

[Bureau of Reclamation, Western Colorado Area Office; mailed September 11, 1998]  
WCN-LWest  
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our August 20, 1998, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. Thank-you to the National Park Service for hosting this meeting at the Elk Creek Visitors Center near Blue Mesa Reservoir. Attendance and participation by more interests from Gunnison was appreciated.

Highlights of the meeting include:

--The most probable prediction from our April meeting for April-July inflow into Blue Mesa was 86 percent of normal. The forecast increased to 99 percent by May 1, but the forecast had decreased to 79 percent by July 1. Actual inflow ended up at 81 percent. A spring peak through the Black Canyon/Gunnison Gorge of 3,200 cfs was provided and involved approximately 35,000 acre-feet of bypass.

--Average monthly flows planned for the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon National Monument and Gunnison Gorge are around 700 to 800 cfs through December.

--From September 29 through October 2, flows through the Gunnison Gorge will be reduced to 600 cfs to help Colorado Division of Wildlife's annual trout census.

--The National Park Service introduced initial concepts for quantifying the Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument.

--The Fish and Wildlife Service hopes to have preliminary flow recommendations for endangered fish available for discussion at the January 1999 meeting.

In addition, if you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or the summaries of the meeting, please let us know. The next scheduled operation meeting will be held at 12:30 on January 21 in the Bureau of Land Management office in Montrose (2465 South Townsend--south of town). If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

Ed Warner  
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure  
Distribution (see attached list)

bc: Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100, CCI-400  
1820 South Rio Grande Avenue, Montrose CO 81401

Regional Solicitor's Office, Attention: Scott Loveless  
125 South State Street, Room 6201, Salt Lake City UT 84138

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT

Attention: UC-282 (Bob Adams), UC-298 (Paul Davidson), UC-600, UC-320,  
(ea w/encl)

WCN-CDeAngelis, DMutz, EWarner, SMcCall, JOzga, CStanton, LWest, KFogelquist,  
MSteves, RStorbo, JWright (ea w/ encl)

WBR:SMcCall:rb:9/10/98:970 248 0638:aspmeet.smc

Distribution List - August 20, 1998 Aspinall Meeting

\*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

**Argonne National Laboratory** . . . . . John Hayse  
**City of Grand Junction** . . . . . Greg Trainor  
**Club 20** . . . . . Greg Walcher, Shane Henry  
**Colorado State University** . . . . . Brett Johnson  
**Daily Sentinel** . . . . . Dave Buchanan\*  
**Environmental Defense Fund** . . . . . Jim Martin  
**Gunnison Basin POWER** . . . . . Ralph (Butch) Clark\*  
**Gunnison Country Times** . . . . . Paul Wayne Foreman\*  
**Gunnison River Expeditions** . . . . . Hank Hotze, Bo Gates  
**High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club** . . . . . Steve Glazer\*  
**Matt Owens Fly Company** . . . . . Matt Owens  
**KNFS Environmental Services (Trans Colorado Pipeline Project)** . . . . . Craig Meis  
**Trout Unlimited** . . . . . Pat Oglesby\*  
**Western Colorado Congress** . . . . . Fred Wetlauffer  
**University of Montana** . . . . . Jack Stanford  
**Co. River Water Conservation District** . . . . . Mike Gross\*, Dave Kanzer\*, Ray Tenney  
**North Fork Water Conservancy District** . . . . . Tom Alvey  
**Redlands Water and Power Company** . . . . . Gregg Strong  
**Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association** . . . . . Marc Catlin\*, Jim Hokit\*  
**Upper Colorado River Commission** . . . . . Everett Sunderland\*  
**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District** . . . . . Kathleen Klein\*  
Mark Schumacher\*, Dennis Steckel\*, Ramon Reed\*  
**Delta County Commissioners** . . . . . Donna Ferganchick, Jim Ventrello  
**Colorado Department of Agriculture** . . . . . Jim Miller  
**Colorado Division of Water Resources** . . . . . Wayne Schieldt  
**Colorado Division of Wildlife** . . . . . Daniel Brauch\*  
Robert Caskey, Pat Martinez, Sherman Hebein, Rick Anderson  
**Colorado Water Conservation Board** . . . . . Randy Seaholm; Ray Alvarado\*  
**Gunnison County Commissioners** . . . . . Marlene Zanetell\*  
**Wyoming State Engineers Office** . . . . . John Shields  
**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers** . . . . . Grady McNure  
**U.S. Bureau of Land Management** . . . . . John Arkins, Allan Belt, Dennis Murphy  
Roy Smith  
**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** . . . . . John Hamill; Henry Maddux, George Smith  
Terry Ireland\*, Rick Krueger, Chuck McAda\*; Reed Harris  
**U.S. National Park Service** . . . . . Bill Hansen\*, Chuck Pettee\*, Sheridan Steele\*  
Myron Chase\*; Matt Malick\*, Mark Wondzell\*  
**U.S. National Weather Service** . . . . . Eric Holloway, Mike Myers  
**U.S. National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration** . . . . . Klaus Weickmann  
**U.S. Geological Survey** . . . . . Paul von Guerard, Bob Jenkins\*, Gordon Mueller  
**U.S. Western Area Power Administration** . . . . . Gary Burton\*; Margaret Matter  
Jeff Ackerman, Kathy Crane\*, Ken Green, Annette Falvo  
**U.S. Bureau of Reclamation** . . . . . Ed Warner\*, Steve McCall\*, Coll Stanton\*  
Karen Fogelquist\*, John Ozga\*, Russ Storbo, Lorrie West\*  
Bob Adams, Gary McDermott, Donald Phillips\*, Richard Stodt  
Arlo Allen, Paul Davidson\*, Chris Karas, Amy Tran\*, Richard Clayton\*

