

WCG-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our January 20, 2005, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held at the Montrose Pavilion. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

- The Gunnison Basin has had 7 straight years of below average runoff; however, early projections for 2005 show runoff at 118 percent of average and snowpack at 175 percent in the basin. April-July inflow to Blue Mesa in 2004 was only 422,000 acre-feet; early projections for 2005 are 850,000 acre-feet. Projections for 2005 may change significantly due to weather conditions.

- Blue Mesa is projected to fill this year under most probable conditions; in 2004 the reservoir was 200,000 acre-feet short of filling.

- Black Canyon flows were increased to 600 cfs in January in response to improved snowpack. Early projections show spring flows of around 1,200 cfs and summer flows of 800+ cfs.

- Testing at the Crystal powerplant was conducted in September and October; further testing is scheduled for this spring but will not affect river flows.

- Reclamation has initiated an environmental impact statement on Aspinall Unit operations—see www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/ for information.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or summaries, please let us know. The next operation meeting will be on Friday, April 22 at 1 p.m. at Reclamation's office in Grand Junction. If you have questions, please call me at 970 248-0652.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree
Water Management Group Chief

Enclosure
Distribution (see attached list)

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

Mr. John Bezdek, Office of Interior Solicitor, 1849 C St. NW, Mail Stop 6412,
Washington, D.C. 20240

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT
Attention: UC-400, UC-434, UC-438, UC-600, UC-700, UC-720

Director, Technical Service Center, Denver CO
Attention: D-8510

WCG-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, BUilenberg, SMcCall, CStanton, EKnight, MSteves,
DCrabtree, TStroh, JHock

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage
(all w/encl)

WBR:SMcCall:rb:1/27/05:970 248-0638:aspinall

Distribution List –January 20, 2005 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Daily Sentinel.....Sally Spauding*, Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan*
Delta County IndependentBob Borchardt*
Gunnison Country Times Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel
Montrose Daily PressJason Monroe, Caitlin Switzer
Western Resource Advocates Bart Miller*
Club 20Reeves Brown
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Environmental Defense FundJim Martin
Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark, Ramon Reed
Gunnison River Expeditions Hank Hotze
Helton & Williamsen, P.C. Duane Helton
High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra ClubSteve Glazer*, Wendy McDermott,
Steve Schechter, Shara Rutberg
Xcel Energy.....Fred Eggleston*
Matt Owens Fly CompanyMatt Owens
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby*, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternell*, John Trammell
Western Colorado CongressRandy See, Fred Wetlaufer
Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District..... Dave Kanzer*, Eric Kuhn, Bill Trampe, David Halford,
Ray Tenney
Ridgway Guide Service.....Tim Peterson
SelfGeorge Sheldon, Bo Gates*, Marlene Zanatell, Jim Cochran,
Jim Hokit
Colorado River Energy Distributors.....Leslie James
North Fork Water Conservancy District..... Tom Alvey
Tri County WaterMike Berry, Kathleen Margetts*, Richard Margetts* (Project
7)
Redlands Water and Power Company Gregg Strong*, Mike Gross*
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association..... Marc Catlin*
Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland
Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District Greg Peterson, Karen Shirley*, Kathleen Curry, Mark
Schumacher, Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel*, Jim Slattery, Ken Spann
City of Grand Junction..... Terry Franklin, Greg Trainor
Delta County Commissioners.....Jan McCracken, Wayne Wolf, Olen Lund
Delta County.....Duane Freeman
City of Delta.....Barry Bullard, Richard Sales, Wilma Ervin
Delta County Emergency Management.....Rob Fiedler
Gunnison County Commissioners Hap Channell, Paula Swenson, Jim Starr
Colorado Department of Agriculture..... Jim Miller
Colorado Division of Water Resources Wayne Schieldt*, Frank Kugel*, Richard Rozman
Colorado Division of Wildlife Daniel Brauch*, Sherman Hebein, Dan Kowalski*, David Graf,
Ryan Swygman, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson, Mark Uppendahl*
Colorado Water Conservation BoardRandy Seaholm*, Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison*, Rick Brown,
Steve Miller
Wyoming State Engineers Office..... John Shields

