United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
Upper Colorado Region
Western Colorado Area Office
2764 Compass Drive, Suite 106
Grand Junction, CO 81506-8785

IN REPLY REFER TO:

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WCG-McCall
ENV-6.00

FEB 13 '09

Interested Parties

Subject: Aspinall Unit Operations Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed is a copy of the Aspinall Unit Operations Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The document was prepared by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on Friday, February 13, 2009.

The DEIS describes the environmental impacts of operating the Aspinall Unit (Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal dams and reservoirs) to implement the flow recommendations provided by the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program. The purpose of the proposed federal action is to provide sufficient releases of water at times, quantities, and duration necessary to conserve four endangered fish species (razorback sucker, Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, and bonytail) and their designated critical habitat in the Gunnison and Colorado rivers in western Colorado and eastern Utah. Reclamation will maintain the authorized purposes of the Aspinall Unit which include enabling future water development to proceed in the upper Colorado River Basin in compliance with applicable laws, compacts, court decrees, and Indian trust responsibilities.

The DEIS describes and analyzes five alternatives. Under the No Action Alternative, the flow recommendations would not be met. Under the other four alternatives, Reclamation would assist in meeting the flow recommendations by modifying the operations of the Aspinall Unit to provide releases of water to conserve the endangered fish and their designated critical habitat.

The DEIS notes, (Section 1.5, page 1-18) that the federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park is nearing quantification. This is no longer correct, as a final decree was signed by the court December 31, 2008. But at the time of printing (last December), the quantification was still pending, hence there is no analysis comparing the peaks through the Black Canyon under the action alternatives with the potential peaks through the Black Canyon if the decree approved by the water court is exercised. However, there is an analysis (Appendix F of Volume II of the DEIS) of the potential impacts (both beneficial and adverse) of operations under the various alternatives on National Park resources in the Black Canyon.

The flow recommendations address flows in the lower Gunnison River downstream of Delta and measured at Whitewater. As explained in the DEIS, the Aspinall Unit lies 90 miles upstream of the river gage at Whitewater, Colorado, while the Black Canyon lies downstream of the Aspinall Unit and the Gunnison Tunnel, but above the confluence of the North Fork of the Gunnison (North Fork). The North Fork, in turn, lies above the designated critical habitat and the river gage at Whitewater. Thus, releases made from the Aspinall Unit in furtherance of the flow recommendations will pass through the Black Canyon and provide peak flows as well as other benefits to the park.

While the Black Canyon will receive the benefits of all releases made from the Aspinall Unit for Endangered Species Act purposes, it does not receive the benefits of increased flows into the Gunnison River from the North Fork because it lies above the North Fork. Because of concerns over downstream flooding, and other operational limitations, when North Fork flows are significant, Reclamation will reduce releases from the Aspinall Unit to protect public health and safety.

The attached charts show the projected peaks during the 31 year study period for each alternative in the Black Canyon, Delta and Whitewater. These projected peaks are compared with the Black Canyon decree and fish flow targets at Whitewater. This information should be considered in addition to the analysis of the alternatives on the National Park found in Appendices A and F of Volume II of the EIS. We are seeking comments from the public on this analysis.

Finally, decisions on when, and under what circumstances, to exercise the water right are at the discretion of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior and thus are not contained or analyzed in this DEIS. Because we cannot predict future decisions of the Secretary we are unable to model the outcome of those decisions. Consequently, the information provided here is solely for the purpose of illustrating how the peaks through the Black Canyon under the various alternatives might compare with the flows established in the Final Decree for the Black Canyon. This information is consistent with the information shared with the parties in the negotiations for the Black Canyon water right. If there are questions on this issue, please contact aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov.

Reclamation's public involvement plan is intended to inform the public as well as solicit public responses and input regarding the public's needs, values, and suggestions. Public hearings will be held during the month of April in Gunnison and Delta, Colorado. The public hearings schedule is as follows:

- **Tuesday, April 7, 2009** – 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. – Gunnison County Fairgrounds, 275 S. Spruce Street, Gunnison, Colorado

- **Wednesday, April 8, 2009** – 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. – Bill Heddles Recreation Center, 530 Gunnison River Drive, Delta, Colorado

The DEIS is now open for a 70-day public review period. To be most helpful, comments on the draft should be as specific as possible and address the adequacy of the document or the merits of

the alternatives. Before including your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Reclamation is not required to seek comments on the final environmental impact statement. Therefore, you are encouraged to raise all comments, recommendations, or objections on the DEIS so that substantive comments are made available in time for Reclamation to meaningfully consider and respond to them in the final environmental impact statement. Written comments, Reclamation responses, and public hearing statements will be used in the preparation of the final environmental impact statement.