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting  
August 20, 1998

**Participation:** This meeting was held at Elk Creek Visitors Center (Blue Mesa Reservoir). Attendees are noted on the attached distribution list.

**Purpose of Meeting:** The purpose of these meetings-- held in January, April, and August-- is to gather input for determining upcoming operations for Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal Reservoirs. This input is also used in development of an overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which also includes plans for Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and Navajo Units. Operation of the Aspinall Unit is based on projected inflows to its reservoirs, existing water rights, minimum in-stream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flows for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, hydropower needs and other factors. In addition, the meetings are used to coordinate activities and exchange information among agencies, water users, and other interested parties.

Handouts provided included background data on projected inflows to the reservoirs; proposed operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable water supply forecasts; and snow course information.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. Field studies leading to flow recommendations to protect downstream endangered fish and to quantify a Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River National Monument have been completed. A 'Synthesis Report' that will include flow recommendations is due from the endangered fish Recovery Program in December 1998. These operation meetings will be used more in the future to discuss proposals for long-term operation plans to address these and related resource management issues, including implementation of flow recommendations and a Draft Biological Opinion on Aspinall operations that is scheduled for completion in 2000.

April-August 1998 Operation: Actual runoff into Blue Mesa this year was only 81 percent of normal. The most probable inflow at the time of the April meeting was 600,000 acre-feet or 86 percent of normal. This number increased to 99 percent and 690,000 acre-feet by May 1 before dropping throughout May and June due to dry conditions. Graphs were handed out to show actual inflow, content of Blue Mesa, and Crystal releases and flows in the river below the Gunnison Tunnel during this period. Due to declining inflow, Blue Mesa Reservoir elevation increased to only 7,505 feet, approximately 14 feet short of filling.

Between May 15 and June 2, flows through the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge were increased and peaked at almost 3,200 cfs before being reduced to around 750 cfs. The peak flow was provided for downstream endangered fish and other resources and occurred May 23 through 25. When it was planned, inflow forecasts indicated that Crystal Powerplant bypasses were going to be necessary, so the peak involved "collecting" bypasses for the peak release. In all, about 35,000 acre-feet of water were bypassed. Flows were kept stable during the Memorial Day holiday.

There were several questions concerning the spring peak. The Upper Gunnison District asked what the spring peak accomplished. The National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service did not specifically monitor spring flow conditions this year, but the Fish and Wildlife Service indicated that these are the kind of flows that are known to benefit endangered fish. Both the Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service indicated they have long-term monitoring programs.

The Colorado River Water Conservation District suggested that the water bypassed for the peak be accounted for as part of the "Dallas and Dolores endangered fish commitment water" stored in Blue Mesa (Biological Opinions on Dallas and Dolores call for the release of up to 148,000 acre-feet to the Colorado River to offset the depletion effects of these 2 projects). The District thinks that accounting is very important for future water management. The Fish and Wildlife Service said that it might be useful

to describe what operations would have been if endangered fish weren't considered.

Proposed August-December 1998 Operation:

Average monthly flows through the Black Canyon are planned to be around 700-800 cfs through December. Blue Mesa should reach its year end target elevation of 7490 feet with no problem.

Flows below the Redlands Diversion are now at 450-500 cfs and will be monitored in the coming months because of the relatively dry conditions. These flows may reach 300 cfs later this year; operations will be coordinated with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the State to determine appropriate actions if flows drop below this point.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities

**National Park Service** - NPS has no special flow requests this year.

**Fish and Wildlife Service** - The Service's only request is to save water for release in providing next year's spring peak. As of August 20, 21 Colorado squawfish have moved up the Redlands fish ladder in 1998. A total of 18 squawfish used the ladder in 1997. Approximately 3,000 razorback suckers were stocked in the lower Gunnison River last year. Twelve of these fish have been recaptured this year, some downstream from the Redlands.

**Bureau of Reclamation** - Don Phillips was introduced as the new manager at Curecanti Field Division.

**Colorado Water Conservation Board** - The State Decision Support Model for the Gunnison River Basin is available on Internet; documentation will be available on Internet soon.