Congressman John SalazarRichard Baca
Senator Wayne AllardDerek Wagner
Senator Ken Salazar
Army Corps of Engineers..... Ken Jacobson
Bureau of Land Management Dennis Murphy*, Jim Ferguson, Roy Smith,
Rooster Barnhart, Karen Tucker, Forest Zerbe, Jesse Kirthorp*, Peter Dennett, Julie Stotler
Fish and Wildlife Service..... Al Pfister, Chuck McAda*, Patty Gelatt, George Smith*
National Park Service Bill Wellman*, Myron Chase*, Ken Stahlnecker, Mark Wondzell*,
Melissa Trammell, Michael Dale*, Bill Johnson, DanGude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee, Norm Henderson*
National Weather Service..... Bill Reed, Brian Avery
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration..... Andrea Ray, Robert Webb, Klaus Weickmann,
Brad Udall
U.S. Geological Survey.....Paul von Guerard, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller, Gerhard Kuhn, Bob Boulgarz,
Joe Sullivan
Western Area Power Administration..... Brad Warren, Nancy Scheid, Clayton Palmer*,
Jeff Ackerman*, Kathy Crane*, Ken Green, Annette Falvo, Ken Otto, Gary Burton; Margaret Matte,
Dave Shelton, Heather Patno*
Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer, Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton*,
Gary McDermott, Don Phillips*, Dick Girvan, David Steinmark*, Ted Dunn, Dan Crabtree*, Chris
Cutler, Terry Stroh*, Arlo Allen, Jane Blair, Paul Davidson*, Justyn Hock*, Erik Knight, Nancy Coulam,
Dennis Kubly, Dave Harpman, Dawn Munger, and Rick Vinton
Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

January 20, 2005

Participation: This meeting was held at the Pavilion in Montrose. Attendees are noted on the distribution list.

Purpose of Meeting: The purpose of operation 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 used in Reclamation's development of specific operations for the Aspinall Unit and for the overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which include plans for Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and Navajo Units as well as the Aspinall Unit. Operation of the Aspinall Unit considers projected inflows to its reservoirs, flood control needs, existing water rights, minimum instream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flow needs 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 concerning the Gunnison River.

Handouts provided included data on April-August operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs; and potential operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable water supply forecasts.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. Field studies leading to flow recommendations to help recover downstream endangered fish and to quantify a Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park have been completed. The Fish and Wildlife Service flow recommendations for endangered fish have been completed and an Aspinall Operations EIS has been initiated. 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.

Operations:

General: Blue Mesa Reservoir capacities are described in meetings as follows: The reservoir holds 940,700 acre-feet. Active capacity is 748,400, inactive capacity is 81,100, and dead storage is 111,200. Live capacity is the active plus inactive, which totals 829,500. Discussions during operation meetings use live capacity.

August 2004-January 2005 Operations: Inflows to Blue Mesa were generally in the 300-500 cfs range during the period. Following the irrigation season releases were reduced to around 350 cfs until early January when releases increased to 600 cfs. Blue Mesa content was 480,000 af by January 1 which is below average for that date; however, Blue Mesa is projected to fill this year based on most probable water supplies.

The increase in releases to 600 cfs is related to the January 1st projection that runoff into Blue Mesa will be 100 percent of normal. The January 1 most probable runoff was projected to be 720,000 af and the January 15, 850,000 af. (On the cautious side, it was noted that a year ago on January 1, 2004 the most probable runoff projections were 680,000 af, but spring snows were

below normal and actual 2004 runoff ended up at 422,000 af.)

The flow capacity at Crystal Powerplant has increased as a result of maintenance work last year; the exact capacity will not be known until later in the year but should be in the 2200-2300 cfs range. Crystal releases and Gunnison River flows during the Crystal Turbine and Generator Testing in late September and early October were reviewed. The planned ramping rates during the test were followed with one exception. On October 4th during the test a bypass valve failed to open causing a short, but abrupt, flow drop of 1,000 cfs+. This resulted in almost a 1.5-foot drop in water depth at the entrance to the Black Canyon and approximately 6-inch drop downstream in the lower Gunnison Gorge. Additional testing will be done in the spring but should not affect releases from Crystal.

