ASPINALL UNIT OPERATIONS
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Background Material

January 2004

Morrow Point Reservoir of the Aspinall Unit, Montrose County, Colorado

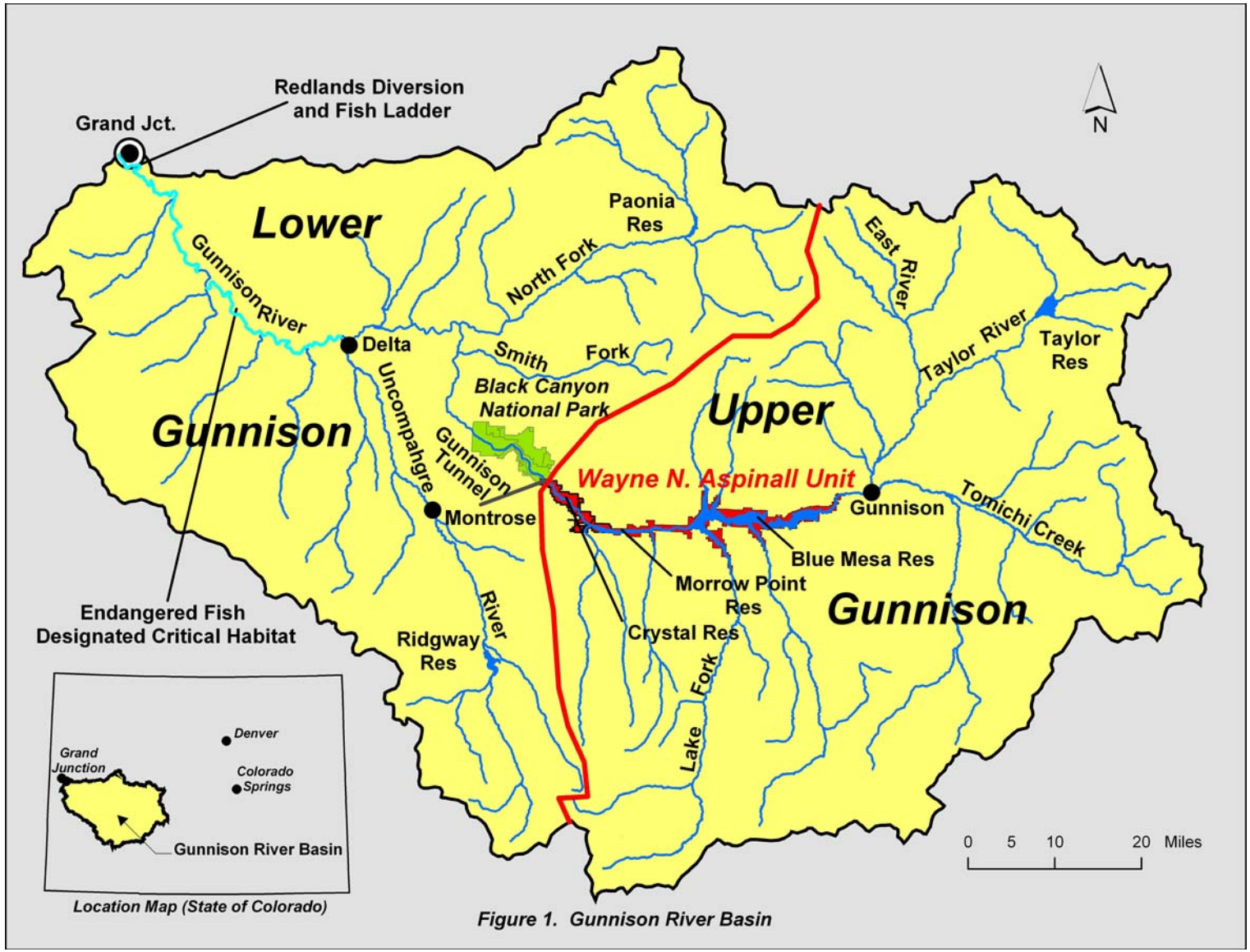


Figure 1. Gunnison River Basin

INTRODUCTION

General

The Bureau of Reclamation is initiating work on the Aspinall Unit Operations Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which will describe effects of operation changes for the Aspinall Unit related to compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The EIS will describe the environmental effects of alternative operations of the Unit to help meet endangered fish Flow Recommendations for the Gunnison River downstream from Delta, Colorado. The EIS will be referred to as the "Aspinall Unit Operations EIS."

