

WCG-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of the January 31, 2002, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

BGunnison Gorge flows have ranged around 600 cfs since August. As of January 1, the April through July inflow forecast to Blue Mesa is at 68 percent of the 1971-2000 average. Very preliminary operations for the upcoming year call for flows of 500-600 cfs in the Gunnison Gorge prior to runoff, a small increase to around 1,000 -1,300 cfs in the spring, and then flows of 600-900 cfs for the summer. Under most probable conditions, Blue Mesa Reservoir will be short approximately 14 feet from filling this year. Runoff predictions will likely change dependent on March through May weather patterns, so predictions are **preliminary** at this time.

BMaintenance activities were discussed, including plans to test equipment at Crystal Dam in February (flows would increase to 2,000 cfs briefly) and for developing drawdown criteria/trash rack cleaning at Morrow Point Dam and Reservoir in the fall. A report was given on the completion of gravel deposit removal at the upper end of Crystal Reservoir.

BReports were given on the status of the Black Canyon National Park reserved right and the endangered fish flow recommendations. Several organizations expressed continued concern that these issues be settled together.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or the summaries of the meetings, please let us know. The next operation meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, April 25, at 12:30 at Reclamation's Office in Grand Junction.** If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0652.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree
Water Management Group Chief

Enclosure
Distribution (see attached list)

bc: Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100 1820 South Rio Grande Avenue,

Montrose CO 81401 (w/encl)

John Bezdek, Office of Interior Solicitor, 1849 C St. NW, Mail Stop 6412, Washington,
D.C. 20240 (w/encl)

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT

Attention: UC-400, UC-434, UC-438, UC-600, UC-723, UC-720, UC-726 (ea w/encl)

Director, Technical Service Center, Denver CO

Attention: D-8510 (w/encl)

WCG-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, SMcCall, JOzga, CStanton, MSteves,
JWright, DCrabtree (ea w/ encl)

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage (ea w/encl)

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Distribution List -January 31, 2002 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
City of Grand Junction Greg Trainor
Club 20 Stan Broome
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Daily Sentinel Dave Buchanan
Environmental Defense Fund Jim Martin
Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark*, Ramon Reed
Gunnison Country Times Pat Daniel
Gunnison River Expeditions Hank Hotze
Helton & Williamsen, P.C. Duane Helton
High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club Steve Glazer
Matt Owens Fly Company Matt Owens
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby, Melinda Kassen*
Western Colorado Congress Fred Wetlaufer
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District Dave Kanzer*, Marlene Zanetell, David Halford, Ray Tenney
Colorado River Energy Distributors Cliff Barrett
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Redlands Water and Power Company Gregg Strong*, Mike Gross*
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association Marc Catlin*, Jim Hokit*
Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland
Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District Kathleen Curry*, Mark Schumacher,
Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel*, Jim Slattery
Tri-County Water Mike Berry*
Delta County Commissioners Donna Ferganchick, Jim Ventrello
Delta County Duane Freeman
City of Delta Richard Sales, Wilma Ervin
Gunnison County Commissioners
Montrose County Commissioners Dave Ubell*
Colorado Department of Agriculture Jim Miller
Colorado Division of Water Resources Wayne Schieldt, Frank Kugel*, Richard Rozman
Colorado Division of Wildlife Daniel Brauch*, Sherman Hebein*, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson
Colorado Water Conservation Board Randy Seaholm, Ray Alvarado*, Michelle Garrison*
Wyoming State Engineers Office John Shields
Congressman Scott McInnis Kelly Watson*, Ann Martinez*, Joy Peck
Senator Wayne Allard Shane Henry, Beth Washburn*
Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell George Rossman*, Katie Aggler*
Army Corps of Engineers Ken Jacobson
Bureau of Land Management Allan Belt, Dennis Murphy*, Jim Ferguson, Carl Bauer, Roy Smith,
Jim Ferguson, Rooster Barnhart, Karen Tucker*
Fish and Wildlife Service Rick Krueger, Frank Pfeifer, Al Pfister, Chuck McAda*, Terry Ireland
George Smith
National Park Service Sheridan Steele, Myron Chase*, Ken Stahlnecker Mark Wondzell*
Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee*, DanGude Bockus*, Michael Dale*, Dave Roberts*, Bill Johnson*
National Weather Service Bill Reed, Brian Avery
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Andrea Ray*, Klaus Weickmann
U.S. Geological Survey Paul von Guerard*, Bob Boulger, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller
Land and Water Fund Bart Miller*
Western Area Power Administration Shane Collins*, Clayton Palmer
Jeff Ackerman*, Kathy Crane*, Ken Green, Annette Falvo, Ken Otto, Gary Burton, Margaret Matte

Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer, Ed Warner, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton*, John Ozga*,
Russ Storbo, Ruth Rydiger, Gary McDermott, Don Phillips*, Dick Girvan*, Arlo Allen, Jane Blair*, Paul
Davidson*, Tony Morton, Terry Stroh, Dan Crabtree

Interior Solicitors Office Jim Karkut ,John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy

Department of Justice Dave Gehlert

Western Slope Libertarian Party Mike Humbert*, Eddy LaBarr*, Rich Norenberg*

University of Colorado, National Snow/Ice Data Center Eileen Hail-McKim*

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
January 31, 2002

Participation: This meeting was held at the Pavilion in Montrose, Colorado. Attendees are noted on the distribution list.