**Colorado River Water Conservation District**-No specific comments, but several questions and suggestions are reported elsewhere in this summary.

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District** -If providing a spring peak release is to be a regular operational occurrence, the district would like to see results monitored to evaluate if goals are being met.

**Colorado Division of Wildlife** - The September 29-October 2 census of Gunnison Gorge trout fishery is still scheduled, and flows of 600 cfs are planned through the Gunnison Gorge. The Division would also like to use the kokanee trap downstream of Blue Mesa Dam this fall. Kokanee in Morrow Point migrate upstream and can be trapped below Blue Mesa Dam. The fish can then be transferred to the Roaring Judy hatchery for spawning. Dan Braugh will coordinate with Don Phillips.

**Western Area Power Administration** - Western requested that the National Park Service keep them informed on the schedule for ending this year's use of the tour boat on Morrow Point. At the time of this meeting, the tour boat was down due to mechanical problems.

**Trout Unlimited** - This summer flows were good for anglers and outfitters using the river.

**Gunnison POWER** - A group is forming to work on watershed planning and will be requesting information from the group. A report for the San Miguel River watershed was cited as a good example of watershed planning.

**Gunnison County** - Gunnison County Commissioners would like to review endangered fish recommendations and are interested in staying involved in Aspinall Unit activities and the Black Canyon reserved water right.

## Endangered Fish Activities

**Synthesis report**-Chuck McAda reported scientists are finishing reports on individual recovery program studies to be consolidated into the 'Synthesis Report', which should be completed in working draft form by the end of 1998. The report will include flow needs for the endangered fish. The Fish and Wildlife Service was asked if flow recommendations will be available in January and replied that was very possible, but could not be promised. Chuck will plan on discussing recommendations or their status at the January meeting. It has not been determined when the Synthesis Report will be available for public use or review. There was discussion on what river gage would be used to monitor needed flows--Delta, Whitewater, or Redlands. The Colorado River District suggested the start of critical habitat (confluence of Gunnison and Uncompahgre) would be a logical point since the Delta gage does not include flow contributions of the Uncompahgre that are accounted for by the Whitewater gage. Also, the Service indicated that year-round minimum flow recommendations downstream from the Redlands Diversion may change--it may not be necessary to maintain these flows outside of the period fish are actively migrating.

The Fish and Wildlife Service answered questions about Recovery Program plans to provide native fish passage at the Hartland Diversion Dam. As background, Hartland Dam is located on the Gunnison a few miles upstream from Delta and, thus, upstream from designated critical habitat. Radio-tagged squawfish have been found at the base of the dam, and Recovery Program studies have recommended a passage be built. The passage would open up about 15 miles of river and floodplain habitat upstream to the North Fork confluence. The Recovery Program is evaluating and prioritizing their expenditures for this passage with respect to passages in other areas and with respect to other program activities.

**EIS status**-Steve McCall reported that a voluntary EIS would be prepared to address changed operations for endangered fish. The draft is scheduled for November 1999, and final in June 2000. Once the Synthesis Report and flow recommendations are available, Reclamation will prepare a biological assessment on the effects of the Aspinall Unit on endangered fish, the effects of operation changes on other endangered species; and how flow recommendations can best be supported while meeting other Colorado River Storage Project Act requirements.

## Black Canyon of the Gunnison Federal Reserved Water Right

The National Park Service updated the group on the Black Canyon water right. As background, the right has not been quantified but is senior to many existing water rights in the basin, including the Aspinall Unit and Taylor Park Reservoir. In general the Park Service concept is to gain a general consensus, leading to a consent decree and a court decree. The Park Service is looking for a peak flow in the spring; maintenance of a minimum flow all year; and, in wet years, a sustained flow in late summer/fall above the minimum flow. A variable regime is sought with higher flows available to the water right in wet years, lower at other times. There probably would be some subordination to existing junior users and would include a "carve out" of water for development. Senior water rights would be protected under State law.

The concept was presented as a block of water divided into 4 "boxes": 1) senior water rights; 2) existing water use by juniors to which the reserved water right would be subordinated; 3) a block of future development water; and 4) the reserved water right itself. The first 3 boxes would be the same or consistent through wet and dry years; the reserved water right box would be small in a dry year and larger in a wet year.

The Colorado Water Conservation District pointed out that "who" was in which box was an important question to answer. The Upper Gunnison District asked how the "boxes" fit with overall resource needs in the basin. Also, Upper Gunnison asked what alternatives have been considered since "carve out" concepts can be controversial. Gunnison County pointed out the need to protect water users in the upper basin. The Sierra Club/High Country Citizens Alliance indicated that the concept sounded

exciting; with protection of existing uses and protection against transmountain diversions.

The National Park Service hopes to hold a public meeting as early as November on the reserved water right. In response to questions, the Service said there will be a series of meetings and they will be held in both the upper and lower Gunnison Basin.

Next Meeting - Scheduled for 12:30 on Thursday, **January 21**, at **BLM's office in Montrose**.