January-April 2005 Operations: A preliminary operation proposal was presented by Reclamation that showed Crystal releases increasing gradually until reaching around 2200 cfs in April and May. Present projections show that inflow in “excess” of that needed to fill Blue Mesa and fully utilize the Crystal powerplant may be available. Reclamation’s proposal is to release this volume through the powerplants prior to spring runoff. If there is still “excess water” projected on May 1, the excess will be “bundled” into a spring peak during the latter part of May.

Because the Gunnison Tunnel will gradually begin diversions in early April, peak flows below the tunnel may occur in April and/or May when tunnel diversions are low. Summer flows in the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge are projected at around 800+ cfs. It should be recognized that significant changes in snowpack can occur between January and May and these operation projections may change significantly in response. It was also pointed out that Reclamation uses inflow forecasts as a guide that moves us in certain operation directions while recognizing that forecasts can change significantly.

Input was requested from those in attendance concerning operations:

- Trout Unlimited suggested having peak flows in the late May-early June period.
- Bo Gates, rafting guide, suggested a peak in late May would be very beneficial, would like to see peak taper off in early June for floating/fishing. Does not believe a 1,500 cfs peak is adequate to move sediment that has accumulated in the Gunnison Gorge during the recent drought years.
- Jeff Akerman, WAPA, pointed out that sometimes rapid inflow from Cimarron Creek can cause a peak.
- High Country Citizens/Sierra Club recommended having releases based on endangered fish flow recommendations.
- CDOW indicated the Gunnison Gorge fish habitat does need a flushing flow and if a peak flow occurs in the mid-April to mid-June period, sudden fluctuations should be avoided because of emerging brown trout and rainbow trout spawning.
- National Park Service reported that a peak of 5,000 cfs would be beneficial to resources in the Black Canyon along with shoulder flows of 800-1000 cfs.

- For endangered fish habitat needs, the Fish and Wildlife Service recommended that “excess” water be save at the present time for a spring peak.

- BLM indicated that good boating flows are desired by the public beginning in the later half of May.
- Upper Gunnison District recommended being cautious in increasing releases—filling Blue Mesa is very important to the upper basin.
- WAPA requested information be presented at the April meeting on what different spring flow levels accomplish in terms of habitat maintenance in endangered fish waters. WAPA was referred to existing studies on this subject for critical habitat areas as well as the Black Canyon.
- The Colorado River Water Conservation District thought the proposed operations looked reasonable.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife requested flows in the 400-500 cfs range September 27-30 to facilitate fishery inventories. The 2004 inventory was cancelled due to uncertainties in flows during the Crystal testing, so this year's inventory is very important for fishery management.

Gunnison River Flows at Redlands: The Memorandum of Agreement providing fish migration flows downstream from the Redlands while protecting Redland's water supply expires in August of 2005 and will not be renewed. Reclamation plans to continue operations similar to those called for in the contract providing that water supplies are adequate.

Maintenance Activities:

Further testing of the Crystal powerplant will be conducted this spring; the maximum capacity of the powerplant can be determined at that time. The testing will not affect river flows.

Outstanding Waters Designation: Matt Malick with the National Park Service made a presentation on the possible designation of waters in the Curecanti Recreation Area and Black Canyon National Park as "Outstanding Waters". This is a designation under the Clean Water Act and is the highest designation for Colorado Waters and calls for no degradation of water quality. Such a designation could affect upstream NPDES permits (discharge permits for point sources such as sewage plants). As such, the idea of "no measurable change" may be proposed instead of true Outstanding Waters. Data from 21 sites within the Recreation Area and Park show that waters presently meet Outstanding Water criteria. The NPS is working on a proposal to present to the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission in November, 2005 and meeting with interested publics to develop this proposal. A Commission decision will be made in July of 2006.

