

GJ-151  
ENV-4.00  
PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operation - Coordination Meeting

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed for your information is a summary of the Aspinall Unit operations meeting held on August 18, 1994. Handouts from the meeting are not enclosed; anyone wanting a set should contact us.

The next meeting will be held in this office at 12:30 p.m. on January 26, 1995. If you have any questions, please contact Ed Warner at (303) 248-0654, or Steve McCall at 248-0638.

Sincerely,

Carol DeAngelis  
Projects Manager

Enclosure

cc: See Attached Distribution List

bc: Chief, Curecanti Field Branch  
Attention: CCI-100 (w/encl)

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT  
Attention: UC-430, UC-440, UC-600, UC-700 (ea w/encl)

bcc: GJ-400, GJ-430, GJ-150, GJ-140 (ea w/encl)

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Aspinall Unit Operations Meeting  
August 18, 1994

The subject meeting was held in Grand Junction, Colorado. An attendance list is attached. New participants were welcomed: representatives from Western Colorado Congress, Gunnison River Expeditions, Redlands Water and Power Company, City of Grand Junction, and U.S. Geological Survey.

The purpose of the meeting was to review operation of the Aspinall Unit over the April through July period, and set the operation plan for the upcoming period (August through December). Setting operation includes consideration of supply forecasts and input from interested participants. The results of the meeting will be incorporated into the "Operation Plan for Colorado River System Reservoirs" (24-Month Operation Plan) of the Bureau of Reclamation.

April - August Operation: Brad Vickers reviewed actual vs. planned operations. Graphs showed that the volume of inflow to Blue Mesa Reservoir was similar to that forecasted, but that it peaked earlier than expected (late April/early May vs. late May). Due to the timing of peak inflows below Blue Mesa and Ridgway operations, we missed passing the peak flows as measured below the Gunnison Tunnel and at the Whitewater gage near Grand Junction a bit. However, we also ended up with a little more Blue Mesa Reservoir storage than expected, ??with Blue Mesa filling to an elevation of 7511 by the end of June (i.e. within 8 feet of filling). Concerning studies of Aspinall Operations on endangered fish, Keith Rose estimated that the water supply was 40% of average, and while it was not one of the driest we've seen, it was droughtly. Overall, streamflows in the Gunnison River fared better than most of the Upper Colorado River Basin.

Proposed April-August Operation Plan and Flow Requests: Planned operation print-outs for each of the Aspinall Unit reservoirs (Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal) were supplied for the minimum, most, and maximum probable water supply forecasts. Current forecasts are for runoff to be 73% of average. Proposed operations were based on setting releases as measured below the Gunnison Tunnel diversion to 600 cfs. On this basis, expected Gunnison River flow conditions below the Gunnison Tunnel were graphed based on recent operations for similar supply years (1992 - minimum probable; 1991 - most probable; 1987 - maximum probable).

Discussion on modifications to proposed operations centered on using existing flexibility of surplus storage to provide flows below the Gunnison Tunnel of between 500-700 cfs. Western requested 700 cfs flows be maintained through August to generate power during hot and dry periods. They depend on the Aspinall Unit to provide needed power due to minimum flow requirements of Flaming Gorge operations, and to conserve water for a high spring spike from Glen Canyon. BLM and river rafters requested that streamflows through the Gunnison Gorge be maintained at a minimum of 600, and preferably at 700 cfs, through September. Higher flows would provide safer conditions for rafters in the event of flash floods and would also protect riverine resources from damage. While thunderstorm activity is most common in July and August, they can occur in September. CDOW has requested flows of 600 cfs from September 26-29 to mimic conditions of their standardized trout fishery monitoring program within the Gunnison Gorge. NPS also preferred higher fall flows, with a gradual decrease into winter. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) concerns were for providing stable flows throughout the winter, at whatever level is agreed upon. FWS also noted that flows below Redlands Diversion Dam need to be kept above 300 cfs, especially between now and December. Sometime in November, Western will lose hydropower generation as Crystal water is bypassed to allow installation of a new "exciter," and Flaming Gorge will also go down for a maintenance activity.

Providing 700 cfs flow into September would probably require releases be cut back to 500 cfs through December, and depending on supply conditions and forecasts, extending through March. Redlands Water and Power Company diversion rights would require 600-700 cfs throughout the winter.

**Planned operation:** Maintain at 700 cfs until September 26 (Brad Vickers will review water supply to make sure this can be done). Provide 600 cfs from September 26-29. Brad Vicker will determine when to cut back to 500 cfs to meet maximum target elevation at Blue Mesa Reservoir for the end of December. Winter levels will be discussed further at January meeting.

Review of July 29-August 8 Research Flows: Many participants contributed to discussion of the low flow releases (300-400 cfs) for National Park Service studies. The following preparation measures were taken to address concerns with the effects of low flows:

- to protect rainbow trout recruitment, ramped carefully;
- to accommodate power generation needs, shifted period to very end of July/beginning of August and maximized use of weekends;
- for recreational use, informed rafters/anglers of reductions and hazards.

Additional measures were needed because of low flows in Gunnison River tributaries. To meet the Redlands Diversion call, protect junior users, and avoid impacts to downstream endangered fish:

- supplementary releases to the Gunnison River were made from Ridgway Dam, with portions of the Ridgway flows protected from diversion to maintain minimum flows below Redlands.
- the duration of low flows was shortened by accelerating studies.

The NPS (Mark Wondzell) thanked everyone involved for their cooperation in making it possible for the studies to be completed. Reclamation extended thanks to Tri-County Water Users at Ridgway. About 5,500 AF were released from Ridgway, and included 50-100 cfs to prevent administration of the Redlands call. Reclamation requested the release under a contract provision that allows us to take possession from blocks of water in Ridgway that are not being used.