The Wayne N. Aspinall Unit (Unit) -- which includes Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal Dams, Powerplants, Reservoirs and associated facilities -- is located in western Colorado. The Unit was authorized by the Colorado River Storage Project Act of 1956 along with Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and the Navajo Unit. The authorization calls for meeting a variety of purposes including:

- regulating the flow of the Colorado River;
- storing water for beneficial consumptive use;
- providing for the reclamation of arid and semi-arid land;
- providing for the generation of hydroelectric power;
- providing for fish and wildlife enhancement and public recreation;
- providing for the control of floods; and
- allowing the Upper Basin states to develop Colorado River Compact apportioned waters.

Various other authorities, contracts, and documents also relate to the Unit.

Flow Recommendations have been developed through the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program), a cooperative partnership created to recover endangered fish in the mainstem of the Colorado River and its tributaries, including the Gunnison River. The Recovery Program has prepared the Flow Recommendations to describe the annual and seasonal patterns of flow in the Gunnison River, and in the Colorado River downstream from their confluence, identified as needed to help recover the fish.

Environmental Impact Statement

The EIS will be prepared under the authority of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA is our basic national charter for protection of the environment and is designed to help make better decisions. NEPA procedures are designed to insure environmental information is available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made. During the EIS process a range of reasonable alternatives and their environmental impacts are developed and ultimately a recommended plan is selected. Public information and involvement are stressed during the process. A draft and final

EIS will be prepared; and following completion of the final EIS, a Record of Decision will be signed that states the agency decision.

The Proposed Federal Action

The initial definition of the proposed action is to develop operating guidance and criteria to implement reservoir operation changes to assist in meeting Flow Recommendations for the Gunnison and Colorado Rivers while maintaining the authorized purposes of the Aspinall Unit.

The need for the proposed action is defined as follows: Guidance and criteria are needed to operate the Unit to avoid jeopardy to endangered fish species while complying with the Unit's authorized purposes. The need sets the overall focus of the EIS process and is the ultimate requirement that all alternatives must satisfy. The underlying need associated with the proposed action is based on legal obligations to maintain the authorized purposes of the Aspinall Unit as well as to comply with the ESA.

There are a group of purposes and desired goals that will be addressed in alternatives. The following purposes and goals of the proposed actions are recognized:

- Assist the National Park Service in protecting resources of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park (Black Canyon)
- Help the state of Colorado protect/use its compact entitlement
- Operate alternatives within State water law
- Satisfy as many needs as possible with same water releases
- Protect recreation at Unit reservoirs and in the Gunnison Gorge and Lower Gunnison River
- Protect tailwater and reservoir fisheries
- Provide needed hydropower flexibility
- Provide flood control
- Provide for public input and public information concerning operations of the Unit
- Allow for adaptive management as new scientific data becomes available through monitoring of endangered fish responses

The degree to which alternatives meet identified purposes provides decision makers guidance in selecting alternatives for detailed study and ultimately for selection of a recommended plan.

BACKGROUND

Authorizations

The Colorado River Storage Project Act of April 11, 1956 authorized the Aspinall Unit:

> "In order to initiate the comprehensive development of the water resources of the Upper Colorado River Basin, for purposes, among others, of regulating the flow of the Colorado River, storing water for the beneficial consumptive use, making it possible for the states of the Upper Basin to utilize, consistently with the provisions of the Colorado River Compact, the apportionments made to and among them in the Colorado River Compact and the Upper Colorado River Basin Compact, respectively, providing for the reclamation of arid and semiarid land, for the control of floods, and for the generation of hydroelectric power, as an incident to the foregoing purposes."

In 1968, Congress enacted the Colorado River Basin Project Act which provided a program for further comprehensive development of the Colorado River Basin water resources for:

> "…the purposes, among others, of regulating the flow of the Colorado River; controlling floods; improving navigation; providing for the storage and delivery of the waters of the Colorado River for reclamation of lands, including supplemental water supplies, and for municipal, industrial, and other beneficial purposes; improving water quality; providing for basic public outdoor recreation facilities; improving conditions for fish and wildlife, and the generation and sale of electrical power as an incident of the foregoing purposes."

