

**Aspinall Operations EIS
Cooperating Agency Meeting
April 1, 2005**

Final Meeting Summary

The fifth Cooperating Agency Meeting for the Aspinall Operations Environmental Impact Statement was held on April 1, 2005 at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Western Colorado Area Office at 2764 Compass Drive, Suite 106, in Grand Junction, Colorado. All Cooperating Agencies were present for the meeting. Cooperating Agencies include the State of Colorado (Colorado), Colorado River Water Conservation District (CRWCD), Southwestern Water Conservancy District, National Park Service (NPS), Platte River Power Authority (PRPA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). A total of 40 people participated in the meeting including Reclamation staff from Grand Junction, Montrose, and Salt Lake City. A copy of the meeting attendees is attached.

The meeting began at 9:30 a.m. Three participants joined the meeting via conference call.

Introduction and Welcome

Ed Warner (Reclamation-WCAO Resource Division Manager) facilitated the meeting and reviewed the ground rules. Cooperating Agencies and others in attendance introduced themselves and Reclamation reviewed the meeting agenda and no changes were proposed.

Discussion on April 1st Meeting Summary

Cooperating Agencies reviewed the Draft Meeting Summary for the April 1, 2005 meeting. There were no changes suggested for the February 15th summary. Previously Mike Gross and Karen Shirley had provided e-mail comments. The summary will be finalized and distributed to Cooperating Agencies and posted on Reclamation's Aspinall EIS website.

Presentation on Flow Recommendations

Chuck McAda made a presentation on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service flow recommendations developed for the Gunnison and Colorado rivers. These recommendations have been approved by the Recovery Program. Chuck made copies of the recommendations available to anyone who did not have them.

On the Gunnison River the last wild razorback sucker was recorded in 1980; pikeminnow have always been present but in very small numbers in recent years. Pikeminnow have been tracked upstream to the Hartland Diversion upstream from Delta but most use occurs in the lower 36 miles of river. Spawning has been confirmed in recent years and 67 have used the Redlands fish ladder. Razorback suckers were first stocked in 1996 and spawning and larval fish have been confirmed. Nine have used the ladder.

The goal of the flow recommendations is to provide annual and seasonal flow patterns to enhance the populations of the fish. The objective is to create and maintain habitat for all life stages to enhance spawning; provide low velocity habitat for staging and resting during runoff; provide floodplains for food production and larval fish survival; provide flows to restore and maintain in-channel habitat, winter habitat, and habitat diversity; and provide for migration flows. Flows needed to move river material drive the flow recommendations. Flow recommendations vary dependent on water availability (i.e. average runoff, above average, etc).

Flow recommendations in addition to other Recovery activities (fish ladder, bottomland work, etc) are needed to help recover the fish. Monitoring is needed to determine the endangered fish (and non-native fish) response to the flow recommendations, and adaptive management is needed to respond to new information.

Concerning the EIS process, alternatives should address all life stages of the endangered fish and should be concerned with all the habitat types used by the fish.

Status of Description of No Action, Baseline, and Existing Conditions

Reclamation reviewed the basics of the EIS process and how the No Action Alternative fits into the process. The proposed action for the EIS is to "...operate the Aspinall Unit to avoid jeopardy to endangered species while maintaining the congressionally authorized Unit purposes." The No Action Alternative considers current Aspinall Unit operations projected to the most reasonable future conditions that could occur during the life of the project without any action alternatives being implemented. Action Alternatives will include a range of Aspinall Unit operation alternatives to address the proposed action---action alternatives may range from using "excess water" to form a spring peak to using large amounts of Blue Mesa storage for spring peaks.

Each action alternative will be compared to the No Action alternative to determine impacts on resources, including endangered fish. The alternatives will be treated and compared on an equal basis in the EIS.

WAPA brought up the question of whether the Action Alternatives are compared to the No Action alternative or to the Existing Conditions description. Action Alternatives will be compared to the No Action Alternative. There was further discussion on what would occur if new operations cannot avoid jeopardy under the ESA.

The February 17th draft of the No Action Alternative had previously been mailed to cooperators and comments received from most. A new version had not been developed for the April meeting, pending receipt of all comments. However, items of concern and clarification brought up by reviewers were summarized and discussed at the meeting.

Some of the thoughts expressed at the meeting included:

- still more clarification of discretionary and non-discretionary operations is needed.
- projection of future water depletions is controversial (i.e. should SWSI in-basin projections be used, should 300,000 af be used, should no future depletions be shown). NEPA calls for including reasonably foreseeable depletions in No Action; however, Colorado is concerned about any projections that might be construed as not providing future full use of Aspinall Unit water---doesn't want to tie up marketable yield in Blue Mesa by using it to meet flow recommendations.
- period of time covered by the EIS needs to be clarified.
- more description needed on BR/WAPA interaction in operations.
- more clarification on what including the 2003 Black Canyon Agreement means in terms of water use and input to the hydrology modeling.
- describe Dallas/Dolores biological opinions and recognize they need to be fulfilled—do not necessarily include in No Action hydrology model.
- various opinions continue on what should be included in No Action in regard to Redlands fish ladder, fish screen, downstream migration flows, and Aspinall's role in supplementing water supplies for downstream seniors.
- clarification of Aspinall Unit purposes, in particular fish and wildlife and recreation, needs to be completed.
- there is no specific fish and wildlife or recreation pool in Blue Mesa and no particular elevation will be used in the hydrology model for these resources.

Action Item: Agencies should send comments on the 2/17 draft if they have not done so. Reclamation will revise description of the No Action alternative.

Initial Discussion of Alternatives

NEPA requires a look at a range of alternatives that are technically and economically feasible and that meet the purpose and need. NEPA require the same level of analysis on all alternatives. There was not enough time to discuss alternatives in detail at the meeting.

