Attachment D

2026 Drought Response Operations Plan

Operations at the Aspinall Unit (Aspinall)

1. Aspinall Operations Without Drought Response

Aspinall operates in accordance with multiple state-decreed water rights and agreements and pursuant to the 2012 Aspinall Record of Decision (Aspinall ROD).

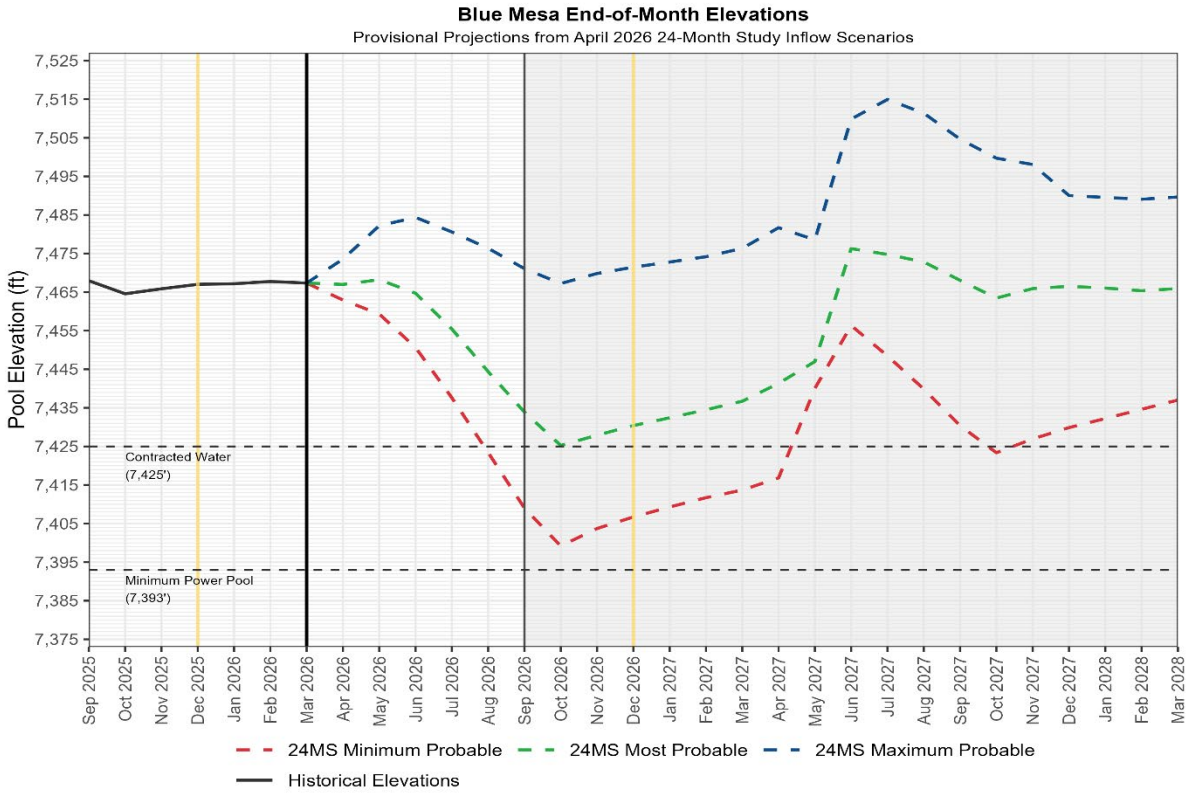
At all times, Aspinall must meet Colorado water administration requirements as determined by the Division 4 Engineer, including the required amount of flow-through necessary to meet downstream water rights senior to Aspinall. Releases above the aforementioned flow-through requirements may be made for various purposes according to the water right decrees for the Aspinall Unit reservoirs including their power plants.

Releases above flow-through amounts necessary to meet downstream senior water rights may be made for other decreed purposes through the power plants at the Aspinall Unit reservoirs. Releases above that required for the aforementioned decreed purposes will not be considered as made pursuant to "Operations without Drought Response" as defined in 5.2.1 but would be calculated as "Drought Release Operations."

As the primary storage facility for the Aspinall Unit, Blue Mesa Reservoir is operated to store water during the spring runoff period. Reservoir elevations typically peak late in the spring runoff and then decline as releases are made to satisfy water administration requirements, to meet authorized purposes including power generation, for flood control, for downstream target flows pursuant to the 2012 Aspinall ROD and to meet the December 31 target elevation of 7,490 feet.

Downstream target flows pursuant to the Aspinall ROD are divided into spring peak and baseflow periods. Spring peak targets vary by hydrologic year type and are determined by the April through July forecasted inflow into Blue Mesa Reservoir as detailed in Figure 1. Baseflow targets may be adjusted based on actual and forecasted inflows into Blue Mesa Reservoir.

Operations for spring peak flows are typically timed to match the spring peak from the North Fork of the Gunnison River. Releases during the baseflow period meet multiple purposes including power generation and baseflow targets and to draw the reservoir down to 7,490 feet by December 31 to prevent icing issues upstream of the reservoir.