All written comments, including those from parties unable to attend the hearings or those wishing to supplement their comments at the hearings, should be addressed to Steve McCall, Bureau of Reclamation, Western Colorado Area Office, 2764 Compass Drive, Suite 106, Grand Junction, Colorado 81506; telephone 970-248-0638; facsimile 970-248-0601; e-mail at smccall@uc.usbr.gov. Under the National Environmental Policy Act process, written and oral comments, received by the due date, are given the same consideration.

If requesting additional copies of the DEIS, please contact Steve McCall at 970-248-0638. The DEIS is also available on Reclamation's web site at www.usbr.gov/uc (click on Environmental Documents).

Comments on the DEIS must be received by **Friday, April 24, 2009**.

Thank you for participating in this environmental review process.

Sincerely,

FOR Carol DeAngelis
Area Manager

Enclosures

Alt A - Risk of Spill Alternative						
	Black Canyon		Delta	Whitewater		Peak Operation Details
	Target	Actual	Actual	Target	Actual	
1975	7595	6341	9828	14350	11201	6500 cfs from Morrow Point does not meet either target
1976	4188	5129	7281	8070	9336	
1977	829	806	895	900	1636	no peak operation
1978	6484	3602	8964	14350	10658	4150 cfs from Crystal does not meet either target
1979	11034	5515	12935	14350	16896	5000 cfs from Morrow Point does not meet Black Canyon target
1980	11568	6376	15100	14350	16404	6500 cfs from Morrow Point does not meet Black Canyon target
1981	886	753	2651	900	3771	no peak operation
1982	6433	4935	8006	14350	9829	5000 cfs from Morrow Point does not meet either target
1983	5864	10081	17586	8070	19418	
1984	13437	11076	17843	14350	20736	6500 cfs from Morrow Point does not meet Black Canyon target, Delta flooding w/ Black Canyon < 5000 cfs
1985	6513	11564	16908	14350	16192	
1986	7595	5652	10338	14350	11896	5000 cfs from Morrow Point does not meet either target
1987	5635	6611	9137	8070	10354	
1988	3273	1341	2723	2600	3665	no peak operation, Whitewater target met with North Fork flows
1989	2176	1793	3146	2600	3465	no peak operation, Whitewater target met with North Fork flows
1990	1673	793	1602	900	2566	no peak operation
1991	4492	4446	7461	8070	8787	4150 cfs from Crystal does not meet Black Canyon target
1992	3578	1212	4111	2600	6043	no peak operation, Whitewater target met with North Fork flows
1993	8922	7573	17260	14350	21948	Delta flooding w/ Morrow Point = 4500 cfs, Black Canyon = 5000 cfs
1994	3883	1946	3292	2600	4907	no peak operation, Whitewater target met with North Fork flows
1995	6866	11750	15951	14350	19476	
1996	6484	5209	9136	14350	9788	5000 cfs from Morrow Point does not meet either target
1997	7595	7462	11256	14350	13739	5000 cfs from Morrow Point does not meet either target
1998	5864	4803	8454	8070	10021	5000 cfs from Morrow Point does not meet Black Canyon target
1999	4492	4955	7091	8070	7703	
2000	3730	1227	2875	2600	4767	no peak operation, Whitewater target met with North Fork flows
2001	3426	1660	2950	2600	3491	no peak operation, Whitewater target met with North Fork flows
2002	778	858	842	900	1170	
2003	2740	1793	4499	2600	5363	Whitewater target met with North Fork flows, Black Canyon < 2000 cfs
2004	2359	911	2390	2600	3411	no peak operation, Whitewater target met with North Fork flows
2005	6312	3480	10021	14350	13473	peak operation but Crystal < 4150 cfs