Purpose of Meeting: The purpose of these meetings-- held in January, April, and August-- is to gather input for determining upcoming operations for Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal Reservoirs. This input is used in Reclamation's development of an overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which includes plans for Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and Navajo Units as well as the Aspinall Unit. Operation of the Aspinall Unit considers projected inflows to its reservoirs, flood control needs, existing water rights, minimum instream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flow needs for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, hydropower needs and other factors. In addition, the meetings are used to coordinate activities and exchange information among agencies, water users, and other interested parties concerning the Gunnison River.

Handouts provided included data on August-January operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs; and potential operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable water supply forecasts.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. Many of the field studies leading to flow recommendations to help recover downstream endangered fish and to quantify a Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park have been completed, and an application to quantify the reserved right has been filed. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) draft flow recommendations for endangered fish in the Gunnison River were also discussed. These operation meetings will be used more in the future to discuss proposals for long-term operation plans to address these and related resource management issues.

Operations:

August -December 2001 Operations: Black Canyon flows during this period ranged around 600 cfs. Blue Mesa Reservoir elevation was 12 feet below the winter target at the end of December; this can be attributed to relatively low runoff in the spring of 2001.

After the 2001 irrigation season, the Gunnison Tunnel was opened four times, for 24 - 48 hours each time, to fill Fairview Reservoir that supplies the Uncompahgre Valley with drinking water. This causes an approximate 50 cfs drop in downstream canyon flows.

January-August 2002 Operations: Forecasted April through July inflow to Blue Mesa Reservoir is around 470,000 acre-feet or less than 70 percent of the 1971-2000 average (maximum probable is 850,000 af and minimum is 239,000 af). The North Fork forecast is also low. Around 72 percent. The amount of inflow predicted into Blue Mesa this spring will be exceeded in over 70 percent of the years. Under most probable conditions, Blue Mesa is expected to be 14 feet short of filling, or approximately 130,000 acre-feet short. Under most probable conditions,

flows in the Gunnison Gorge should be around 500-600 cfs prior to runoff and 600-800 cfs during the summer. Changes in snowpack may occur from February thru May, so any predictions at this time are **preliminary**. Reclamation is considering reducing releases from 600 to 500 cfs in late February and is also considering operating at full powerplant capacity in late May (which would provide a small peak flow through the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge of around 1,000-1,300 cfs).

The following input was received on the proposed April-July operations:

Draft flow recommendations call for a 7,000 cfs flow at the Whitewater Gage near Grand Junction in a moderately dry year such as this. Part of this flow would be met by tributaries downstream from Aspinall, but a peak release would also be needed from Aspinall. Full powerplant capacity would be used to try to match the peak of the North Fork to maximize flows at Whitewater, but it is not probable that the 7,000 cfs would be reached. Based on the predicted Blue Mesa inflow, the NPS reserved right filing would call for approximately 5,000 cfs through the Black Canyon. Several people questioned the value of a small spring peak if it did not meet either the endangered fish or reserved right recommendations. Resource agencies thought that the small peak flow would be some help in channel maintenance and sediment movement.

Reducing flows to 500 cfs in late February would probably not significantly harm brown trout eggs; however, concern was expressed that this flow would drop to 450 cfs when the Tunnel was opened to fill Fairview Reservoir and this would be a concern. Reclamation indicated that small increases in releases from Crystal during those periods could maintain the 500 cfs. Also at 500 cfs, flows could drop below 300 cfs downstream from the Redlands Diversion. The FWS indicated that the 300 cfs was not as critical in the winter period and they are more concerned about spring flows.

Aspinall Unit Maintenance Work: Dick Girvan from the Bureau's Curecanti Office gave a presentation on dredging work at the upper end of Crystal Reservoir. The work was successfully completed last fall with 14,000 tons of gravel removed. The work lasted 17 days and water quality was protected during the operation; thanks were given to the agencies and organizations that assisted: WAPA, CDOW, NPS, Colorado Department of Transportation, and Trout Unlimited.

The Curecanti Office described several future maintenance projects:

The governor at Crystal Powerplant has been replaced and needs to be tested. The testing is needed to avoid future flow problems. The testing would occur over a 2-day period in February. Each day, the flows would be increased from 600 cfs to 2000 cfs for a 3-hour period. There could be fluctuations during the 3-hour time period.

Drawdown criteria needs to be established for Morrow Point Reservoir. The criteria is needed for future operations as related to landslide movement. The drawdown would start after Labor Day with the reservoir being lowered 60 feet. During the drawdown, the Morrow Point Dam trash racks would be cleaned as much as possible. Water would not be lowered below the minimum level needed for power production. Sonar work will be done to determine potential

sediment buildup in Morrow Point Reservoir. Reclamation will prepare an environmental assessment on this activity; scoping comments were received last year, but people are encouraged to still send any concerns to Reclamation for consideration in the EA.