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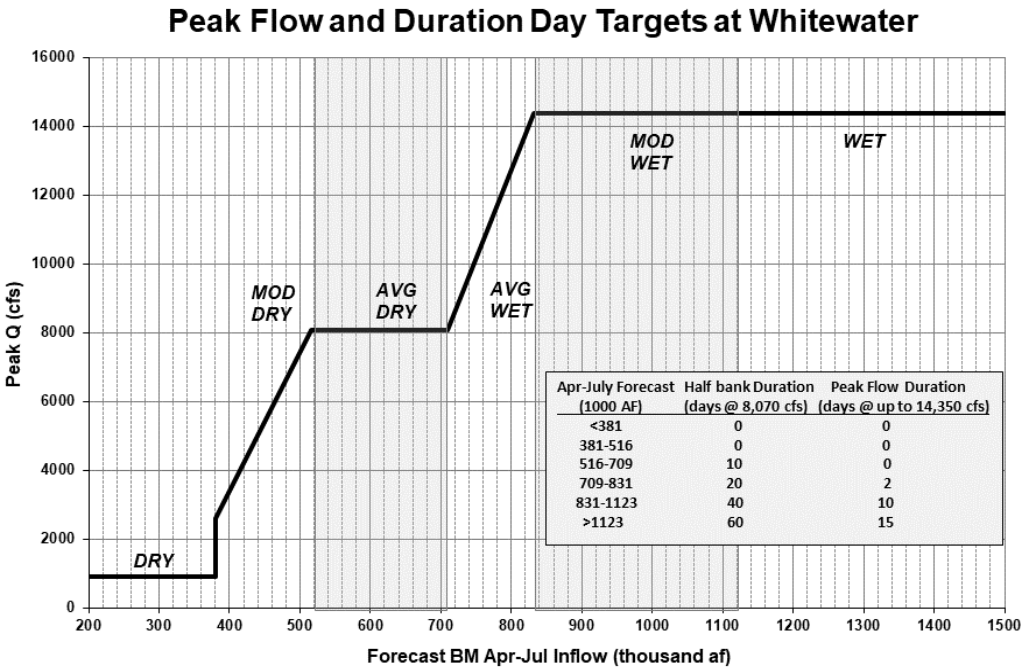

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44 Figure 1.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Wet	1050	1050	1050	1050	1050	1500	1500	1500	1050	1050	1050	1050
Mod Wet	1050	1050	1050	1050	1050	1500	1500	1500	1050	1050	1050	1050
Avg Wet	1050	1050	1050	1050	1050	1500	1500	1050	1050	1050	1050	1050
Avg Dry	1050	1050	1050	1050	1050	1500	1500	1050	1050	1050	1050	1050
Mod Dry*	750	750	750/790	750/890	750/890	1050	1050	1050	750/890	750/790	750/790	750
Dry*	750	750	750/790	750/890	750/890	1050	1050	750/890	750/890	750/790	750/790	750

*During March through November in Moderately Dry and Dry type years, additional releases will be made as necessary to provide flows above the 750 cfs anticipated to be diverted by the Redlands Water and Power Company, for the fish ladder and fish screen as shown.

2. Current Hydrology

The total live capacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir is 828,000 acre-feet. The activecapacity at Blue Mesa Reservoir available for power generation exists above elevation 7393 ft, and totals 748,000 acre-feet. Below the elevation of 7393 ft, no releases through the power plant can be made.

As of April 6, 2026, Blue Mesa Reservoir is at 7,466.22 ft of elevation, with 406,000 acre-feet of live storage (49% of live capacity) and 217,000 acre-feet of active storage (34% of active capacity). The active content, less various commitments described further below, determines water available for a potential Drought Response Operations Release.

The April unregulated inflow forecast for Blue Mesa Reservoir in water year 2026 ranges from a minimum probable of 389,00 acre-feet (43 percent of average) to a maximum probable of 640,000 acre-feet (71 percent of average) with the most probable forecast for water year 2026 of 479,000 acre-feet (53 percent of average). There is a 10 percent chance that inflows could be higher than the current maximum probable forecast and a 10 percent chance that inflows could be lower than the minimum probable forecast.

Under the most probable unregulated inflow scenario, Blue Mesa Reservoir content is projected to peak at 420,00 acre-feet (elevation 7468.23 feet) and drop to a content of 213,000 acre-feet at the end of 2026 (elevation 7430.42 and 26 percent of live capacity). This corresponds to an active content of 133,000 acre-feet (18 percent of active capacity).

3. Aspinall Operations without Drought Response during Plan year

Under the most probable unregulated April-July inflow scenario, releases from Crystal Dam will be made to deliver water to the Gunnison Tunnel for diversion to the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association starting in late March and continuing through October 2026.

Representatives from Reclamation and the State of Colorado will meet to discuss any operations of the Aspinall Unit to maintain flows in the Black Canyon for targets

described in the Black Canyon Reserved Water Right Decree. Based on the current forecast under the Black Canyon Reserved Water Right Decree, flows in the Black Canyon may be maintained above 300 cfs. The current forecast would include a spring peak release calculated as 482.95 cfs plus 1.44 times the Forecasted Inflow number divided by 1,000 expressed as cfs.

