

Aspinall Unit Operations Meeting
April 15, 1993

The subject meeting was held in Grand Junction, Colorado. An attendance list is enclosed. The purpose of the meeting was to establish operation plans for the Aspinall Unit for the January-April 1993 period with input from all affected parties.

Review of January through March 1993 Operations

At the beginning of the meeting, the January-March 1993 operations were reviewed and a data table provided. Releases have increased since January due to increased forecasted inflow. At the present time, snowpack is estimated at 153 percent of average and inflow to Blue Mesa at 136 percent. In January the inflow had been estimated at 86 percent.

1993 Runoff Forecast/Anticipated Aspinall Unit Operations

The most probable runoff to the Aspinall Unit is estimated at 950,000 acre feet for April through July. Proposed operations were presented; these plans provide for spring peaks in mid to late May. A peak of approximately 16,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) is expected to be reached at the Gunnison River gauge at Whitewater. Peak flows through the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument depend somewhat on type of runoff from Cimarron Creek, but peaks should be between 3,000 and 4,000 cfs.

In summary, releases will be increased to 4,000 cfs around May 1, and are expected to remain at that level through May and into June. This is being done in order to keep storage in Blue Mesa low enough to accommodate the expected high runoff and to provide test flows. After completion of the 4,000 cfs releases sometime in June, releases will be reduced to approximately 2,000 cfs and will remain at that level through September. This will result in flows of around 1,000 cfs through the Monument and Gunnison Gorge during most of the summer. It is probable that Blue Mesa Reservoir will fill, and it is also probable that spills will occur at Crystal due to side inflow.

All agencies and organizations at the meeting supported the operation.

Computation of Delivery to the Monument and Operation Plan Development

Anticipated deliveries to the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument for April through July, were computed based on the equation described in the preliminary working draft of a water service contract for the Monument. Handouts covering this material were provided at the meeting. The computed delivery to the Monument of 408,000 acre-feet exceeds the 126,000 acre-feet needed to meet a minimum release of 300 cfs for the April through July period.

There were several questions on the accounting of releases between January and March. Meeting attendees were requested to keep track of these type questions so that when the preliminary working draft of the water service contract is updated, corrections can be made.

Coordination Needs

Timing of the peak flow release from Crystal was discussed. Ramping of flows after high releases and after spills at Crystal is very important to the downstream fishery and associated recreation and related economy. Recommendations are to ramp up at 500 cfs per day (when beginning flows are around 2,000 cfs), and to ramp down at 250 cfs per day. It was agreed that during the high flow period this spring (around 3,000 cfs), daily fluctuations of around 200 cfs for power production would be all right.

Research flows of 600 cfs were confirmed by the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) for fish population surveys on the following dates in 1993: September 27-30; October 12-15; and October 18-22.

Agencies discussed their plans for monitoring the anticipated high spring flows. The National Park Service (NPS) will obtain water surface elevations in the Monument to supplement existing low and medium flow elevations. NPS will also look at riparian vegetation and hyporheic communities following high flows. NPS in cooperation with CDOW will also have a creel census underway at Blue Mesa. The Fish and Wildlife (FWS) will continue planned biological monitoring, including track radio-tagged Colorado squawfish; obtain videography at peak flows; and field check backwaters to determine whether flooding occurs. It was agreed it would be important to determine at what flow level key backwaters are flooded. The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and FWS will determine if people can be made available for this work. Reclamation will work on flushing flow study downstream from Delta and are working with NPS on fishery study at Blue Mesa. CDOW will do a fry estimate in June, July, and September in the Gunnison Gorge in addition to their annual population study. Western is working to have videography from last year analyzed (5 flights at different flows).

Conclusions

- The Grand Junction Projects Office will be responsible for informing interested parties of flow changes and plans.
- Measurement of flows continues to be a problem. The Grand Junction Projects Office will report on this problem at the August meeting.
- The draft contract delivery water for the January-July, 1993, period is now estimated at 408,000 acre-feet.

The next meeting on operations will be held in Grand Junction at 1 p.m. on August 19, 1993.