The transformer at Blue Mesa will be replaced in June; this activity will not affect river flows but will interrupt power production at Blue Mesa for around 3 weeks. Sonar monitoring of the Crystal stilling basin will be completed this spring to determine the condition of the stilling basin. This activity will not affect river flows.

The following input was received on the proposed maintenance activities:

Potential concerns with the Crystal governor replacement expressed by CDOW: brown trout eggs loss through abrasion; sediment picked up and redeposited; hazardous to anglers. CDOW thought the timing (February) was ok. Trout Unlimited had similar concerns to CDOW, and the BLM agreed that angler safety was a concern (people can wade across the river at 600 cfs, but could get stranded on the wrong side at 2,000 cfs; also if velocity and depth increased suddenly, people wading could have difficulty); BLM suggested that warnings be placed at access points. The Uncompahgre Valley Water Users supported the testing to avoid future flow problems (sudden drops in flows could harm the Tunnel). The Colorado River District suggested that this could be a good opportunity to monitor sediment movement.

Some suggested measures to reduce impacts were brought up: conducting test in the evening, ramping flows up and down, safety signing, and news release.

Reclamation will continue planning for this activity and will contact interested agencies.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Congressional Staff-They will keep Senators/Congressman informed of activities. Concerned with the Black Canyon reserved water right.

National Park Service -Concerning the reserved right, technical staff are working on models to analyze the effects of the right. Reclamation is working on a RiverWare model and the State is working on water rights model. Interior agencies and WAPA are meeting to try and resolve a Federal position. Several meeting attendees urged that the reserved right and endangered fish flow issues be resolved concurrently.

Fish and Wildlife Service - Technical issues with the draft flow recommendations are being reviewed by a contractor; there is still hope that the flow recommendations will be finalized soon. Meetings have been held with WAPA, CREDA, and water users to try to resolve problems.

Generally the draft report calls for a more natural hydrograph, with magnitude of the spring peak varying with the amount of unregulated flow at Whitewater. A base flow of 300 cfs downstream from the Redlands Diversion is discussed in the report. The types of peaks discussed are listed

below (draft). These are flows at the Whitewater gage so they include flows from the North Fork, Uncompahgre and other tributaries as well as from the Aspinall Unit:

Extremely dry year-4,000 cfs or greater
Moderately dry year- 7,000 cfs or greater
Average dry year-9,500 cfs or greater
Average wet year-12,500 cfs or greater
Moderately wet year-16,000 cfs or greater
Wet year-18,000 cfs or greater

As indicated previously, this year is in the moderately dry category.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservation District-Reserved right and endangered fish flows need to be resolved together. Wants to be kept informed on status of reserved right negotiations.

Colorado Division of Wildlife - Lake trout and kokanee interaction studies continuing on Blue Mesa. Kokanee release from Roaring Judy Hatchery scheduled for April 12 will work with Reclamation on flows at that time.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - Suggested monitoring of sediment when the Crystal governor is tested to gain information on sediment movement. Suggested that more information/analysis be given to correlating Blue Mesa water levels to different resources such as recreation and fishery. It was discussed among the audience about having reports on Blue Mesa Resources, and this will be considered for the August operation meeting. CRWCD recommends that operations consider and try to resolve all issues (such as reserved right, endangered fish, authorized purposes); when an EIS is prepared, Reclamation should consider expanding scope beyond just analyzing endangered fish flow recommendations.

Colorado Water Conservation Board - CWCB is working on state water right model; urges resolution of reserved right and endangered fish flows together.

Bureau of Land Management - Last year there was a large increase in river use during the June stonefly hatch (possibly because flows were relatively low and river accessible). The Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area Planning process has begun; the planning will ultimately be reported on in an EIS. For more information: www.Gunnison-Gorge-EIS.com.

Western Area Power Administration - Pray for snow.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users - Will need a day of 600 cfs or less flows before runoff for diversion dam maintenance - - should be no problem this year.

Gunnison Basin Power - Will be starting monthly water issue meetings at the College in Gunnison; check with Butch Clark at 970-641-2907 or reclarkIII@pcrs.net . Also there will be water classes in Delta at the Heddles Center in the evenings of March 12, 19, and 26.

NOAA - Some indication an El Nino may be developing. This can lead to wet conditions in San Juan area, no great change in our area, and dry conditions in Pacific NW. Also working on ways to improve runoff forecasting.

Land and Water Fund- Urges people to look to flexibility in operations; will be issuing a report addressing some of the issues in the Upper Gunnison drainage.

Libertarian Party - Concerned that reserved water right claims carry a hidden agenda because existing flows already meet many needs. Concerned with proposed state legislation on instream flows (Gordon Bill).

Next Meeting-April 25th, 12:30 at Reclamation Office in Grand Junction