In addition, the Criteria for Coordinated Long-Range Operation of Colorado River Reservoirs (including the Aspinall Unit) were mandated by the Colorado Basin Project Act which requires that the Annual Operating Plan for Colorado River reservoirs:

> "…reflect appropriate consideration of the uses of the reservoirs for all purposes, including flood control, river regulation, beneficial consumptive uses, power production, water quality control, recreation, enhancement of fish and wildlife, and other environmental factors."

The purposes for which the Unit are operated and laws authorizing those purposes are summarized in Table 1.

Construction and Operations

The Aspinall Unit was constructed between 1963 and 1977 and consists of a series of three dams and reservoirs-Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal- along a 40-mile reach of the Gunnison River. Table 2 summarizes statistics on the Unit facilities.

Table 1. Authorized Purposes of the Aspinall Unit and Enabling Legislation

PURPOSE	LAW
Municipal, Industrial and Miscellaneous	1939 Reclamation Project Act (P.L. 76-260) & the1956 Colorado River Storage Act (CRSP--P.L. 84-485) & the 1968 Colorado River Basin Project Act (CRBP--P.L. 90-537)
Flood Control	1939 Reclamation Project Act & 1956 CRSP Act & the1968 CRBP Act
Improving Navigation	1939 Reclamation Project Act & 1956 CRSP Act & the1968 CRBP Act
Regulating the flow of the Colorado River	1956 CRSP Act & the 1968 CRBP Act
Reclamation of Arid Lands	1956 CRSP Act
Generation and Sale of Electric Power	1956 CRSP Act & the 1968 CRBP Act
Fish and Wildlife	Section 8 of the 1956 CRSP Act; 1965 Federal Water Project Recreation Act (P.L. 89-72); and the 1958 Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (P.L. 85-624) & the 1968 CRBP Act
Recreation	1965 Federal Water Project Recreation Act (P.L. 89-72) & the 1968 CRBP Act
Improving Water Quality	1974 Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act (P.L. 93-320 & the 1968 CRBP Act

Table 2. Aspinall Unit Statistics

	Blue Mesa	Morrow Point	Crystal
Capacities (acre-feet)			
Dead storage	111,200	165	7,700
Inactive storage	81,070	74,905	4,650
Active storage	748,430	42,120	12,890
Live* storage	829,500	117,025	17,540
Total storage	940,700	117,190	25,240
Elevation range (ft)			
Dead storage	7186-7358	6747-6808	6547-6670
Inactive storage	7358-7393	6808-7100	6670-6700
Active storage	7393-7519.4	7100-7160	6700-6755
Total storage	7186-7519.4	6747-7160	6547-6755
Outlet capacities (cubic feet-per-second [cfs])			
Power plants (max)	2,600-3,400	5,000	2,100
Bypass	4,000-5,100	1,500	1,900-2,100
Combined (max)	6,000	6,500	4,000
Spillway	34,000	41,000	41,350

*Live storage is the combination of the active and inactive storage. It represents storage that physically could be released from the reservoir

Primary water storage occurs in the uppermost and largest reservoir, Blue Mesa. Powerplants at Blue Mesa and Morrow Point are operated on a peaking basis (high flexibility in release rates), while the dam and powerplant at Crystal are operated to regulate downstream flows. Water can be released from the reservoirs through the powerplants and/or river outlets. Spillway use is limited to periods when the reservoirs are full.

Reclamation manages water at the Unit within certain sideboards that include annual snowpack conditions, senior water rights, minimum downstream flow requirements, powerplant and outlet capacities, reservoir elevation goals, fishery management recommendations, dam safety considerations, and others. Certain sideboards can be considered mandates such as honoring senior water rights and flood control, while others such as reservoir elevation criteria to reduce landslides are given a high priority. To conserve water for later use, an operational goal is to fill Blue Mesa by the end of July. Another operational goal is to draw Blue Mesa down to an elevation of 7,490 by December 31 to provide space for the next spring's runoff and to avoid ice damage upstream. In general, operation of the Unit has changed the natural river flow pattern by reducing downstream spring peak flows and increasing flows during the remainder of the year.

