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Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our January 18, 1996, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The next meeting will be in Grand Junction on April 18, beginning at 12:30.

Highlights of the recent meeting include:

-- Low flows were required three times between September 5 and 22 to aid in searches for a drowning victim. Beginning in October, Crystal operated at full power to meet the end-of-year storage target for Blue Mesa Reservoir. It was met on January 3, 1996. Since then, releases have remained steady at about 1,000 cfs.

-- Current snowpack is 66 per cent of average. "Most probable" operations are based on expected runoff being 80 per cent of average. The Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association needs releases lowered to 600-700 cfs for about 3 days before March 20 to work on the Gunnison Tunnel portal. Reclamation should receive a new transformer in April; releases during its installation will be made through the bypass outlet, so they cannot exceed 2,000 cfs.

-- Based on early January forecast, the operation plan ramps up to about 1,500 cfs flow below the Gunnison tunnel for 7 days. Peak flow duration and amount could change dramatically as actual runoff conditions are known. Pivotal decisions will need to be made in March.

-- The 600 cfs flow for Sherman Hebein's annual trout survey is scheduled for September 23-26.

-- Participants received a handout for the operation matrix. Comments received by the end of March can be discussed at the next meeting. The NPS will lead work on a suggestion to add emergency shutdown criteria to the guidelines.

-- A work group was formed to improve on "accounting" for releases of storage water.

If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

Ed Warner
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure

cc: Chief, Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100, 1820 South Rio
Grande Avenue, Montrose CO 81401

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Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT
Attention: UC-288, UC-297, UC-600, UC-320
(ea w/copy of encl)

bc: DMutz, EWarner, CStanton, MSteves, SMcCall, JWright (ea w/copy of encl)

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Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
January 18, 1996

This meeting launched our fourth year of regularly scheduled meetings to coordinate Aspinall operations. It was held in Montrose, and was facilitated by Ed Warner and John Chapman. Participants are indicated on the attached distribution list. If you have any corrections for, or questions about, this summary or need a copy of handouts please call Lorrie West at 248-0635.

September-December 1995 Operation: Flows below the tunnel were decreased 3 times between September 5 and 22 to aid in searches for a drowning victim. The final search effort was followed by 600 cfs flows for the Division of Wildlife (DOW) census. Late fall/early winter inflow to Blue Mesa was higher than expected. This, combined with extra water held back during search efforts, required Crystal to be operated at full capacity to meet the end-of-year storage target, which was accomplished a little late (on January 3).

Since the target was met, releases from Crystal Reservoir have been steady at about 1,000 cfs.

Reclamation's Curecanti Field Office people took advantage of the search flows to perform needed tests at Crystal power plant.

Handouts showing flow reductions for the search effort were provided. The emergency notification process helped the National Park Service (NPS) respond efficiently when first notified of the drowning. It is Reclamation policy to cooperate in search and rescue efforts. The second and third recovery searches were made to honor commitments to the victims family. The reduction below Colorado Water Conservation Board's (CWCB) minimum 300 cfs instream flow meeting for the final search was conducted after the NPS contacted responsible agencies to verify that irreparable resource damage would not occur. Colorado Trout Unlimited will be sending the CWCB a letter outlining their position on reductions below the instream flow filing. The victim was not found.

Randy Seaholm suggested operation guidelines be developed for future use in emergency situations. They could be added to the current matrix, or developed separately. John Chapman and Myron Chase (NPS) will work with Sherman Hebein (DOW) in coming up with a proposal.

Options for monitoring flows through the Black Canyon (i.e. Crystal releases less diversions through the Gunnison Tunnel vs. depending on the US Geological Survey (USGS) space-gage below the tunnel) were also discussed. Reclamation is able to monitor releases through the generators and outflow tube at Crystal within 20 cfs. Diversions through the tunnel are currently measured in the South Canal. An alternative would be to gage and transmit information for inflow to this tunnel, but this would be difficult. Paul von Guerard suggested USGS could offer some expertise based on their experiences in gaging inflow in stormwater drains, etc. Ed wants to coordinate further discussion on options with Jim Hokit and the Division Engineers.

Mark Wondzell reported the NPS also took advantage of the low flows during the

recovery search to resample vegetation plots. Sediment transport data was also checked.

Sherman Hebein reported the electrofishing trip was normal. It was interesting to see the rise in the high water line, everything was noticeably clean! Haven't read scales yet, so can't report on recruitment. It's also too early to assess if the low search flows damaged recruitment. This year's census has been scheduled for September 23 (please have flows down by 8am at the Duncan site) through the 26th (bring flows back up starting about 3pm).

Jeff Ackerman of Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) worked with the concessionaire and NPS to solve the tour boat problem at Morrow Point. The new operating criteria is incorporated into the matrix. Basically, 2 feet of operating space was freed up.