Flows recorded by Reclamation's gauge below Redlands during the test period were handed out. Redlands reported their diversion got below 700 cfs for one day. FWS was supplied with hourly gauge readings. Flows below the dam got below 300 cfs for 14 days, minimum flow recorded was 59 cfs.

There is still disparity between readings at Whitewater and Reclamation new gauge below the Redlands diversion. For example, on July 22, 1220 cfs was measured at Whitewater, 744 was diverted by Redlands, leaving 476 cfs below. Reclamation gauge 294, therefore, 180 cfs is unaccounted for. Ken Knox thinks they may be about 6 intervening rights that would account for a portion of this; he will supply a list. USGS reported the last shift for the Whitewater gauge was measured July 28.

BLM (Karen Tucker) and Gunnison River Expeditions (Bo Gates) reported on rafting difficulties in the Gunnison Gorge. Generally, most accidents happen between 300-550 cfs. On July 30, experienced guides were barely able to get down the river. It was a learning experience for many of the guides since they are trained at much higher flows (800-1000 cfs is optimal for boating safety and ease of rowing). Many commercial rafters helped private parties. Karen was aware of about 20 accidents -- 8 or 9 involved commercial rafters. The most serious was a 3 boat collision due to "tailgating."

Bo Gates also noticed the frequency of dead fish was greater during the study period--on one day he count 14, and that the water temperature was up 6-7 degrees Fahrenheit. The CDOW monitoring rainbow trout reproduction success the following week; no report on findings yet.

Flow Matrix Development: Based on input received to date, Brad Vickers handed out a preliminary "matrix" of flow needs (for fish, power, recreation, etc.) and Blue Mesa contents. More input is needed to define operational targets

for the spring, summer/fall, and winter periods under high, normal, and low water supply conditions. Clarifying information will be forwarded to each agency as this effort continues.

#### Agency/Organization Activities and Comments

**Colorado Water Conservation Board** - The first negotiation session for the interim contract to provide flows to endangered fish below Redlands was held August 17. Issues were identified. A bill was passed in the last legislative session that CWCB cannot accept conditional water rights for conversion to instream flows (special Yampa River and The Nature Conservancy donation were excepted). All opposition to The Nature Conservancy donation on the Gunnison River except for Arapahoe County's has been removed; the decree has to be settled in court.

**National Park Service** - In cooperation with Reclamation and others, Blue Mesa limnology studies continue, and nets for the entrainment study at Blue Mesa have been installed.

**Fish and Wildlife Service** - Decisions are being made regarding the funding of studies on the Gunnison.

**Western Area Power Administration** - During the meeting, a system power emergency that occurred on July 28 was discussed. The option of making up power by increasing Aspinall releases was considered at the time but the problem was resolved before this occurred. Several meeting participants pointed out that a rapid increase in flows through the Gunnison Gorge would have a good chance of killing people, as well as damaging river resources and possibly features of the Uncompahgre Project. It was agreed that Jeff Ackerman, Brand Vickers, and Ed Warner would review plans for such emergencies and report back to the group.

**Colorado River Water Conservation District** - Mike Gross asked about status of the Gunnison River Contract EIS. Owen Williams (NPS) reported that Reclamation is doing in-house work on the scope, NEPA compliance and contracting processes. Whether or not the NPS and cooperators are successful in resolving all the complex issues through this process, the NPS does intend to pursue an unopposed court decree for the Black Canyon reserved water right. It was noted that Campbell's latest bill specifies the contract.

**Upper Gunnison River Conservancy District** - Tyler Martinneau asked what regime of flow was delivered at Whitewater this spring (6,000 cfs peak; low end of regime). FWS reported that year 1 of their 5-year study was of "normal" conditions, year 2 received high (2,000 cfs), and this year was low (6,000 peak). Future needs are for a moderately high year; however, FWS doesn't anticipate asking for more than 4,000 from Crystal.

Computation of Deliveries to the Monument: The computation of deliveries to the Black Canyon was included in the handouts.

Next Meeting - was set for 12:30 on January 26, 1995, in Grand Junction.

Attendance List  
Aspinall Unit Operations Meeting - August 18, 1994

City of Grand Junction	Kristen Dillon	303-244-1507
Trout Unlimited	Pat Oglesby	303-434-3912
Western Colorado Congress	Fred Westlaufer	303-249-1978
Gunnison River Expeditions	Bo Gates	303-249-4441
Redlands Water and Power Company	Laurie Brach Gregg Strong	303-243-2173 303-243-2173
Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District	Tyler Martineau	303-641-6065
Colorado River Water Conservation District	Mike Gross	303-945-8522
Colorado Water Conservation Board	Randy Seaholm	303-866-3441
Upper Colorado River Commission	Clint Stevens	801-531-1150
Western Area Power Administration	Gary Burton Jeff Ackerman Chris Brown	303-275-1725 303-240-6209 303-240-6210
U.S. Geological Survey	Paul von Guerard	303-245-5257 x3014
Fish and Wildlife Service	George Smith Robert Green Keith Rose Chuck McAda	303-236-5322 303-236-5322 303-243-2778 303-245-9319
Bureau of Land Management	Karen Tucker	303-249-6047
National Park Service	John Welch Owen Williams Chuck Pette Mark Wondzell Lynn Cudlip	303-249-7036 303-225-3505 303-225-3535 303-225-3537 303-641-2337
Bureau of Reclamation	Brad Vickers Jim Schumacher Lorrie West Steve McCall Coll Stanton Ed Warner Dave Mutz	801-524-5576 303-240-6300 303-248-0635 303-248-0638 303-248-0660 303-248-0654 303-248-0655