

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
April 26, 2012

Participation: This meeting was held at Reclamation's Grand Junction office. Attendees are noted on the distribution list located at the end of these notes. **Handouts and presentations 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) 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 2011-2012 operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs for 2012; and proposed operation plans for 2012 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 has been released to evaluate alternative operations to help meet these recommendations. Operations for the endangered fish will begin when a Record of Decision on the EIS is signed. In addition, the water right for the Black Canyon National Park has been quantified and adjudicated. These operation meetings are used 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 (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 2012-April 2012 Operations:

The fall of 2011 began with good precipitation in the Gunnison Basin; however, November and December were much drier than normal. As of January 16, snowpack in the Gunnison Basin was 56 percent of average and there was less snow accumulation than in 2002. January and February precipitation was generally near average; however, March precipitation was extremely low, in

some areas record lows occurred. Gunnison Basin snowpack is now at 32 percent of average reflecting low precipitation and early snowmelt.

Crystal releases were around 2,000 cfs in September; reduced to 600 cfs during October, and then increased to 1,500 cfs until the Blue Mesa winter elevation target of 7490 feet was reached in late December. Releases were around 800 cfs in January and then decreased to 600 cfs.

The Gunnison Tunnel began diversions in the 3rd week of March and Crystal releases have increased to around 1400 cfs. Black Canyon flows are now around 400 cfs.

The forecasted April through July inflow to Blue Mesa was 315,000 af or 49 percent of average on April 15. This is considered a “dry type” year and inflow would be expected to be exceeded in 96-97 percent of years. The January forecast was 450,000 af which would be expected to be exceeded 85 percent of years. In contrast, the 2011 April-July inflow was 893,000 af.

Under most probable conditions, Blue Mesa Reservoir will be short approximately 185,000 af from filling (approximately 19 feet down).

Based on the present forecast, the Black Canyon National Park water right calls for a 1-day peak of 937 cfs. Flow Recommendations for endangered fish would call for a peak at Whitewater of 900 cfs.

Flows through the Black Canyon will be largely controlled by downstream senior water rights such as the Redlands. May and June flows should be in the 350-450 cfs range and 600-700 cfs later in the summer. Fall flows will drop to the 350-450 cfs range.

Comparisons to the drought year of 2002 were discussed. April to July inflow that year was 157,000 af and followed a low precipitation year in 2001. The dry year of 2012 follows a moderately wet year of 2011 which has resulted in generally good reservoir storage in the basin.

The National Weather Service reported that warm and dry weather was forecasted for the next few weeks. The Forecast Center indicated that Blue Mesa forecasted inflow was declining and on the day of the meeting was 280,000 af; down from the 315,000 af prediction on April 15th.

Special flow requests: The National Park Service would appreciate flows of 600-650 cfs during the last weekend of July to conduct vegetation surveys, if possible. The Colorado Division of Wildlife is scheduling trout monitoring for October 2-5 and flows of 600-900 cfs are ideal for this work. If preconstruction activities are completed in time, construction on the Relief Ditch replacement will begin this fall. Will keep Reclamation updated.

EIS update: The final EIS on endangered fish operations was released in February. Reclamation reported that signing of the Record of Decision was imminent. The preferred alternative addresses spring peak flows, duration flows, base flows measured at Whitewater and migration flows downstream from the Redlands Diversion.

Power Office: Normal maintenance work on dams and powerplants completed. No projects planned that will affect river flows/reservoir operations.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Colorado Parks and Wildlife: Kokanee release from Roaring Judy Hatchery to river on April 11 was successful. Around 3.5 million fish released that travel from the East River to the Gunnison River to Blue Mesa. CPW are spawning fish at East Portal now—requested updates of any significant flow changes. Working with USGS on stonefly study on the Gunnison River.

Colorado Water Conservation Board: Meets May 15-16 in Glenwood Springs. See website for information on water celebrations this year. Board will meet in Gunnison in July in conjunction with the Gunnison Water Workshop.

