

Aspinall Unit Operations Meeting
August 17, 1995

The subject meeting was held in Montrose, Colorado. An attendance list is attached.

The purpose of the meeting was to review operation of the Aspinall Unit over the April through August period, and revise the operation plan for the upcoming period (August through December), based on current predictions for water supply conditions and input from interested participants. Results will be incorporated into Reclamation's "Operation Plan for Colorado River System Reservoirs" (24-Month Operation Plan). General goals for operation include filling Blue Mesa Reservoir in July, and then drawing it down by the end of December to a level that minimizes ice jamming problems at the upper end. A new goal, which will be easy to achieve this year, is to maintain a minimum 300 cfs flow for endangered fish below the Redlands Diversion Dam.

April-August 1995 Operation: Randy Peterson reviewed graphs and data from the runoff period. Following the April operation meeting snowfall and runoff forecasts increased sharply, and releases from Blue Mesa increased to provide storage space. July inflows to the Aspinall Unit were over 300% of normal. Inflow forecasts went from below normal in January, to 130% in April, and to around 175% when runoff began. Blue Mesa provided the primary control, and releases were balanced between providing storage space and controlling flows at Delta to reduce flooding. Periods of cool weather were very important in controlling the runoff; without these, peaks could have been much higher.

An open discussion was held on the operation, and the following comments were recorded:

- Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association:** Operations were a good job of balancing releases and inflows.
- Colorado Division of Wildlife:** Good communication throughout the runoff period. Good job of not spilling Taylor Park.
- National Park Service:** Anticipate that the high flows through the Monument were good for the resources there. The late runoff may not have been good for cottonwood regeneration above Blue Mesa. Also asked why Blue Mesa was kept full for such a short period (in answer, the reservoir was drawn down 3-4 feet to provide storage in case of heavy rains).
- Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy District:** Operations well coordinated with Taylor Park operations. Peak flows through Gunnison were reduced by 2,000 cfs and significant damage avoided. Concerned that forecasts seemed to lag and underestimated runoff, making operation decisions difficult. The **National Weather Service** commented that in the future forecasts will include rainfall

forecasts more accurate than the average rainfall included in past calculations.

-Gunnison River Expeditions: Higher releases early would have helped the recreation industry so that high flows in recreation season would not have been so prolonged. Recreation use down and this has significant economic effects.

-Colorado State Engineer: Good operations this year; would have been problems without cool periods that helped spread runoff over longer period.

-Colorado Water Conservation Board: There were runoff problems statewide, not just in Gunnison Basin. Cool periods were helpful in reducing problems.

-Fish and Wildlife Service: This type runoff good for endangered fish. Peak flows were only a 1 in 10 or 11 year event; volume was higher.

-Trout Unlimited: Concerned about the sudden drop (over 1,000 cfs) in May when power plant at Crystal went down. Can this be avoided (in answer, this can and is avoided most of the time by instantaneously opening the bypass to keep releases constant; however, due to high releases the bypass was already being fully used).

Forecast and Proposed August-December 1995 Operation: Planned operation printouts for each of the Aspinall Unit reservoirs (Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal) were discussed for the minimum, most, and maximum probable water supply forecasts. The forecasted inflow to the Aspinall Unit is to return to normal in September, but this may be a low estimate since inflows are still at 150%. Releases are planned to stay at around 2,100 cfs through the period. Gunnison Tunnel diversions will cause flows through the Monument and Gorge to be lower than this until the irrigation season ends. Tunnel diversions will depend on weather and farming patterns, but it is estimated that diversions will be reduced to 500-600 cfs in early September and down to 400 by October. There were no further recommendations from those in attendance.

Special Flow Requests: Previously, the Division of Wildlife requested 600 cfs from September 25 to 27 or 28 for their annual fish census. The National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management stated that they could also use this period to inventory the effects of the high runoff. It was agreed to provide the flows; releases will be ramped down to reduce impacts to fisheries. A suggestion was made that less ramping would be needed if studies were done around September 1. This was discussed, but dates were not changed for several reasons: logistics of changing dates would be substantial, data would be less comparable to prior years, and this year's fish recruitment would be harder to monitor. No other special or test flows were requested.

Endangered Fish Flow Requests:

- Peak flows near Whitewater this year met the needs of the FWS for a high flow. In future years, another moderately low peak (6-8,000) will be needed.
- The proposed operation plan shows there will be more than 300 cfs available all summer below the Redlands Diversion. Therefore, no special flows will be needed in August-December to maintain minimum flows under the Interim Agreement.

Agency/Organization Activities and Comments

Western Area Power Administration - Jeff Ackerman of Western still wants to re-evaluate the operation criteria for Morrow Point imposed by the old tour boat with the NPS. A minimum elevation at Morrow Point should be determined for the boat operations. Pat Sanderson discussed proposals to transfer several functions from Montrose to eastern Colorado and Arizona.

Gunnison River Expeditions - Need better information on flows. Concerned with bad forecasts received from Reclamation. There were significant economic losses due to high water. Agrees river should be closed to commercial use at flows over 7,000 cfs.

Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) - Starting next year, will track fish use around Redlands fish passage. Flows this year were good for the endangered fish.

Bureau of Land Management - Visitation down in Gunnison Gorge due to high flows. Hike-in fishing reduced the most. BLM is improving facilities at the confluence of the North Fork and Gunnison.

National Park Service - The high flows were good for Monument resources; will monitor effects this September. High water points were marked and will be correlated with flows. Recreation use along the river was reduced this year. New boat on Morrow Point was down for 3-4 weeks this spring due to engine problems and high releases from Blue Mesa. Limnology studies, entrainment studies, and creel census are going well.

Bureau of Reclamation - The interim water agreement to provide flows below the Redlands Diversion Dam has been executed. Bids on the Redlands fish passageway will be opened at the end of August, and the passageway is expected to be in operation in April 1996.

Colorado Division of Wildlife - Kokanee were stocked in Morrow Point this July. Entrainment of kokanee at Blue Mesa increased with higher releases. The kokanee that are beginning to return to the East River are larger than normal, and this may reflect lower numbers, which is

not good in terms of collecting eggs and supporting Blue Mesa and other kokanee fisheries.

Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District - Recommended adding NWQA to mailing list. Concerned that forecasts were not accurate this year. Forecasts lagged behind SNOTELL data. Randy Peterson will relay concerns, but also suggested that National Weather Service in Salt Lake be written so they are aware that people are concerned with forecasts.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users - Some minor damage to Gunnison Tunnel Diversion Dam this year from logs in river; will repair during low flow period in September.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - Requested an update on the National Park Service contract. NPS indicated that the primary activity was working on the flow matrix.

Flow Matrix Development: The matrix will be an important long-range tool. Reclamation has incorporated responses from NPS and BLM to the latest request for matrix information. Reclamation will send out another request for information. Comments should be provided Reclamation, NPS, or Randy Seaholm, at the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

Next Meeting January 18, 1996; 12:30 to 3:00 p.m.
Will be held in Montrose, at the Craft Training Center:
1843 So. Townsend Avenue (same as U.S. Highway 550)