Hydropower

The five generators at the three dams of the Unit are capable of generating up to 283 megawatts of electricity. Morrow Point is the real powerhouse of the Unit—its generators produce twice as much electricity as those at Blue Mesa. The Western Area Power Administration markets electricity generated by the Unit in conjunction with power from Glen Canyon and Flaming Gorge Dams and other plants of the Colorado River Storage Project as part of an integrated system that provides electricity to all states of the Colorado River Basin. Power revenues are used to offset costs of developing, operating, and maintaining other Colorado River Storage Project features. The upstream powerplants of the Unit (Blue Mesa and Morrow Point) are critical in that they can be operated to provide peaking power. Crystal Reservoir then serves as a regulation reservoir to stabilize flows to the Gunnison River. Peaking operations help the Western Area Power Administration meet demands for electricity that change on an hourly, daily, and weekly basis. The flexibility offered by the three dams of the Unit is very important for meeting peaking, automation generation control, and reserve sharing obligations of CRSP.

Fish, Wildlife, and Recreation

Public recreation use of Aspinall Unit lands and water are managed by the National Park Service as the Curecanti National Recreation Area. Blue Mesa Reservoir supports over 1,000,000 recreation visitor days per year. Fishing, boating, and camping are primary recreation uses.

When operation of Blue Mesa Dam began in 1966, minimum downstream flows of 100 cubic feet-per-second (cfs) were called for, primarily to support downstream water rights and a downstream fishery. With the construction of Crystal Dam in 1976, this minimum was increased to 200 cfs. In 1985, based on results of studies to protect the Gold Medal trout fishery, Reclamation, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board worked to increase minimum flows to 300 cfs.

Approximately 3 miles downstream from Crystal Dam, the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park begins and stretches 14 miles along the Gunnison River. Downstream from the National Park, lands are administered by the Bureau of Land Management as the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area.

The downstream 30-mile reach of river includes designated Wilderness, an eligible Wild and Scenic River, and a Gold Medal fishery.

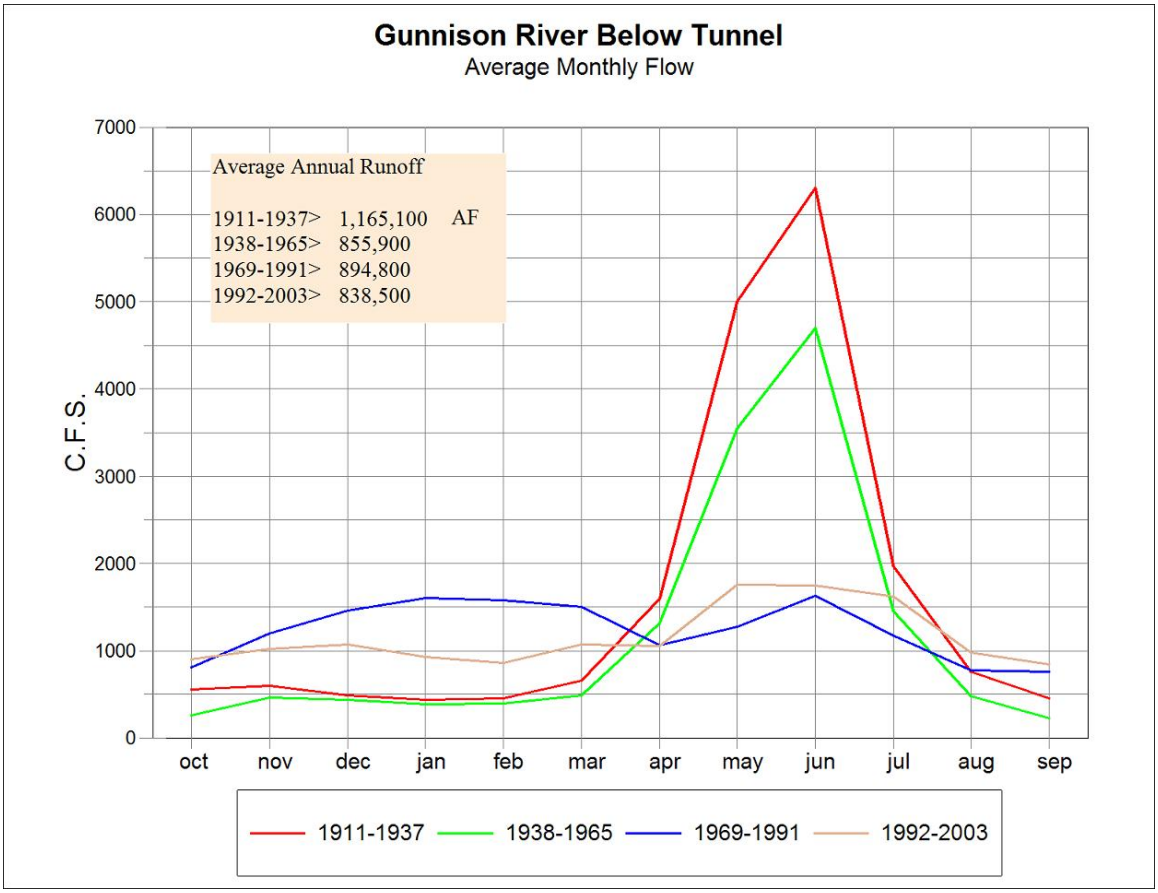
Recommendations under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act were adopted to mitigate losses of big game and fishery habitat associated with inundation by the Unit reservoirs. Reclamation has completed acquisition and development of wildlife areas—Cimarron State Wildlife Area, Gunnison State Wildlife Area, and portions of the Billy Creek State Wildlife Area—and has acquired public fishing access in the Gunnison Gorge and on streams upstream and downstream of the Unit. The fish and wildlife areas are managed by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the Bureau of Land Management, and/or the city of Gunnison.