Southwestern did ask the Fish and Wildlife Service what they would like to see in alternatives related to the Dallas/Dolores biological opinions. The Service does expect action alternatives to address the opinions. WAPA has been investigating an action

alternative and it is tentatively planned to have a presentation on this at the next Cooperators' meeting.

There was discussion on the Dallas/Dolores Projects' biological opinions. The Fish and Wildlife Service was concerned that not much was being done to satisfy these opinions at this time (opinions call for operation of Reclamation reservoirs to offset impacts of Dallas/Dolores depletions). Others brought up that endangered fish deliveries to the Redlands, general operations (minimum flows, research flows, bundling of excess water into peaks) have been done to help offset the impacts; and in addition depletions from Dallas/Dolores are far below depletions predicted in the biological assessments and opinions.

***Action Items** WAPA will prepare a presentation regarding an alternative it is developing with the assistance of Argonne National Laboratories. WAPA will review its presentation with Reclamation and the Department of Justice regarding information on the Black Canyon Settlement prior to making the presentation at the next Cooperating Agency Meeting. Reclamation will continue to work with the Solicitors Office to address issues regarding authorized purposes of the Aspinall Unit*

Update on hydrology/hydropower modeling

The first meeting of the hydropower subgroup was held in Denver on March 22. A meeting summary was made available. The subgroup suggested a "hydropower 101" presentation be made at a future cooperating agency meeting. The presentation would be made by David Harpman of Reclamation with help from Western. The presentation would cover basic power concepts and definitions as they relate to Aspinall operations.

Public Involvement Update

Reclamation continues to update its web page and is open to suggestions on how to improve public involvement. The next Aspinall Operations Meeting is scheduled for April 22 at 1 p.m. at Reclamation's Offices in Grand Junction. Reclamation is willing to come and talk to anyone's board or group about the Aspinall EIS process.

Next Meeting Date

The next Cooperating Agency meeting was scheduled for **May 20th at 9:30 a.m.** at Reclamation's Office in Grand Junction.

Public Questions and Comments & General Discussion

Bart Miller with Western Resource Advocates asked if Chuck McAda's powerpoint presentation could be posted to EIS website along with meeting schedules. Offsetting impacts of Dallas/Dolores depletions should be part of No Action and action alternatives. Discussion on discretion vs. non-discretionary operations is improving but should be refined more. Ok to include power contracts in No Action but should recognize that they are flexible and can be changed. No Action alternative should exclude transmountain diversions. The actual marketable yield from Blue Mesa can be affected by several factors such as ESA operations and cannot be quantified at this time. Concerned that alternatives should go beyond "avoiding jeopardy" and should look at recovery.

Drew Peternell representing Trout Unlimited encouraged completion of the discretion vs. non-discretion analysis. Would like e-mail copy of CWCB comments on No Action alternative.

Steve Glazer representing High Country Citizens stated that transmountain diversion should not be in the No Action alternative. The CRSP Act does not discuss marketable yield. Would also like to see elements in alternatives that are not operation elements—would help avoid jeopardy opinion.

Karen Shirley with Upper Gunnison would like Reclamation to revise and distribute draft No Action alternative. Should not include transmountain diversions. Is concerned with CWCB's suggestion to include either "0" or "300,000" acre-feet depletion in No Action.

Mike Gross representing several water user organizations was also concerned with the CWCB suggestion and Mike does not believe the EIS should identify a "marketable pool" in the alternatives and in the modeling. Concerned with previous discussions concerning whether or not the Dallas/Dolores biological opinions were being met. Also Aspinall's role in deliveries to the Lower Colorado River Basin cannot be ignored and should be addressed. Water decrees for Aspinall mean that enough water should be run through Aspinall Unit power facilities to meet Redlands' Diversion needs—would not be a direct release of water to the Redlands. To say this is needed only in dry years is not correct.

Bob Muth with the Recovery Program advised that group should strive for success in addressing the flow recommendations and is concerned about early negative attitudes concerning the ability to meet flow recommendations.

The Cooperating Agency Meeting ended at 3:30 p.m.

Meeting Attendees

Carol DeAngelis, USBR-Grand Junction
 Steve McCall, USBR-Grand Junction
 Terry Stroh, USBR-Grand Junction
 Dan Crabtree, USBR-Grand Junction
 Ed Warner, USBR-Grand Junction
 Eric Knight, USBR-Grand Junction
 Nancy Coulam, USBR-Salt Lake
 Paul Davidson, USBR-Salt Lake
 Dave Speas, USBR-Salt Lake
 Jane Blair, USBR-Salt Lake
 Don Phillips, USBR-Montrose
 Patty Gelatt, USFWS-Grand Junction
 Norm Henderson, NPS*
 Bill Wellman-NPS*
 Michael Dale, NPS*
 Melissa Trammell, NPS*
 Mark Wondzell, NPS*
 Wayne Schieldt, CDWR*
 Randy Seaholm, CWCB*
 Michelle Garrison, CWCB*
 Jay Skinner, CDOW*+
 Kent Holsinger, PRPA*+
 Leslie James, CREDA (representing PRPA)*+
 Taylor Haus, CRWCD*
 Clayton Palmer, WAPA*
 Heather Patno, WAPA*
 Wayne Cook, WAPA*
 Mike Gross, UVWUA, Tri-County & RWPC
 Karen Shirley, UGRWCD
 Dennis Steckel, UGRWCD
 Steve Glazer, HCCA
 Bart Miller, Western Resources+
 Drew Peterzell, Trout Unlimited+

*Cooperating Agency Representatives

+Participated via conference call