

Columbia Basin Region Advisory Committee meeting

April 1, 2026

Flood Risk Operating Plan (member questions)

Below are answers provided by BC Hydro to questions raised by CBRAC members during the webinar.

1. How do you feel about current monitoring of snowpacks? Do we need to do something else? Do we need to start monitoring at low elevations?

BC Hydro uses an integrated system of snowpack stations and other weather stations to help with forecasting. The existing system is distributed across many different locations and altitudes, including “low elevations” providing timely information for inflow volume forecasting. The system and associated forecasting accuracy is reviewed periodically and, at this time, maintenance of the existing system remains a priority.

2. Over the last 4 years flood control hasn't been an issue, so can you explain the requirement to draft Arrow so low?

The level in Arrow (rising and falling) is determined by the obligations for releases under the Columbia River Treaty and upstream, offsetting discharges from Kinbasket. The last few years have been particularly dry in BC but also dry in the U.S.. Under the CRT, when the US is dry then Canada is obliged to release additional water to supplement US generation. This is known as proportional draft and the Columbia system has been in deep proportional draft the last three years. The calculation that determines the amount of additional water is objective and is based on the inflows at 84 hydro plants in Canada and the U.S. The lower levels in Arrow were not associated with system FRM requirements.

In addition, Mica generation has been low in summer and fall of the past three years in order to save water for serving load in the winter. This has further lowered Arrow elevation during this period.

3. Are we to expect that these consistent low levels on Arrow are the new normal?

No. The province and the Pacific Northwest experienced unusually below average inflows between 2023 and 2025. Operations at Arrow (and many other BC Hydro reservoirs) reflected these dry conditions. This is not the first time we have seen consecutive years of low inflows. The extended dry sequence in the 1940's remains the most severe on record. It should be noted that the recent sequence of dry years is not representative of overall climate change nor should we expect it to become the new norm. Our snowpack for this spring 2026, is an example of how quickly conditions can change, for example.

4. Arrow is “low” for this time of year (April). Is it about proportional drafting requirements in critical rule curve for U.S. power requirements?

As of mid-April, Arrow was about 5 feet below average for this time of year but is expected to start tracking to average or above average conditions with the start of freshet. It’s also worth noting that that levels at Arrow, at any given time, are not just a result of Columbia River Treaty discharge requirements. It’s the balance between CRT discharges and offsetting local inflows and upstream discharges from Kinbasket Reservoir. For this past winter and early spring, discharges from Arrow (primarily governed by power objectives, not flood risk management) were generally more than local inflows and Kinbasket discharges resulting in below average winter levels at Arrow. In particular, Kinbasket discharges were less because we were retaining storage for late winter or early spring generation while also balancing generation and demand across the rest of the system.

5. If FROP continues until a modernized treaty, is there any room for ecological restoration in this new plan or is it business as usual with a few minor tweaks. Heard flexibility could be used outside FRM and power generation?

FROP is for flood risk management objectives in Canada and U.S. and not designed for ecological objectives. Flood risk management as well as further flexibility to support ecological considerations are both included as objectives as part of the modernized treaty, which has not been finalized.

6. If you anticipate spilling water from Kinbasket in the summer, why isn't some of the water being evacuated [from Kinbasket] to Arrow now to improve dust control, erosion, etc?

Water is being released from Kinbasket this spring. The volume of water from Kinbasket and local inflow is greater than Arrow discharges required under the treaty, so Arrow has been and will continue to rise this spring.