Hydrology

The Gunnison River originates where the East and Taylor Rivers join at Almont, Colorado, in Gunnison County. From that point, the river flows 25 miles to Blue Mesa Reservoir and on through Morrow Point and Crystal Reservoirs. From Crystal Reservoir, it flows approximately two miles to the Gunnison Tunnel. From the Gunnison Tunnel, the river flows for 29 miles to the confluence with the North Fork. It then travels 75 miles to its confluence with the Colorado River at Grand Junction, Colorado.

The area of the watershed that flows into the Aspinall Unit is approximately 4,000 square miles. At the United States Geological Survey gage downstream from the Gunnison Tunnel, historical average monthly flows have been 1,320 cfs and daily flow extremes have ranged from a few days of no flows to 19,000 cfs. Another important measurement point on the river is the Whitewater gage, eight miles upstream from the Colorado River confluence. At this point the drainage area is roughly 8,000 square miles; average monthly flows are approximately 2,600 cfs, and historic extremes have ranged from 106 cfs to over 35,000 cfs.

The Aspinall Unit allows water to be stored during spring runoff and released when needed to meet downstream needs. The following hydrograph shows how Unit operation has influenced average monthly streamflows downstream of the Unit. Unit regulation



since 1969 has reduced Gunnison River flows during spring runoff and increased flows during the non-runoff months.

Even with regulation, however, flows vary with the amount of snowfall. For example, annual flows through the Black Canyon averaged 396 cfs during 1977 and 2,943 cfs during 1984. Long-term changes in climatic conditions explain some of the post- versus pre-Aspinall differences (overall, the 1992-2003 period appears drier than the other periods), but changes in the seasonal distribution of flows depicted by the hydrographs are due mostly to reservoir storage patterns.

Flood Control

Unit operations provide flood control benefits, both upstream and downstream of the reservoirs. One of the operational sideboards for high water years is to reduce flooding through the Delta area during spring runoff. Coordination of the Aspinall Unit and Taylor Park operations reduce upstream flooding. During the winter months, Blue Mesa Reservoir is drawn down approximately 30 feet (7490 feet elevation) to help reduce problems with ice jams and winter flooding upstream from the reservoir near the city of Gunnison.

Water Rights

Gunnison River Basin water use began in the 19th century with the establishment of numerous irrigation water rights by individuals, organizations, and government agencies. There are more than 5,000 water rights for direct flow diversions presently in use on the river and its tributaries. Significant senior diversion rights include the Gunnison Tunnel of the Uncompahgre Project (1,300 cfs) and the Redlands Diversion (750 cfs). A federal reserved instream flow right for the National Park that is senior to the Unit's water rights is currently being quantified.

