

**Colorado River Storage Project  
Flaming Gorge Working Group  
Meeting Minutes  
August 22, 2012**

### **Participation**

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This meeting was held at Western Park, Vernal, Utah. Attendees are listed below.

### **Purpose of Meeting**

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The purpose of operation meetings (held in April and August) is to inform the public and other interested parties of Reclamation's current and future operational plans and to gather information from the public regarding specific resources associated with Flaming Gorge Reservoir. In addition, the meetings are used to coordinate activities and exchange information among agencies, water users, and other interested parties concerning the Green River.

### **General**

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Heather Hermansen welcomed everyone to the Flaming Gorge Work Group meeting. The individuals attending the meeting each introduced themselves and their affiliations. See below for a list of participants. The agenda for the meeting was reviewed and attendees were told there would be time set aside for questions and discussion. Heather explained the purpose was to look back at spring operations, and then to talk about fall and winter operations.

### **Flaming Gorge Operation and Hydrology - Heather Hermansen**

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The May 2012 final forecast of the April-July unregulated inflow volume into Flaming Gorge Reservoir was 630 thousand acre-feet (kaf). The observed volume into Flaming Gorge Reservoir for the April thru July period was 570 kaf (58% of average). The hydrologic classification, under the 2006 Record of Decision (ROD), based on the observed unregulated inflow is moderately dry. The May forecast of the April-July flow volume for the Yampa River at Maybell and Little Snake at Lily (which represents the Yampa River at Deerlodge Park) was for 541 kaf. The observed volume was 460 kaf (36% of average). This was the 4th driest year on record for the Yampa River.

Flaming Gorge was operated under the ROD and with consideration to the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) March 2012 research study: The Larval Trigger Study Plan (LTSP). The LTSP recommends altered timing of the Flaming Gorge Dam spring peak to coincide with the emergence of wild razorback sucker larvae in the middle Green River (Reach 2). Because of the dry conditions on the Yampa River, it was decided to attempt to meet the the dry hydrologic classification objectives for the ROD and LTSP. The target this year was at least 1 day of flows greater than 8,300 cfs as measured on the Green River at Jensen, Utah USGS stream gage. Spring operations were timed with the emergence of larvae in the middle Green River, which occurred after the peak of the Yampa, during the descending limb of the hydrograph. Flaming Gorge releases utilized both power plant capacity and some bypass, with releases peaking on May 23, 2012, at 7,430 cfs. Flows at Jensen, Utah were measured above 8,300 cfs for five consecutive days during larval presence.

Flaming Gorge Reservoir is currently at 82% of capacity. Releases are 1,300 cfs and inflows are averaging 900 cfs. The reservoir elevation is decreasing and expected to continue decreasing through the winter months.

Heather explained the baseflow requirements and the possible flexibility. She indicated the variation is plus or minus 40% around the mean annual base flow, as well as meeting the requirements of a 0.1 meter stage change at the Jensen gage.

Trina Hedrick with Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) asked a question about the 2011 reservoir elevation drop in relation to the kokanee eggs and whether we learned anything from the 2011 operational season of the reservoir in regard to kokanee. No one present in the meeting could adequately answer the question.

Darren Bowcutt with the Green River Outfitters Guide Association (GROGA) asked a question about the forecasted hourly release patterns during the fall, and the shape and size of the winter release pattern.

This led to Jeff Ackerman with [Western Area Power Administration \(Western\) presenting their proposal for Flaming Gorge Dam winter operations](#) to support hydropower production. Jeff explained the difficulties with the 2012 fires, transmission system, and other system conditions Western has been faced with. Blue Mesa is currently more than 30 feet lower than this same time last year. Jeff explained that Western's peak power load is December through February with high power demands in the early mornings and late evenings. Jeff referenced a letter Western sent to Reclamation requesting additional water for the December through February timeframe. Western would like to see steady 800 cfs releases during October and November with an increase to approximately 1,500 cfs during the months of December through February. Jeff handed out a graph of Western's proposed hourly release pattern from Flaming Gorge Dam for hydropower. Darren Bowcutt (GROGA) asked why the releases in the middle of the day could not be higher. Jeff explained it would create excess power that would have to be sold at the times when price is at its lowest.