Aspinall Unit Environmental Impact Statement:

The Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS on operations of the Aspinall Unit was published in the Federal Register on January 21, 2004 and scoping meetings were held in February. Cooperating agencies have been selected and initial meetings held. The EIS will look at Aspinall Unit operation changes to help meet endangered fish flow recommendations while protecting other Unit purposes. Website information is available at www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/.

Work is progressing on developing a No Action alternative which will describe Aspinall Unit

operations in the absence of flow recommendations. Action alternatives will be identified this spring and Reclamation hopes that a range of alternatives will be available this fall to present to the public.

Cooperating agency meetings are open to the public to attend and observe. Opportunity for public questions and comments is provided at the end of the meetings. The next meeting will be on February 15th in Grand Junction---contact aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov for information.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Western Resources Advocates and Nature Conservancy-Requested more information on the EIS process at operation meetings; and, when possible, combine dates of operation and cooperating agency meetings to reduce travel costs. Would like EIS-related resource information on the EIS website.

National Park Service --Reported that new access to the river will be available through Red Rocks Canyon---check with local office for information.

Colorado Division of Wildlife- Kokanee salmon numbers were down last fall with the egg take being the lowest since 1986. Several possible reasons for this including lake trout predation, reduced reservoir content due to drought, and problems with the 2000 release of salmon from the hatchery (an irrigation diversion problem that has since been corrected). Yellow perch numbers appear to be increasing in Blue Mesa and these fish may compete with kokanee. Rainbow trout stocking methods for Blue Mesa are being modified and this is hoped to make more rainbows available to anglers. Stocking of rainbow trout in the Gunnison Gorge continued in 2004 in response to whirling disease losses and resistant strains of rainbows are being investigated.

Colorado River Water Conservation District- The District has water resource grant money available. The District is concerned that the Redlands Contract will not be renewed—migration flows below the Redlands diversion are needed whenever the ladder is operating.

Bureau of Land Management-Gunnison Gorge RMP/FEIS Management Plan is final—still a couple of appeals remain to be resolved.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy District-Augmentation water is being sold under third party 40-year contracts; the annual subordination report has been completed for 2004. The District is considering the Outstanding Waters Designation and is also working on studies for 3 water projects in the upper Gunnison Basin.

Tri-County-Ridgway was within 1-2 feet of filling this spring. Inflow has held up well in the Uncompahgre Basin this spring and summer.

Redlands – Construction of fish screen on Redlands Canal is on schedule for completion in mid-June. Canal operations are scheduled to begin April 1.

Sierra Club/High Country Citizens – Supports NPS Outstanding Waters Designation.

Encourages maintenance of flows downstream from the Redlands Diversion and encourages Reclamation to complete the operations EIS faster.

Western Area Power Administration – Completion of Crystal testing will be beneficial to power operations.

Trout Unlimited – Requested notification of Aspinall Unit EIS cooperating agency meetings.

Fish and Wildlife Service – In 2005 Gunnison River work will include operating the Redlands fish ladder and additional stocking of razorback suckers in the fall. In 2004, 5 pikeminnow and 3 razorbacks used the ladder. A total of 73 endangered fish have used the ladder since operations began; in addition thousands of non-endangered native fish have used the ladder. The FWS reported that razorback larvae were found in the river in 2002 and 2003; results from 2004 are not yet available. The recovery program will complete a study on river water temperatures related to the Aspinall Unit in April.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association – inspecting the Gunnison Diversion Dam, if repairs are needed they may make special flow request for a short period of time.

Colorado Water Conservation Board – Working as a cooperating agency on the Aspinall Unit EIS. Supports full use of Redlands endangered fish facilities but is concerned with how to protect releases for these facilities, especially releases for migration flows. Last fall, the Recovery Program released its Sufficient Progress Report which basically concludes that recovery elements are proceeding with sufficient progress.

Next Meeting: **The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Friday April 22 at Reclamation's Office in Grand Junction.**