In addition to water rights for direct diversions and instream flows, there are significant storage rights in place on the Gunnison River. The largest single perfected storage right is for Blue Mesa Reservoir. There are also numerous small reservoirs and several larger Reclamation project reservoirs on tributaries with storage rights: Taylor Park Reservoir on the Taylor River, Silver Jack Reservoir on Cimarron Creek, Crawford Reservoir on the Smith Fork, Paonia Reservoir on the North Fork, Ridgway Reservoir on the Uncompahgre, and Fruitgrowers on Alfalfa Run.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

General

The Unit was largely completed prior to passage of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Unit is located upstream from habitat of the endangered fish species; however, operation of the Unit changed the flow regime of the lower Gunnison and Colorado rivers within what is now critical habitat for endangered fish. The Gunnison River provides habitat for two of the endangered fish species, the Colorado pikeminnow and the razorback sucker. The 50 miles of river downstream from Delta, Colorado, are designated as critical habitat for these species. These and two additional endangered fish species—the humpback chub and bonytail chub—occur in the Colorado River downstream from the mouth of the Gunnison River. Operation of the Unit is important in determining the flow pattern of the Gunnison River, and to a lesser extent, the Colorado River.

ESA consultation on the operation of the Aspinall Unit was deferred pending completion of studies under the Recovery Program and completion of the Flow Recommendations.

Previous ESA consultations on Reclamation projects relate to the Unit:

- The Dallas Creek Project on the Uncompahgre River, a tributary of the Gunnison River downstream from the Unit, would deplete an average of 17,200 acre-feet annually. The reasonable and prudent alternative for the Dallas Creek Project is "…to release water from the Dallas Creek Project or from other projects that regulate flows in the Gunnison River and the Colorado River in order to replace the depletions caused by the Dallas Creek Project. This released water could

provide for essential life stages of the endangered fish. The Curecanti Project (Aspinall Unit) may be the best source of water for such releases."

- The Dolores Project on the Dolores River, a tributary of the Colorado River, would deplete an average of 131,000 acre-feet annually. The reasonable and prudent alternative in the 1980 Biological Opinion said "…it may be necessary that an equal volume be released to the Colorado River from one or more projects. This alternative would prevent the Dolores Project itself from jeopardizing the existence of the fishes of concern."

- The "Agreement for the Administration of Water Pursuant to the Subordination of Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Water Rights Within the Upper Gunnison River Basin" subordinated Aspinall Unit water rights to up to 60,000 acre-feet of upstream depletions. The Service concurred with this agreement based on two conditions: "1) The 60,000 acre-foot depletion will be consulted on during the upcoming Aspinall Unit consultation; and 2) During the interim, all new Federal actions that deplete water will be consulted on."

- Water sales have been completed or are being negotiated from Blue Mesa Reservoir. Biological opinions have been completed on these sales, identifying the Recovery Plan as the reasonable and prudent alternative. These sales total less than 1,000 acre-feet.

Upper Colorado River Recovery Implementation Program (Recovery Program)

Since 1988, the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program has worked to address upper Colorado River water issues. The Recovery Program is a partnership created to recover the endangered Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub, and bonytail while allowing for continued and future water development. The Recovery Program was initiated in 1988 when a cooperative agreement was signed by the Governors of Colorado, Utah and Wyoming; the Secretary of the Interior; and the Administrator of the Western Area Power Administration. Recovery Program partners include the Colorado River Energy Distributors Association, Colorado Water Congress, Western Resources Advocates, State of Colorado, State of Utah, State of Wyoming, The Nature Conservancy, Reclamation, the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Utah Water Users Association, Western Area Power Administration, and Wyoming Water Association.

The program has 5 elements: habitat management, which includes developing river flow recommendations; habitat development; nonnative species management; endangered fish propagation and stocking; and research and monitoring.

