TWG POSITION PAPER

INSTALLATION OF SPILLWAY GATE EXTENSIONS

Background: The preferred alternative in the final environmental impact statement on the operations of Glen Canyon Dam allowed two options for increasing the risk of spilling. When the Secretary of the Interior signed the Record of Decision he chose the option to permanently install 4.5 foot extensions on both sets of spillway gates at Glen Canyon Dam. The purpose of this provision was to increase Reclamation's ability to safely control high runoff years and not spill large volumes of water downstream through the Grand Canyon. This was selected as the means to accomplishing this objective instead of the alternative of increasing the storage buffer currently used as a protection against unexpected late spring forecast increases. The Basin States opposed the storage buffer concept due to the negative impact it would have on the Upper Basin yield.

Monitoring of the 1996 test of the BHBF and recent analysis by researchers indicates that large releases from the dam are indeed beneficial to the sediment resources of the Grand Canyon. In the April 1997 symposium of the 1996 BHBF test, researchers indicated that releases greater than 45,000 cfs were likely preferable to lesser releases. This information implies that historic premises regarding the negative effects of spills have been replaced by new information that would welcome the occurrence of high spring spills.

Issue: Since the philosophy of avoiding spills is changing, the TWG believes that it is appropriate to readdress the necessity of installing the spillway gate extensions. It is possible that neither the spillway gate extensions nor the additional storage buffer is required, since large spring spills would not be viewed as negative to Grand Canyon resources.

Recommendation: We recommend that the AMWG task the TWG with an investigation of this issue and to provide back to the AMWG information and analysis as to the implications of not installing the extensions.