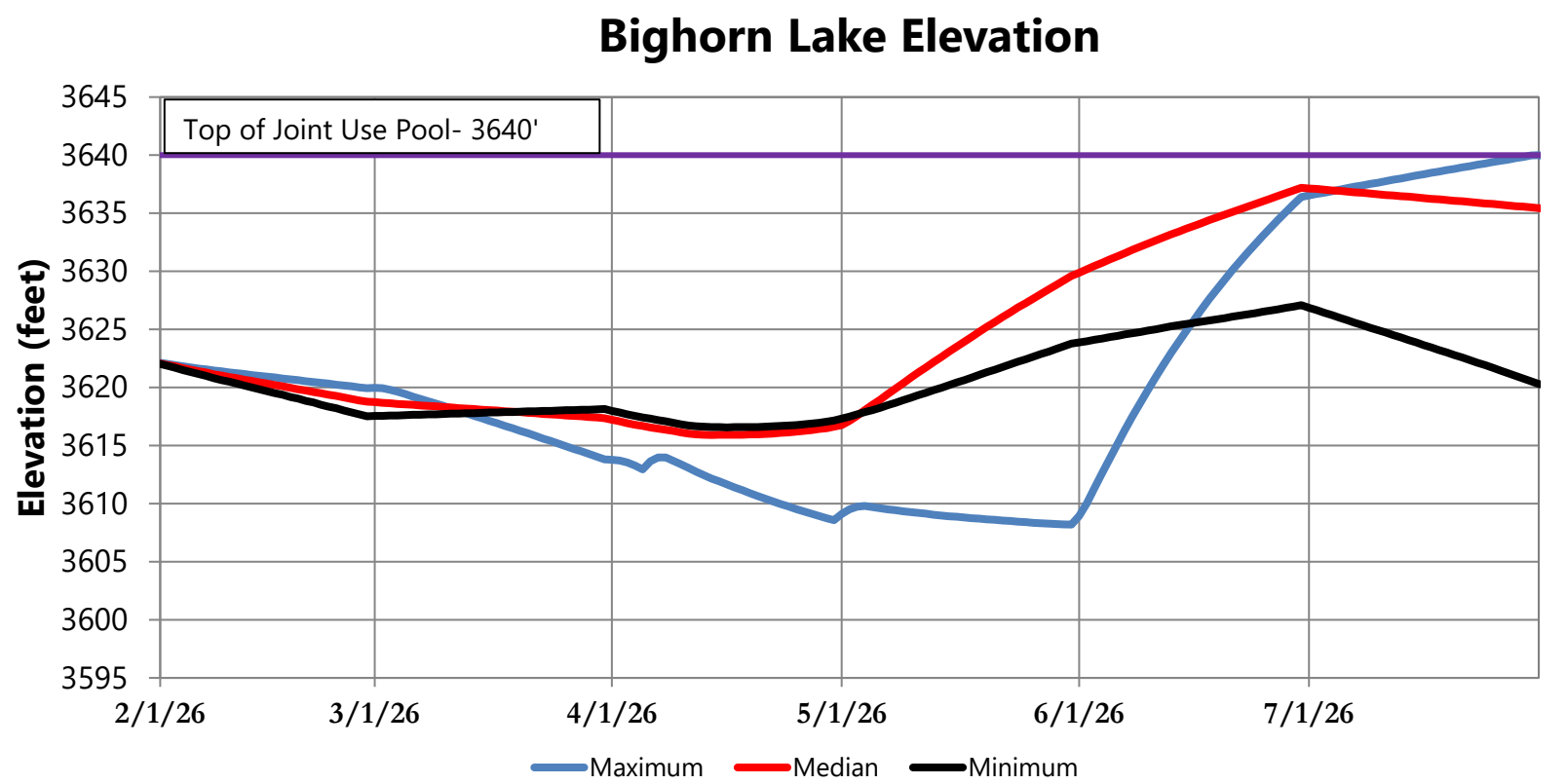


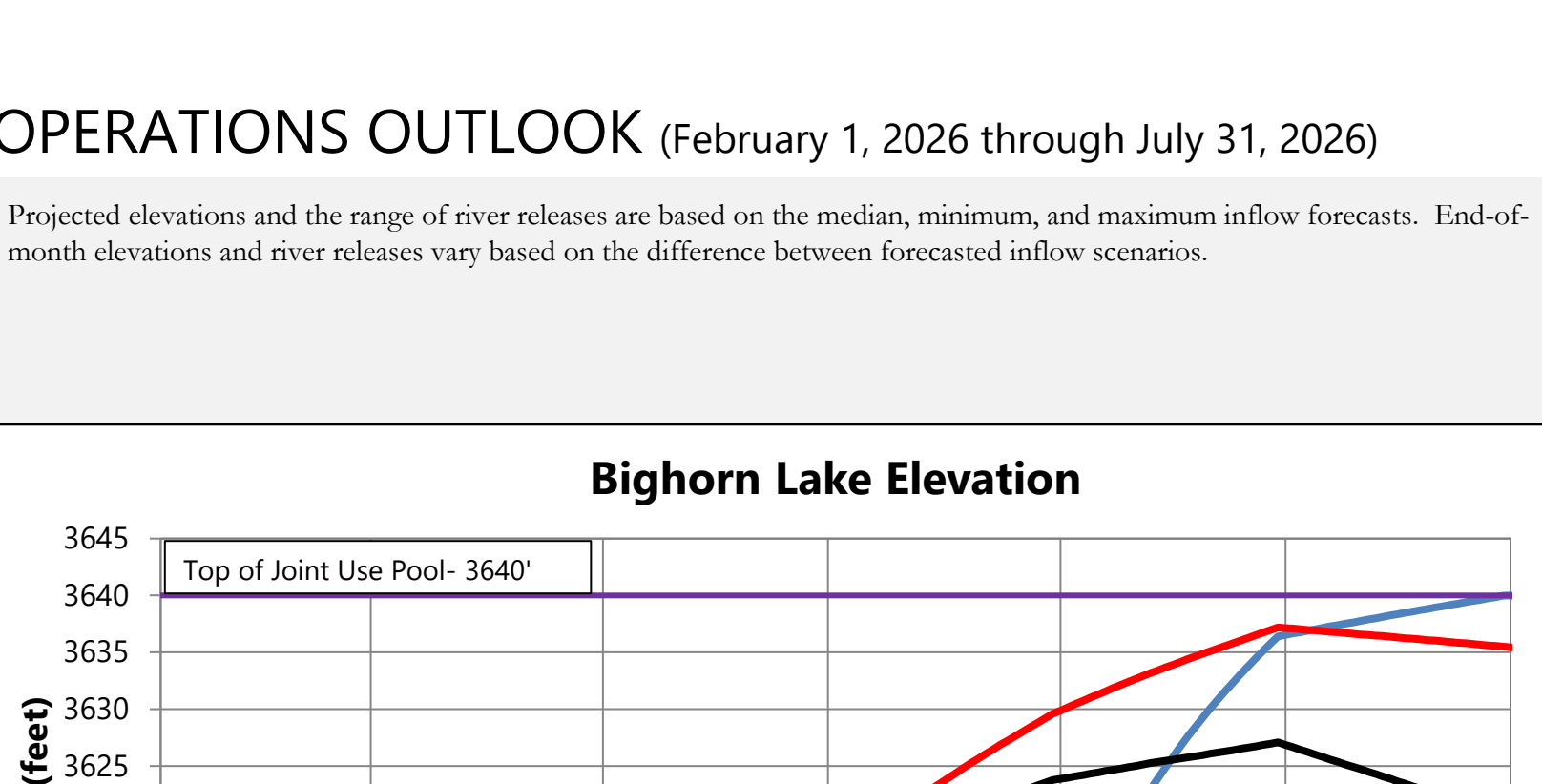
Release Outlook by Outlet

Yellowtail Powerplant bypass releases are expected in May through July under maximum inflow conditions.

OPERATIONS OUTLOOK (February 1, 2026 through July 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