The Aspinall Unit Operations EIS will address the habitat management element. The operation of the Aspinall Unit is a key component of the Recovery Program for offsetting adverse effects of flow depletions from the Gunnison and Colorado rivers and allowing water development in the Upper Colorado River Basin. Other elements of the Recovery Program are ongoing or planned for the Gunnison River and include the fish passage at

the Redlands Diversion Dam, a fish screen on the Redlands Canal, bottomland habitat development near Whitewater and Delta, stocking, and research and monitoring.

Flow Recommendations

Flow Recommendations for the Gunnison River were prepared by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Recovery Program using the results of research and monitoring activities funded as part of the Recovery Program and are presented in the July 2003 report titled "Flow Recommendations to Benefit Endangered Fishes in the Colorado and Gunnison River". The goal of the recommendations is to provide the annual and seasonal patterns of flow in the Gunnison River and in the Colorado River downstream from their confluence to recover populations of the four endangered fishes. The degree to which Flow Recommendations are met for the Gunnison River will be modeled and measured at the Whitewater USGS gage (Gunnison River near Grand Junction). Only approximately 50 percent of the basin above this point is regulated by the Aspinall Unit, thus it is apparent that Unit operations can only partially assist in meeting recommendations.

Copies of the Flow Recommendations are available on the internet at http://www.r6.fws.gov/crrip/doc/GunnCoflowrec.pdf.

RELATED PROJECTS

Programmatic Biological Opinion

A programmatic biological opinion (PBO) for the Gunnison Basin is being discussed (a PBO can potentially provide ESA compliance for other Federal and private projects in the Gunnison Basin). It is in Reclamation's interest to complete ESA compliance on other Federal projects in the basin which include: Paonia, Smith Fork, Fruitgrowers Dam, Uncompahgre, Dallas Creek, and Bostwick Park. Water user groups are interested in having a PBO completed to provide ESA compliance for private water users.

The relation between the Aspinall Operations EIS and a PBO should be considered in the early scoping process for the EIS.

Aspinall Unit Subordination

Blue Mesa Reservoir has a water storage right for 940,755 af with an appropriation date of November 13, 1957 and a refill water right of 122,702 af. During the planning for the Unit, there were concerns that a storage right of this magnitude would preclude future upstream water developments and uses in the Gunnison Basin. To address these concerns, Reclamation's policy has been to allow junior water users within the natural basin of the Gunnison River to develop up to a total of 60,000 af without interference from the Aspinall Unit. This policy was consummated in an agreement in 2000 that formally implemented the 60,000 af subordination. When completing NEPA and ESA

compliance on this agreement, Reclamation committed to considering and accounting for this subordination in the overall ESA consultation process on the Unit.

Uncompahgre Project

Storage for the Uncompahgre Irrigation Project is located in Taylor Park Reservoir upstream from the Aspinall Unit. The Uncompahgre Project also has direct flow rights on the Gunnison River downstream from the Unit. The Gunnison Tunnel, located two miles downstream from Crystal Dam, carries water to the Uncompahgre Valley. There are two key water exchanges that involve the Uncompahgre Project. First, an exchange exists under which Uncompahgre Project water is used for domestic purposes in the Uncompahgre Valley in exchange for releases from Ridgway Reservoir on the Uncompahgre River. Second, the 1975 Taylor Park exchange agreement allows exchange of storage between Taylor Park Reservoir and Blue Mesa Reservoir to benefit recreation, fisheries, and other resources in the upper Gunnison Basin.

Other Reclamation Projects

Reclamation has constructed other irrigation projects in the Gunnison Basin, all of which affect Gunnison River flows. Projects include the Smith Fork Project on the Smith Fork of the Gunnison, Dallas Creek Project on the Uncompahgre River, Bostwick Park Project on the Cimmaron River, Fruitgrowers Dam Project fed by Surface Creek, and Paonia Project on Muddy Creek. These projects would be included as part of the Aspinall Operations baseline. The Dolores Project is also related, although it is outside of the Gunnison Basin. The biological opinion for the Dolores Project calls for an upstream (of the Colorado River/Dolores River confluence) reservoir to make up for Dolores Project depletions and the Aspinall Unit is a logical reservoir to accomplish this.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park Reserved Water Right

The Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park was established in 1933 to preserve the spectacular gorge and other objects of scenic, scientific, and educational interests. The Park includes 16 miles of the Gunnison River downstream of the Unit. In January, 2001 the NPS filed to quantify a reserved water right for the Park. At the present time a 1933 Federal reserved right of 300 cfs is being contemplated along with a 2003 state instream flow right to protect spring runoff.