There was also the question as to what effect the Western proposal would have on the reservoir. Heather explained it would result in the reservoir being an additional 3 feet lower at the end of water year 2012, but the elevation would recover by 2014 assuming an average year in 2014. Steve Hulet, Manager of the Flaming Gorge Dam field division, indicated the Western proposal coincides well with the planned maintenance at the dam and power plant.

### **Forecast Presentation- Heather Hermansen for Ashley Nielson**

Heather presented Ashley Neilson's Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) slideshow discussing the past spring precipitation and temperatures and observed water supply. Heather explained that we have transitioned from last year's La Nina to an El Nino pattern.

Aldis Strautins (National Weather Service, Grand Junction Office) explained a study effort they have been working on that looks at two consecutive years of La Nina conditions. The correlations they found indicate that the first year of La Nina is typically a wetter year, and the second La Nina is a dry year. He mentioned the quick transition to El Nino conditions, which we

currently see, indicates that average to slightly below average conditions can be expected next year.

### **Larval Trigger Study Plan- Joe Skorupski**

Joe Skorupski with UDWR and in conjunction with Dave Speas, fish biologist with Reclamation, presented this year's work and results associated with the LTSP. Joe reviewed the LTSP and included the floodplain areas in the middle Green River associated with dry flow conditions. Joe indicated Old Charlie Wash and Stewart Lake are the only areas expected to connect to the river during a moderately dry to dry year. A number of larvae were seen entering the wetland habitat areas this spring but the drying out of the areas in the summer led to a complete fish kill in those areas. The fish kills were the only negative aspect of the LTSP this year. The other research areas were a success with successful real-time coordination between Reclamation, the Service and UDWR; successful larval entrainment in Old Charlie Wash and Stewart Lake; and significant research progress made in 2011 and 2012 under wet and dry conditions.

### **Discussion and Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Flaming Gorge Work Group will be April 24th, 2013 at 11:00 am at the new Utah Department of Natural Resources building in Vernal, Utah, located at 318 North Vernal Avenue.

### **Presentations**

#### [Reclamation Hydrology Presentation](#)

<http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/wg/fg/twg/twgSummaries.html>

#### [Western Area Power Administration Presentation](#)

[http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/wg/fg/pdfs/12.08.22.WAPA\\_Proposal.pdf](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/wg/fg/pdfs/12.08.22.WAPA_Proposal.pdf)

#### [Colorado Basin River Forecast Center Presentation](#)

[http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/wg/fg/pdfs/12.08.22.RFC\\_FG.pdf](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/wg/fg/pdfs/12.08.22.RFC_FG.pdf)

#### [Larval Trigger Study Plan](#)

<http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/wg/fg/pdfs/12.08.22.UDWR.FG.pdf>

## Attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Heather Hermansen	Reclamation
Ed Vidmar	Reclamation
Steve Hulet	Reclamation
Paul Messerschmidt	Trout Creek Flies/Guide
Darren Bowcutt	Western River/Guide/VP GROGA
Yankton Johnson	Moon Lake Electric
Alan Haslam	Moon Lake Electric
Bob Leake	Utah Water Rights
Charles Card	Trout Unlimited
Aldis Strautins	NWS GJT
Trina Hedrick	Utah Div. Wildlife Resources
Joe Skorupski	Utah Div. Wildlife Resources
Jeff Ackerman	Western Area Power Administration
Nancy Scheid	Western Area Power Administration
Jerry Wilhite	Western Area Power Administration

## Additional Links

[Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group Meeting Summaries](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/wg/fg/twg/twgSummaries.html)

<http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/wg/fg/twg/twgSummaries.html>

## Previous Meeting Minutes

Flaming Gorge Working Group Meeting Minutes:

April 18, 2012

August 23, 2011

April 26, 2011

August 26, 2010

April 27, 2010

August 26, 2009

April 15, 2009

August 20, 2008

April 16, 2008

August 23, 2007

April 19, 2007

August 22, 2006

April 13, 2006

November 2, 2005

October 28, 2005

August 25, 2005

April 20, 2005

August 19, 2004  
April 15, 2004