Releases from Crystal Dam may be made to help reach the Aspinall ROD (2012) spring peak and base flow targets in the Whitewater reach of the Gunnison River, recognizing the flow targets are not required minimum flows. Under the current forecast, the Aspinall ROD (2012) target for baseflows in April and May are 890 cfs in the Whitewater reach. The spring peak target is currently 900 cfs for a duration of one day in the Whitewater reach. The baseflow target in the Whitewater reach is about 900 cfs through September, followed by 790 cfs in October and November, and then will drop to 750 cfs for the remainder of 2026. These releases made to satisfy the Aspinall ROD (2012) result in Gunnison River flows that meet or exceed the flows described in the Black Canyon water rights decree.

4. Aspinall Drought Response Operations

The available water for a potential Drought Response Operations Release is determined to be the active content of Blue Mesa Reservoir excluding the volume of Taylor Park water stored within Blue Mesa Reservoir (see below for explanation of the Taylor Park Exchange Agreement) and excluding 60,000-acre feet of decreed water rights (see below for explanation of the decree in Case No. 03CW263 Water Division No. 4), and 1,400 acre-feet designated to contracts.

The calculation of available water for a Drought Response Operations Release can vary daily and will be directly affected by several factors including changes in operations and changes to inflow forecasts throughout spring 2026 and the determination of Black Canyon and Whitewater flow targets from the May 2026 forecasts.

a. Releases

No Drought Response Operations is contemplated for water year 2026. The volume of available DROA water will be re-evaluated at the beginning of water year 2027.

b. Recovery

There is no Drought Response Recovery planned for Aspinall during the 2026 DROA Plan year.

Recovery options are hydrology/year type dependent. For years with longer duration targets (such as moderately wet), opportunities to reduce durations to recover water will be pursued. This would require consultation with and concurrence from the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program).

If Drought Response Operations Releases result in Blue Mesa Reservoir elevation being below the spillway elevation when it otherwise would have been at or above the spillway elevation, the reductions in spring releases based upon elevation limitations can be accounted as recovered water.

When operations without Drought Response would cause releases to drop Blue Mesa Reservoir elevation to the Dec 31 icing target, accounting would include that volumetric difference as recovered.

There are two elevation targets, which, if reached, will "recover" all prior Drought Response Operation releases:

- 7517.4 - 7519.4 feet (full reservoir)
- Dec. 31: 7490.0 feet (icing target)

5. Contracts and Decrees

Existing water rights decrees, agreements, and supply contracts at Aspinall are described below. Any future contracts which become executed will be described here. Water rights decrees, agreements, and supply contracts are not impaired by any Drought Response Operations because the water decreed and under contract or agreement is considered unavailable under DROA.

a. Contract Deliveries

Aspinall currently has 1,400 acre-feet of water under contract for delivery downstream, or for augmentation of depletions for decreed water rights upstream in any given year. Water under contract is not available for Drought Response Operations pursuant to DROA.

b. Taylor Park Exchange Agreement

The Taylor Park Reservoir Operation and Storage Exchange Agreement (1975) allows for the exchange of water stored in Taylor Park Reservoir and Aspinall (Blue Mesa Reservoir) to improve utilization and management of available water supplies under the water rights of the Uncompahgre Project and Blue Mesa Reservoir. The maximum amount of Taylor Park Reservoir exchange water that can be stored within Blue Mesa Reservoir at any time throughout the year is 106,230 acre-feet. The amount of Taylor Park Reservoir exchange water stored in Blue Mesa Reservoir is for diversion by the Uncompahgre Project at the Gunnison Tunnel and is determined

through accounting managed by the Colorado Division of Water Resources. This water is not available for release pursuant to DROA.

c. Decree Case No. 03CW263 Water Court, Water Division No. 4 (Subordination Agreement)

The Subordination Agreement, dated June 1, 2000, formalizes the commitment made by the United States during the planning of the Aspinall Unit to allow the depletion of Aspinall Rights up to 60,000 acre-feet per year to in-basin water users so that Aspinall would not interfere with water use in the Upper Gunnison River Basin. A decree entered in Case No. 03CW263 (October 10, 2006), Water Court, Water Division No. 4, for a plan for augmentation permitted depletion of up to 60,000 acre feet per year of Aspinall Rights to augment existing and future water rights exercised for all decreed beneficial purposes within the Gunnison River Basin through any decreed structure or facility upstream and downstream of the Crystal Reservoir Dam. Accounting for the plan for augmentation is the responsibility of the State of Colorado Division Engineer's Office, Water Division No. 4. This water is not available for release pursuant to DROA.

6. Coordination

Aspinall Unit stakeholder coordination meetings are held three times annually in January, April, and August. DROA plans will be presented for comment and feedback at these meetings to all interested parties. Additionally, Reclamation will reach out to stakeholders as needed for input and coordination on operations outside of regularly scheduled meetings.

7. Accounting

Accounting for prior and current DROA releases and recovery at Aspinall can be found here:

https://www.usbr.gov/ColoradoRiverBasin/documents/dcp/DROA/DROSummarySheet.pdf