

From: Dan Crabtree  
To: Aspinall Operations  
Subject: Aspinall Unit Operations Meeting Summary

Enclosed is a summary of our April 22, 2010 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held in Grand Junction. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

- April through July inflow to Blue Mesa is forecasted at 530,000 af or approximately 73 percent of the 31 year average. The 31-year average is 720,000 af.
- Based on projected forecast, the one day peak flow target for the Black Canyon water right is calculated at 3425 cfs. Final calculations will be made based on May 1 forecasted inflow.
- Blue Mesa is not expected to fill this year with live storage reaching approximately 760,000 af.
- Following a spring peak, probably in May, Gunnison Gorge flows should be around 700-900 cfs, dropping to 500-700 cfs later in August.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or summaries, please let us know. The next operation meeting will be on Thursday, August 26, 2010 at the Elk Creek Visitor Center on Blue Mesa. If you have any questions, please call me at 970 248-0652 or respond to this email.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree  
Water Resources Group Chief

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

April 22, 2010

**Participation:** This meeting was held at the Reclamation office in Grand Junction. Attendees are noted on the distribution list located at the end of these notes. Handouts are available for review at <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/water/rsvrs/mtgs/amcurrnt.html>

**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 ([www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/studies/index.html](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/studies/index.html)) 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, hydropower and flood control needs, existing water rights, minimum instream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flow needs for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, 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 2010 operations; preliminary projected inflows to the reservoirs for 2010; and potential operation plans under probable maximum, most probable, and probable minimum runoff forecasts for this spring.

The Fish and Wildlife Service flow recommendations for endangered fish have been completed and published, and a final Aspinall Operations EIS is being prepared to evaluate alternative operations to help meet these recommendations. In addition, the water right for the Black Canyon National Park has been quantified and adjudicated. 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.

**Weather Forecasts:** El Nino conditions peaked in January and resulted in fairly typical precipitation for an El Nino: Dry in northwest Colorado, wet in Southwest, and variable in west central Colorado. In spring, precipitation typically increases in northwest Colorado under these conditions. Short-term forecast is for wetter and cooler conditions, and conditions in May-July have equal chances of being wetter or drier than average.

Inflow forecasts to Blue Mesa were 575,000-600,000 af in January and February, 560,000 on April 1 and 530,000 af on April 15. Preliminary predictions call for North Fork peaks of approximately 3700 cfs around May 19.

Colorado Basin River Forecast Center will have an open house in Salt Lake August 17-19.

**Operations:**

**General:** Blue Mesa Reservoir capacities are described in meetings as follows: The reservoir holds 940,700 acre-feet (af). 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.

#### January-April Operations:

Blue Mesa was lowered to its icing target in December, 2009. Crystal releases were around 800 cfs in January and February and were reduced to 600 cfs in late February. Releases began increasing in late March to accommodate diversions through the Gunnison Tunnel and were at 1,100 cfs on April 22.

Blue Mesa content is around 560,000 af; roughly 150,000 af above average. Snowpack decreased markedly in April due to rapid runoff conditions.

#### April-July 2010 Operations:

As of April 15, unregulated inflow to Blue Mesa is forecast at 530,000 af or approximately 73 percent of average. This is considered an average to moderately dry year. The 31-year average is 720,000 af. Blue Mesa is not expected to fill this year and may reach an elevation of around 7,512 by the end of June (around 760,000 af).

Based on projected forecast, the one day peak flow target under the Black Canyon water right is calculated at around 3,425 cfs. Ramping up and down for this peak will involve release of around 23,000 af. Around 12 days would be involved in ramping up and down for the peak. A final calculation will be made based on May 1 inflow forecast. Reclamation plans to operate the Unit to allow the peak flow target to be met which may occur around middle of May with a better prediction being made after May 1. Summer flow in the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge should be in the 700-900 cfs range, dropping to 500-700 cfs later in the summer. November-December flows could increase above that level.

It was also noted that Taylor Park Reservoir is not expected to fill this year.

Kent Holsinger asked if the Black Canyon peak would involve storage. This would depend on the exact timing of the peak but the right does contemplate the use of storage. WAPA was concerned about the amount of water used for the peak and supports steeper ramping rates to reduce the amount of water needed to reach a peak. According to WAPA, in 2009 approximately 100,000 af was used and this year 23,000 af will be used. WAPA would like to have its biologists study steeper ramping rates and this was supported by Kent Holsinger. Ramping rates used by Reclamation are actually steeper than those recommended by the Colorado Division of Wildlife. The Division bases its recommendations on many years of monitoring Gunnison River and other fisheries.

CDOW stated that ramping rates are particularly important this year because of problems the last 2 years with brown trout reproduction and would prefer to see the peak in mid-May and matching the North Fork if possible. BLM would like to see the peak in mid-May also in order to reduce conflicts with recreation later in the year. Expects heavy river use through September.

One special flow request was made for 2010. The CDOW requested flows of 800-1,000 cfs from October 4-8 for their annual monitoring. Range could be 500-1,000 cfs. This year's monitoring

may involve a longitudinal sample downstream to the North Fork. In addition, it was noted that the National Park Service has formally requested a peak for the Black Canyon.

**Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:**

**Maintenance activities:** Reclamation anticipates the need to dredge material at mouth of Cimarron River this year to reduce interference with hydropower production. Work will be coordinated with CDOW. Need advanced warning of spill so preparations can be made. Lots of preparation required for even a small spill at Crystal. Don Phillips is retiring and headed to Alaska.

**Hartland Diversion Dam:** Painted Sky RC&D gave a status report on plans for a boating/fish passage at the Hartland Diversion Dam which is located between Austin and Delta. Final designs have begun and they hope for construction this fall. Design would involve a series of drops and pools which would be safer for boaters and easier for fish to traverse. An environmental assessment on the project has been released with comments due May 19. NRCS is lead NEPA agency. The RC&D will remain in close contact with Reclamation regarding flows and construction activities.

**Aspinall EIS:** The Aspinall EIS evaluates alternative plans for releasing water from the Unit for endangered fish habitat in the lower Gunnison River. In general, flow recommendations for the endangered fish call for higher spring flows and moderate base flows.

The advanced draft final EIS has been prepared and is being reviewed by Interior in Washington. The advanced draft will next be provided to cooperating agencies for review. The Fish and Wildlife Service has completed a programmatic biological opinion on the new operations and on existing basin water uses. The opinion includes provisions for the new flow regime and for a selenium management program. When the final EIS is completed, a Record of Decision is prepared. The goal is to have this process completed late this year.

**Dust on Snow:** Was a slow year for dust storms until April; however there has been significant activity in April with dust events on April 5<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. This may increase rate of runoff.

**Colorado Water Conservation Board:** Jim Martin has been appointed Regional Administrator of EPA. Randy Seaholm retired in November and will be replaced. April board meeting cancelled due to budget and May meeting moved to Denver. Still working on O&M funding for Orchard Mesa improvements related to endangered fish.

**Bureau of Land Management:** Hartland Diversion work would be beneficial and improve river safety. They have found dead bald eagles this spring in the Gorge and turned them in to the CDOW for investigations. BLM will assist in signs notifying river users of timing of peak flows. Office working on new management plan. See [www.blm.gov.ufo.planning](http://www.blm.gov.ufo.planning).

**Upper Gunnison Water Conservation District:** Working with Uncompahgre Valley Water Users and Gunnison Electric on potential development of hydropower at Taylor Park. Working on biological monitoring at sites in upper Gunnison area.

**Colorado State Engineer:** Working on two new gages on the Uncompahgre between Colona and the South Canal inflow to help with water administration.

**Colorado River Water Conservation District:** The District has contributed \$50,000 for Hartland project. On May 3 will have State of River meeting on the Gunnison following the Gunnison Basin Round Table. See website for more information. Also supporting a group to look at alternative strategies for wild and scenic designation for rivers in the area.

**Trout Unlimited:** Appreciated work on meeting the Black Canyon right and supports protecting the fishery.

**Tri-County:** Should fill Ridgway Reservoir by July 4 or earlier. Working on correlations between dust and runoff. Awaiting federal register notice for hydropower development at Ridgway.

**National Park Service:** Inspected 13,350 boats for mussels last year-7 contaminated boats found. Have started again this year. Will be making plans for tour boat.

**Next Meeting:** The next operation meeting is scheduled for August 26 at the Elk Creek Visitor Center on Blue Mesa.

April 22, 2010 Aspinall Operation Meeting

\*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting in person or by phone

**Daily Sentinel**..... Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan  
**Delta County Independent** .....Bob Borchardt  
**Gunnison Country Times** ..... Michelle Burkhart, Will Shoemaker, Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel  
**Montrose Daily Press** ..... James Shea, Jason Monroe, Caitlin Switzer  
**Western Resource Advocates** ..... Bart Miller\*  
**Club 20** .....Reeves Brown  
**Colorado State University** ..... Brett Johnson  
**Gunnison Basin POWER** .....Ralph (Butch) Clark, Ramon Reed  
**Gunnison River Expeditions** .....Hank Hotze, Al DeGrange  
**Helton & Williamsen, P.C.** ..... Duane Helton  
**High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club** .....Steve Glazer\*, Wendy McDermott,  
Steve Schechter, Shara Rutberg  
**Xcel Energy**..... Fred Eggleston, Tom Minerick  
**Matt Owens Fly Company** .....Matt Owens  
**Trout Unlimited** .Pat Oglesby, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternel\*, John Trammell\*, Marshall Pendergrass,  
Matt Mayer, Mac Cunningham\*  
**Western Colorado Congress** .....Fred Wetlaufer  
**Argonne National Laboratory** ..... John Hayse, Kirk Lagory  
**University of Montana** ..... Jack Stanford  
**Ridgway Guide Service**.....Tim Peterson, Matt McCannel  
**Black Canyon Anglers**.....Richard Dudginski