Proposed January-July Operation: Brad Vickers projected a map for the Colorado River Basin that shows, unlike last year, snowpack is concentrated in the north. For the Gunnison Basin, snowpack is at 66 per cent of average. Planned operation print-outs and graphs for Blue Mesa content, Crystal Reservoir releases, and streamflows below the Gunnison Tunnel were discussed for the minimum, most, and maximum probable water supply forecasts. The operating plan is based on a most probable runoff forecast being 85 per cent of average. The minimum probable is 43 percent and the maximum is 117 per cent. The most probable plan supplies a peak flow of about 1,500 cfs flow below the Gunnison over 7 days. Peak flow duration and amount could vary by as much as 1,000 cfs, and last between 3 to 14 days, as actual runoff conditions are known. Pivotal decisions will need to be made in March, and will be discussed further at the April meeting.

Some errors in certain handout sheets were noted. Brad will supply Ed with corrected sheets:

- Graph of Blue Mesa EOM Content; change x-axis to read October 1995 - September 1997
- Operation Plan; Most Probable Water Supply - Blue Mesa; data for EOM Elevation is wrong (the graph is correct). There may be other mistakes in the Plan.
- Graph of Expected Flow Below Tunnel; change x-axis to read October 1995 - September 1997

Special Flow Requests:

Previously, DOW requested 600 cfs from September 23 to 26 for their annual fish census. The FWS flow requests for peak and late summer studies will depend on if the Redlands passage is operational; construction progress indicates it should be done in April.

WAPA will be most concerned about when the flows go through the turbines. A new transformer will be delivered in April; flows will be limited to the river bypass tube at Crystal during its installation and therefore cannot exceed

2,000 cfs. This should not interfere with a late May or early June peak.

UVWUA will need low flows (600-700 cfs) at the tunnel inlet for about 3 days before March 20 to repair damage caused during last spring's high runoff flows.

Sherman noted the above low flows should not go below 600 cfs to ensure they do not go below the last fall's low flows during brown trout spawning. Brad noted it will often be difficult to keep flows lowest in the fall as we also meeting the end-of-year maximum storage target for Blue Mesa and prepare for the next year's runoff.

Agency/Organization Activities and Comments

Colorado River Water Conservation District - Mike Gross requested status of the NPS Contract effort. There is no change from where NPS was last August. If flows are low enough in the summer, they would like photos. Otherwise, no more work on studies is planned. NPS is willing to discuss their needs, but they then need to mesh them with the needs of the FWS. Meanwhile, NPS emphasis is on developing the matrix. FWS recommendations will consider other projects such as AB Lateral and revisit the 148,000 AF commitments of the Dallas Creek and Dolores opinions. Once studies with the passageway are done, FWS will only have 2 years to pull all information together and make recommendations in their biological opinion.

Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District - Tyler emphasized that the Upper Gunnison users will need as much time as possible to prepare for adjudication and administration of a quantified NPS right and contractual arrangements for changed operation of the Unit. Some discussion followed on if we should continue to develop one contract to satisfy many purposes as proposed following scoping for the contract proposal, or if we should look at multiple contracts.

National Park Service - The combined management of Curecanti and Black Canyon is official and working well. A staff member (O'Toole) on a Senate committee rewrote and introduced another bill for the Black Canyon National Park Complex. It would still create the Curecanti National Recreation Area, redesignate the Black Canyon Monument as a National Park, and create the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. Changes include the involvement of the USFS and exclusion of the Wild and Scenic River designation. They are still relying on the Aspinall Unit contracting effort to resolve water rights issues. Past provisions to help NPS deal with private lands within the NRA boundary are not included. Hearings will be held in the spring.

Colorado Division of Wildlife - Sherman recently determined the value of a trout is \$35. This would mean the Gold Medal waters of the Black Canyon is worth \$4.5-7 million.

Western Area Power Administration - Jeff suggests the Morrow Point tour boat be taken out after the summer use season each year.

Colorado Water Conservation Board - Randy Seaholm previously suggested emergency criteria be identified. CWCB will continue to participate in groups to develop the matrix and account for releases.

Fish and Wildlife Service - Crews Will be in the field during high water to evaluate habitat, and will continue monitoring activities this summer.

Bureau of Land Management - Nothing to report.

Bureau of Reclamation - A mixture of environmental and landowner interests have petitioned Reclamation to supplement the AB Lateral EIS. Reclamation cannot make a decision on this at the same time that the Corps is considering whether or not to issue a 404 Permit for required bank stabilization work along the Uncompahgre.

Flow Matrix Development: Participants received a handout for the operation matrix. Comments received by the end of March can be discussed at the next meeting. The NPS will work with DOW on CWCB's suggestion to add emergency shutdown criteria to the guidelines.

Computation of the Delivery to the NPS: In discussing the planned operations, it was noted that we continue to "borrow" water from the State to provide peak flows. A workgroup formed to improve on "accounting" for releases of water. It includes representatives from Reclamation, CWCB, NPS, FWS, and Division 4 Engineer of the Colorado Division of Water Resources.

Next Meeting - We changed the location of the next meeting to Reclamation's office in Grand Junction (2764 Horizon Drive). It is scheduled for Thursday April 18 at the usual time (12:30).