Fish and Wildlife Service: Redlands fish ladder is now operating. Recommended that base flows called for in the EIS be met.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users: South Canal hydropower work underway. Tunnel is at 100 percent and water deliveries reduced to 80 percent.

Western Area Power: New CRSP Manager Nancy Scheid was welcomed. There will be limited generation this year due to low water conditions. Will try to optimize operations. Any needed power purchases will be much less expensive than they were in the prior dry year of 2002 because of low natural gas prices and weakened economy.

Bureau of Land Management: Anticipate very busy June. Flows in 400-700 cfs are boatable but certainly lower than optimum.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservation District: Working on 50th anniversary celebration of Blue Mesa construction with Gunnison Basin Round Table. Will be event in June including ceremony at the dam. Working with Taylor Reservoir work group on operation recommendations for this year; there is 28,000 af in second fill at Taylor Park.

Colorado River Water Conservation District: Hartland Diversion improvement work complete; boat passage opened in early February. Has also provided funds for replacement of Relief Ditch Diversion. Base flows under the EIS need to be clarified. Redlands Diversion needs 750 cfs plus water to operate the fish screen. Working on abandonment of water rights for Juniper-Cross Mountain dams on the Yampa river due to the high cost of due diligence to retain the rights. Several activities coming up: May 2-state of the river at Mesa State. June 4-State of river presentation in Gunnison and celebration of the start of Blue Mesa Construction along with Round Table at Western State. August 6th-50th anniversary of Paonia Reservoir. . Lots of water-related celebrations this year -See www.crwcd.org.

Tri-County: In 2002 they were required to cease filling Ridgway due to downstream calls in April. Hopefully will occur later this year so that reservoir fills. Hiring contractor for design/build of hydropower project and continuing to work with power purchase contractors. In response to a question, indicated that test releases will be made from Ridgway on May 1, reaching 1200 cfs. CPW has been advised.

National Park Service: Happy the EIS is being completed. History tours at the East Portal will begin May 10th.

USGS: Asked which gages are most important in the area if work needs to be prioritized – people indicated the Black Canyon gage, Whitewater gage, and North Fork mouth gage. They have a “water alert” system which will notify you by email if flows reach a certain level—see website for information.

State Engineer: Runoff has been early. Has budget and personnel concerns requiring that work be prioritized. Will be busy year due to low streamflows.

Trout Unlimited: Mentioned South Canal hydropower project—planned fish barrier and completed Uncompahgre River access are very positive. Hope that Relief Ditch work will start this fall. Hartland Diversion Dam work complete—will be a river awareness float to celebrate on May 19th.

Delta County Emergency: Very dry conditions, concerned with fire danger.

Redlands Water and Power: Fish screen operational next week. Fish ladder is operating.

High Country Citizens: Working on Slate River mine remediation project.

Next Meeting: The next operation meeting is scheduled for August 9, 2012 at 1 pm in the Elk Creek Visitors Center at Blue Mesa Reservoir.