**Self** .....Curt Treichel, Lynn Johnson, George Sheldon, Bo Gates, Marlene Zanatell, Jim Cochran, Jim Hokit, Richard Girvan, Coll Stanton, Joe Waggoner  
**Colorado River Energy Distributors**.....Leslie James, Kent Holsinger\*  
**Colorado River Water Conservation District** .....Dave Kanzer\*, Don Meyer, Jim Pokrandt, Eric Kuhn, Bill Trampe, David Halford, Ray Tenney  
**North Fork Water Conservancy District**..... Tom Alvey  
**Tri County Water** .....Mike Berry\*, Ion Spor, Kathleen Margetts,  
**Project 7** ..... Richard Margetts  
**Redlands Water and Power Company** ..... Charles Mitisek, Mike Gross  
**Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association**..... Marc Catlin, Ed Suppes\*, Steve Fletcher\*  
**Upper Colorado River Commission** .....Everett Sunderland  
**Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District**.....John McClow\*, Frank Kugel, Greg Peterson, Kathleen Curry, Mark Schumacher, Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel\*, Jim Slattery, Ken Spann  
**City of Grand Junction**..... Terry Franklin, Rick Bukus, Greg Trainor  
**Delta County Commissioners**.....Jan McCracken, Wayne Wolf, Olen Lund  
**Delta County**.....Duane Freeman  
**City of Delta**.....Lanny Sloan, Steve Glammeyer, Barry Bullard, Jim Brown, Wilma Ervin  
**Delta County Emergency Management**.....Rob Fiedler  
**Mesa County Emergency Management**.....  
**Gunnison County Commissioners** ..... Hap Channell, Paula Swenson, Jim Starr  
**Colorado Department of Agriculture**..... Jim Miller  
**Colorado Division of Water Resources** ..... Pat McDermott, Bob Hurford, Scott King, Richard Rozman, Luke Reschke\*  
**Colorado Division of Wildlife**...John Alves, Dan Brauch, Sherman Hebein, Dan Kowalski\*, David Graf, Ryan Swygman, Jay Skinner, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson, Mark Uppendahl  
**Colorado Water Conservation Board**..... Randy Seaholm, Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison\*, Rick Brown, Steve Miller  
**Congressman John Salazar** .....Richard Baca  
**Senator Mark Udall** .....  
**Senator Michael Bennet** ..... Trudy Kareus  
**Army Corps of Engineers**..... Ken Jacobson  
**Bureau of Land Management** ..... Roy Smith, Rooster Barnhart, Karen Tucker, Edd Franz\*, Forest Zerbe, Jesse Kirthorp, Peter Dennett, Julie Stotler, Ryan Mathis\*, Michelle Bailey, Patrick Pratchett\*  
**Fish and Wildlife Service**..... Al Pfister, Jana Mohrman\*, Patty Gelatt\*  
**National Park Service** .....Connie Rudd\*, Ken Stahlnecker, Dave Roberts, Matt Malick, Mark Wondzell, Melissa Trammell, Michael Dale\*, Bill Johnson, Dan Gude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee, Norm Henderson  
**National Weather Service**.....Brenda Alcorn, John Lhotak, Jim Pringle, Bryon Lawrence\*, Bill Reed, Aldis Strautins  
**National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration**..... Andrea Ray, Robert Webb, Klaus Weickmann, Brad Udall, Kevin Werner\*, Chad McNutt, Tracy Cox\*  
**NRCS**..... Paul Van Ryzin\*, Tom Pagano, Mike Gillespie, John Scott  
**U.S. Geological Survey**..... David Brown, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller, Gerhard Kuhn, Bob Boulgarz, Joe Sullivan\*, Steve Anders, Kirby Wynn, Trisha Solberg  
**Western Area Power Administration**..... Burt Hawkes\*, Brad Warren, Nancy Scheid, Clayton Palmer\*  
Jeff Ackerman, Kathy Crane, Ken Green, Annette Falvo, Ken Otto, Gary Burton, Margaret Matte, Dave Shelton, Jennifer Turnbull, Chris Brown, Shane Messawo, Rachelle Fellin, Laurie Moore\*  
**Bureau of Reclamation**... Ed Warner, Steve McCall\*, Joe Austin, Grant Watson, Ted Dunn\*, Dan Crabtree\*, Chris Cutler, Terry Stroh\*, Jane Blair, Max Spiker, Paul Davidson\*, Justyn Hock, Erik Knight\*, Nancy Coulam\*, Laurie Jones, Heather Patno, Dennis Kubly, Dave Harpman, Dawn Munger,

Tom Ryan\*, and Keith Twehous

**Interior Solicitors Office**..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy  
**Department of Justice**.....Dave Gehlert  
**Colorado U/CADSWES**.....Edie Zagona, Satish Regonda  
**University of Colorado**..... Christina Alford  
**Colorado Basin River Forecast Center**.....Brenda Alcorn, John Lhotak  
**National Drought Mitigation Center**.....Donna Woudenberg  
**Painted Sky RCD**.....Mike Drake  
**National Drought Mitigation Center**.....Donna Woudenberg  
**CSAS-CODOS**.....Chris Landry\*