Alt B - Fish Peak with Duration Alternative					
	Black Canyon		Delta	Whitewater	
	Target	Actual	Actual	Target	Actual
1975	7595	6839	10308	14350	12296
1976	4188	4387	6649	8070	8386
1977	829	806	895	900	1636
1978	6484	6051	9677	14350	11364
1979	11034	6684	12144	14350	16261
1980	11568	6253	15047	14350	16326
1981	886	753	2651	900	3771
1982	6433	6451	9374	14350	11023
1983	5864	10707	18413	8380	20350
1984	13437	10458	17923	14350	20941
1985	6513	9063	13956	14350	15503
1986	7595	6782	12406	14350	13727
1987	5635	6346	9015	8070	10191
1988	3273	2921	4536	4990	5814
1989	2176	3314	4879	5315	5243
1990	1673	903	1602	900	2566
1991	4492	4720	7119	8070	8593
1992	3578	3330	6647	8070	8583
1993	8922	7587	16146	14350	21040
1994	3883	4167	6282	8070	7755
1995	6866	11871	16471	14350	19125
1996	6484	8475	11931	14350	12412
1997	7595	7808	12754	14350	14530
1998	5864	3843	7396	8070	9158
1999	4492	5093	7100	8070	7783
2000	3730	6204	7122	8070	7840
2001	3426	5537	6910	8070	7439
2002	778	858	842	900	1170
2003	2740	2863	6144	5395	7033
2004	2359	2863	4451	4385	5207
2005	6312	1535	7603	10180	11372

Peak Operation Details

peak release for 9 days, Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway - Whitewater peak not met (North Fork < 4000 cfs)

no peak operation
peak release for 9 days, Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway - Whitewater peak not met (North Fork < 3500 cfs)
Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 5000 cfs (North Fork > 7000 cfs)
Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 6000 cfs (North Fork > 9000 cfs)
no peak operation

flooding at Delta w/ Black Canyon = 4000 cfs

Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway, North Fork < 6000 cfs

Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 2600 cfs

no peak operation

Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 3300 cfs
flooding at Delta w/ Black Canyon < 4000 cfs

Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 2600 cfs, (North Fork = 5000 cfs)

Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon < 1000 cfs, (North Fork = 6800 cfs)

Alt C - Fish Peak with Increased Duration Alternative					
	Black Canyon		Delta	Whitewater	
	Target	Actual	Actual	Target	Actual
1975	7595	6839	10308	14350	12296
1976	4188	4984	6754	8070	8386
1977	829	806	895	900	1636
1978	6484	6058	9423	14350	11424
1979	11034	7069	11922	14350	16033
1980	11568	6482	14488	14350	15545
1981	886	753	2651	900	3771
1982	6433	6054	8664	14350	10294
1983	5864	11212	16710	8380	19265
1984	13437	10906	17898	14350	20859
1985	6513	9248	13999	14350	15530
1986	7595	7062	12713	14350	14018
1987	5635	5955	8381	8070	10463
1988	3273	3462	4754	4990	5974
1989	2176	3732	5081	5315	5371
1990	1673	896	1602	900	2566
1991	4492	4848	7040	8070	8514
1992	3578	4350	6740	8070	8647
1993	8922	7596	16338	14350	21144
1994	3883	4964	6538	8070	7875
1995	6866	12560	16526	14350	18751
1996	6484	8775	12202	14350	12655
1997	7595	7994	13699	14350	14470
1998	5864	3940	7551	8070	9324
1999	4492	5673	7497	8070	8156
2000	3730	4248	5588	8070	6091
2001	3426	4089	5956	8070	6536
2002	778	858	842	900	1170
2003	2740	2863	6421	5395	7191
2004	2359	2990	4728	4385	5366
2005	6312	1476	7771	10180	11483

Peak Operation Details

peak release for 9 days, Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway - Whitewater peak not met (North Fork < 4000 cfs)

no peak operation
peak release for 9 days, Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway - Whitewater peak not met (North Fork < 3500 cfs)
Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 5000 cfs (North Fork > 7000 cfs)
Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 6000 cfs (North Fork > 9000 cfs)
no peak operation
peak release for 9 days, Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway - Whitewater peak not met (North Fork = 3000 cfs)

flooding at Delta w/ Black Canyon = 4500 cfs

Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway, North Fork < 6000 cfs

no peak operation

flooding at Delta w/ Black Canyon < 4000 cfs

Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 2800 cfs, (North Fork = 5000 cfs)

Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 1300 cfs, (North Fork = 6800 cfs)

Alt D - Fish Peak with Revised Target Alternative					
	Black Canyon		Delta	Whitewater	
	Target	Actual	Actual	Target	Actual
1975	7595	6839	10308	14350	12296
1976	4188	4387	6649	8070	8386
1977	829	806	895	900	1636
1978	6484	6051	9677	14350	11364
1979	11034	6684	12144	14350	16261
1980	11568	6253	15047	14350	16326
1981	886	753	2651	900	3771
1982	6433	6451	9374	14350	11023
1983	5864	9613	17146	8070	19058
1984	13437	10444	17921	14350	20939
1985	6513	9081	13955	14350	15504
1986	7595	6782	12405	14350	13727
1987	5635	6346	9015	8070	10191
1988	3273	1341	2723	2600	3665
1989	2176	1051	1988	2600	2462
1990	1673	823	1602	900	2566
1991	4492	4687	7104	8070	8580
1992	3578	1352	4108	2600	6045
1993	8922	7588	16176	14350	21058
1994	3883	1943	3295	2600	4911
1995	6866	11876	16474	14350	19130
1996	6484	8518	11959	14350	12422
1997	7595	7808	12755	14350	14531
1998	5864	3844	7396	8070	9158
1999	4492	4944	7100	8070	7783
2000	3730	1316	2891	2600	4779
2001	3426	1660	2950	2600	3491
2002	778	858	842	900	1170
2003	2740	1295	4499	2600	5310
2004	2359	859	2390	2600	3411
2005	6312	3533	10070	14350	13516

Peak Operation Details

peak release for 9 days, Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway - Whitewater peak not met (North Fork < 4000 cfs)

no peak operation
peak release for 9 days, Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway - Whitewater peak not met (North Fork < 3500 cfs)
Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 5000 cfs (North Fork > 7000 cfs)
Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 6000 cfs (North Fork > 9000 cfs)
no peak operation

flooding at Delta w/ Black Canyon = 4500 cfs

Blue Mesa max = 6100 cfs, no spillway, North Fork < 6000 cfs

Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 1300 cfs
no peak operation
no peak operation

Whitewater peak met with North Fork flows, no peak operation
flooding at Delta w/ Black Canyon < 4000 cfs
Whitewater peak met with North Fork flows, no peak operation

Whitewater peak met w/ Black Canyon = 2700 cfs, (North Fork = 5000 cfs)

Whitewater peak met with North Fork flows, no peak operation
Whitewater peak met with North Fork flows, no peak operation

Whitewater peak met with North Fork flows, no peak operation
Whitewater peak met with North Fork flows, no peak operation
peak release for 7 days, Whitewater peak not met

No Action					
	Black Canyon		Delta	Whitewater	
	Target	Actual	Actual	Target	Actual
1975	7595	3323	7019	14350	8924
1976	4188	1293	3889	8070	5125
1977	829	450	900	900	1573
1978	6484	3602	8964	14350	10662
1979	11034	3655	11153	14350	15161
1980	11568	3564	12722	14350	13882
1981	886	438	2651	900	3771
1982	6433	3559	6807	14350	9135
1983	5864	10750	18507	8070	20481
1984	13437	10990	17922	14350	20744
1985	6513	11743	17209	14350	16498
1986	7595	5028	8744	14350	10353
1987	5635	5856	8194	8070	9713
1988	3273	1042	2133	2600	3434
1989	2176	1051	1988	2600	2462
1990	1673	699	1602	900	2566
1991	4492	4144	6939	8070	8409
1992	3578	1382	4101	2600	6050
1993	8922	5666	15696	14350	20489
1994	3883	1944	3294	2600	4909
1995	6866	12156	16522	14350	19506
1996	6484	3204	7291	14350	7857
1997	7595	7682	10224	14350	11993
1998	5864	3364	8281	8070	9852
1999	4492	3991	5350	8070	6857
2000	3730	1140	2872	2600	4766
2001	3426	1660	2950	2600	3491
2002	778	439	842	900	1170
2003	2740	951	4499	2600	5310
2004	2359	840	2390	2600	3411
2005	6312	3527	10278	14350	13572