Redlands Diversion Fish Passage

A fish ladder has been constructed under the Recovery Program around the Redlands Diversion Dam, located 2 miles upstream from the mouth of the Gunnison River. In 1995 a temporary Memorandum of Agreement was executed between the Fish and Wildlife Service, Reclamation, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board to provide for and protect certain water released from the Unit to the fish ladder and the reach of the Gunnison River downstream from the ladder. This agreement was extended until 2005; water issues related to operation of the ladder will need to be resolved for long-term

operations as part of the Unit operations EIS. A fish screen is also being planned for the Redlands Canal.

Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area Planning Process

In 1999, Public Law 106-76 created the Gunnison Gorge Conservation Area and Gunnison Gorge wilderness downstream from the Unit and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. The legislation directed the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to develop a new plan for the area's long term management and protection. In conjunction with the development of the management plan, a final EIS was prepared by BLM in January, 2004. Operations of the Unit affect the resources in these areas.

AB Lateral Hydropower Project

The AB Lateral Hydropower Project is a potential development sponsored by Montrose Partners as joint venture with the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users. The project would increase annual diversions from the Gunnison River through the Gunnison Tunnel by approximately 300,000 af. Water would be directed to a hydro-powerplant near Montrose and water would be returned to the Gunnison via the Uncompahgre River.

NEPA PROCESS

A draft and final EIS will be prepared to provide decision makers appropriate information and to inform the public of the proposed action, reasonable alternatives, and the impacts of the alternatives. Key activities will be scoping of significant issues and alternatives, development of alternatives that support the proposed action and need, analysis of issues in the EIS, selection of a recommended plan, and preparation of a Record of Decision.

The Record of Decision will be the final product prepared under this program. It will officially present the Department of the Interior's position on operating criteria and guidance for the Unit.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT COMPLIANCE

A Biological Assessment will be prepared by Reclamation on the preferred alternative in compliance with Section 7 of the ESA. The Section 7 consultation will cover the effect of the proposed operating criteria and guidance for the Unit compared to the baseline conditions. Reclamation will define the baseline for species considered and prepare the biological assessment. As now envisioned, the hydrology baseline will include existing Federal and private projects and potential projects that have current ESA and NEPA compliance. The Fish and Wildlife Service will prepare a biological opinion on the proposed action.

The ESA process will be coordinated with activities leading to a Gunnison Basin PBO; however, the two processes would be separate.

AGENCY COORDINATION

Reclamation is the lead agency for preparation of the EIS, with responsibility delegated to the Regional Director in Salt Lake City, and further delegated to the Area Manager in Grand Junction, Colorado.

The scoping process will be used to identify cooperating agencies. Decisions on cooperating agencies will be made following scoping. Federal agencies and local, state, and tribal governments with appropriate expertise or jurisdiction, per Section 1501.6 of Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for NEPA implementation, may become cooperating agencies. Cooperating and other agencies and the public will be informed of project progress through news letters, project planning meetings, news releases, and other means.

Once identified, cooperating agencies will be assigned specific tasks of providing data and/or analysis. Periodic meetings with the cooperators will be held to review progress on the project and cooperators will be given the opportunity to review drafts of reports and appendices.

The following list identifies key agencies and their responsibilities:

Agency	
Bureau of Reclamation	Operates and maintains the Unit dams and powerplants
Fish and Wildlife Service	Provides Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act information and administers the Endangered Species Act
Western Area Power Administration	Markets and transmits power produced by the Unit
National Park Service	Manages the Curecanti National Recreation Area around the Unit and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park downstream
Bureau of Land Management	Manages federal lands along the Gunnison River between the Black Canyon and Grand Junction
State of Colorado	Colorado agencies have varied responsibilities pertaining to water and related resources: Colorado Water Conservation Board-water resources; Colorado State Engineer-water rights; Colorado Division of Wildlife-fisheries and wildlife resources; and Colorado Department of Health-water quality.

RECLAMATION CONTACTS

Reclamation has established a website to provide information on the EIS process: www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/

Reclamation's EIS team can be contacted at aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov

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