April 26, 2012 Aspinall Operation Meeting

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

Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
Black Canyon Anglers.....Richard Dudginski
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, Jeremy Matlock
Bureau of Reclamation... Denny Johnson, Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Ted Dunn*, Dan Crabtree*,
Terry Stroh*, Jane Blair, Paul Davidson*, Justyn Hock, Erik Knight*, Nancy Coulam, Laurie Jones, Phil
Martin*, Grant Watson, Vern Harrell
CSAS-CODOS.....Chris Landry
City of Grand Junction..... Terry Franklin, Rick Bukus, Greg Trainor
Club 20Reeves Brown
Colorado Department of Agriculture..... Jim Miller
Colorado River Energy Distributors.....Leslie James*, Kent Holsinger
Colorado River Water Conservation DistrictDave Kanzer*, Don Meyer, Jim Pokrandt*, Eric
Kuhn, David Halford, Ray Tenney
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Colorado Division of Water Resources Pat McDermott, Bob Hurford*, Scott King, Richard Rozman,
Luke Reschke, Jason Ullmann*
Colorado Division of Wildlife..... John Alves, Dan Brauch*, Dan Kowalski*, David Graf,
Ryan Swygman, Jay Skinner, Rick Anderson, Mark Uppendahl
Colorado U/CADSWES.....Edie Zagona, Satish Regonda
Colorado Water Conservation Board...Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison*, Rick Brown, Steve Miller
Congressman Scott Tipton
Daily Sentinel..... Gary Harmon*, Dave Buchanan*
Delta County IndependentBob Borchardt
Delta County Commissioners.....Jan McCracken, Wayne Wolf, Olen Lund
Delta County..... Duane Freeman
City of Delta..... Lanny Sloan, Steve Glammeyer, Glen Black*, Barry
Bullard, Jim Brown, Wilma Ervin
Delta County Emergency Management.....Rob Fiedler*
Delta Montrose Electric Association..... Jim Heneghan
Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert
Fish and Wildlife Service..... Jana Mohrman, Patty Gelatt*
Gunnison Country Times Michelle Burkhart, Will Shoemaker, Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel
Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark, Ramon Reed
Gunnison County Commissioners Hap Channell, Paula Swenson, Jim Starr
Gunnison River Expeditions Hank Hotze, Al DeGrange
Helton & Williamsen, P.C. Duane Helton
High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club..... Steve Glazer*, Jennifer Boch, Wendy McDermott,
Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Mesa County Emergency Management.....
Montrose Daily Press..... James Shea, Jason Monroe, Caitlin Switzer
National Drought Mitigation Center.....Donna Woudenberg
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration..... Andrea Ray, Robert Webb, Klaus Weickmann,
Brad Udall, Kevin Werner, Chad McNutt, Tracy Cox, Brenda Alcorn, John Lhotak
National Park ServiceConnie Rudd, Ken Stahlnecker, Matt Malick, Mark Wondzell,
Melissa Trammell, Michael Dale*, Bill Johnson, Dan Gude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Clayton Frazier
National Weather Service..... Brenda Alcorn, John Lhotak, Jim Pringle, Bill Reed,

Aldis Strautius*

NRCS..... Paul Van Ryzin, Tom Pagano, Mike Gillespie, John Scott

North Fork Water Conservancy District..... Tom Alvey

Painted Sky RCD..... Mike Drake

Project 7 Adam Turner

Recovery Program..... Tom Pitts, Tom Chart

Redlands Water and Power Company..... Kevin Jones*

Ridgway Guide Service..... Tim Paterson, Matt McCannel

Self Ralph Files, Dick Margetts

Senator Mark Udall.....

Senator Michael Bennet Trudy Kareus

Tri County Water Mike Berry*, Ion Spor, Kathleen Margetts,
Norm Brooks

Trout Unlimited.... Pat Oglesby*, Cary Denison*, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternel, John Trammell,
Marshall Pendergrass*

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association Ed Suppes*, Steve Fletcher*, Steve Shea, Aaron English,
Dennis Veo

Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland

Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District..... John McClow*, Frank Kugel, Greg Peterson,
Mark Schumacher, Tyler Martineau, Jim Slattery, Ken Spann

U.S. Geological Survey..... David Brown*, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller, Gerhard Kuhn, Bob Boulgarz,
Steve Anders, Trisha Solberg

Western Area Power Administration..... Clayton Palmer*, Jeff Ackerman*,
Jerry Wilhite*, Nancy Scheid*, Tim Vigil*, Tanya Newman

University of Colorado..... Christina Alford

Western Colorado Congress Fred Wetlaufer

Western Resource Advocates..... Bart Miller

Xcel Energy..... Fred Eggleston, Tom Minerick