

WCN-SMcCall  
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of the April 25, 2002 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

–Gunnison Gorge flows have ranged around 600 cfs to 350 cfs since January 1. April through July inflow forecast to Blue Mesa has dropped from 500,000 acre-feet (af) on January 1st (68 percent of the 1971-2000 average) to 270,000 af on April 15<sup>th</sup> (43 percent). (May 1 readings show a further decline of 65,000 af) The inflow predicted at the present time would be expected to be exceeded in 97 percent of years. Gunnison River flows should remain around 300-350+ until July, when they may increase in order to supply a fish passage flow downstream from the Redlands Diversion. Under most probable conditions, Blue Mesa Reservoir will be approximately 35 feet (or 300,000 af) short from filling this year. Runoff predictions may still change dependent on May weather patterns and river administration issues may affect operations, so predictions are **preliminary** at this time.

–An environmental assessment is being prepared on drawing down Morrow Point Reservoir to clean trash racks late this summer or early fall.

–Inflow to Blue Mesa is predicted to be the lowest since 1977. Forecasts for other areas are also very low. River administration is in effect in some areas.

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 **Tuesday August 20, at 12:30 at the Elk Creek Visitor Center on Blue Mesa. An interim meeting will be held Thursday June 13 at 12:30 in Grand Junction–location to be announced.** If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0652.

Sincerely,

/s/

Dan Crabtree  
Water Management Group Chief

Enclosure  
Distribution (see attached list)

bc: w/ enclosure

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

John Bezdek, Office of Interior Solicitor, 1849 C St. NW, Mail Stop 6412, Washington, D.C.  
20240

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 (ea w/encl)

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

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage

Distribution List -April 25, 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 ..... Reeves Brown  
 Colorado State University ..... Brett Johnson  
 Daily Sentinel ..... Gary Harmon\*, 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\*, Peter Fleming\*, 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\*  
 Upper Colorado River Commission ..... Everett Sunderland\*  
 Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District ..... John McCLOW\*, 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\*, David Graf\*, 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 ..... Beth Washburn\*  
 Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell ..... George Rossman\*  
 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, Chris Brown\*  
 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, Chris Cutler\*, 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  
April 25, 2002

**Participation:** This meeting was held at the Bureau of Reclamation Office in Grand Junction, 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.

The Aspinall Unit is operated to meet purposes established in its authorization which include regulating the flow of the Colorado River; storing water for beneficial consumptive use; providing for the reclamation of arid and semi-arid land; providing for the generation of hydroelectric power; providing fish and wildlife enhancement and public recreation; providing for the control of floods; and allowing the Upper Basin states to develop Colorado River Compact apportioned waters.

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 January-April 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:**

January-April 2002 Operations: Black Canyon flows during this period ranged around 600 cfs from January into early March when flows were dropped to around 500 cfs in response to declining inflow forecasts. In April, flows to the Black Canyon dropped to around 350 cfs. Blue Mesa April-July inflow forecasts declined throughout the period: January 1 -500,000 af; February 1 -445,000 af; March 1 -410,000 af; April 1 -310,000 af; and April 15 -270,000 af. The largest drops occurred late in the season, making operational responses more difficult. Average April-July inflow is around 720,000 af based on historical records.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of February short spike releases were made to test new equipment at Crystal Dam. Flows reached 2,000 cfs at the Tunnel gage, 2 miles below Crystal. Travel times of these peaks were monitored--they took 7 hours to reach the North Fork confluence, 12 hours to reach Delta, and around 24 hours to reach the Whitewater gage. The peaks were timed to go through the higher recreation use areas after dark to reduce safety concerns.

Blue Mesa Reservoir elevation was 15 feet below the winter target at the end of December, 2001; this was attributed to relatively low runoff in the spring of 2001. As of April 25, 2002 reservoir elevation was 7480 feet, 39 feet below filling.

After the 2001 irrigation season, the Gunnison Tunnel was opened 10 times, for 24 - 48 hours each time, to fill Fairview Reservoir which supplies the Uncompahgre Valley with drinking water. This causes an approximate 50 cfs drop in downstream canyon flows.

April-August 2002 Operations: Forecasted April through July inflow to Blue Mesa Reservoir is around 270,000 acre-feet or around 43 percent of the 1971-2000 average. (On May 1, this dropped another 65,000 af). Based on 1937-1997 hydrology data, this inflow would be expected to be exceeded in 97 percent of years. Since Blue Mesa was constructed, only 1977 with 168,000 af inflow, has been drier. The North Fork forecast is also low—around 44 percent. Forecasted runoff for the Gunnison near Grand Junction is 38 percent of average.

Under most probable conditions, Blue Mesa is expected to be 35 feet short of filling or approximately 300,000 acre-feet below full capacity.

Flows in the Gunnison Gorge should remain low (300-350+) into May and June. Around July 1<sup>st</sup> flows may increase—possibly to 600 cfs— as the contract to deliver endangered fish water below the Redlands Diversion Dam at Grand Junction takes effect. This contract delivery is limited if Blue Mesa storage is projected to drop below a certain level, which may occur later in the year. Thus, actual operation plans in July and later cannot be confirmed at this time.

Overall conditions in the Upper Colorado Basin are dry, runoff in most areas is projected at less than 50 percent. Some areas in the Upper Green River drainage are near 70 percent of average and some areas of the San Juan River drainage are closer to 25 percent. Lake Powell may increase only 3 feet during runoff and is projected to be 53 feet short of full. Glen Canyon Dam will be at minimum releases this year.

The following input was received on the proposed April-July operations: The Fish and Wildlife Service has shut the Redlands fish ladder down due to lack of flows, they want to be able to operate it beginning in July using water under the contract mentioned above. The Service did not make any special flow requests for spring peaks because of the dry conditions. The National Park Service did not request a spring peak; the reserved right claim, as filed, would call for a 2,000 cfs peak in a year such as this, or as the Park Service pointed out, the claim also would allow balancing river management issues and perhaps foregoing a peak. The Colorado Division of Wildlife would like to see flows of 600 cfs for about 3 days in September for fish sampling.

Aspinall Unit Maintenance Work: Reclamation is preparing a draft environmental assessment on drawing Morrow Point Reservoir down late this summer or fall to clean trash racks. Scoping concerns have been received previously—main concerns are fisheries, recreation, power loss, and water quality. New issues should be provided to Reclamation. The Bureau of Land Management mentioned that sediment control would be very critical in a low water year such as this.

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 and monitoring of Morrow Point Reservoir will also be completed to better determine areas of sediment buildup and the amount of trash around trash racks. This activity will not affect river flows.

### **Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:**

**Congressional Staff**-Senator Allard and Campbells' staff discussed support for Governor Owens drought designation, and indicated that the public may contact them for assistance or information.

**National Park Service** -The Morrow Point boat tour will not operate this year; they are looking into operating the boat on Blue Mesa. Concerning the reserved right, Division 4 (Montrose water court) has been determined as the venue. Department of Justice has received a list of conditions that opposes to the right want as conditions for a stay to allow for negotiations.

**Fish and Wildlife Service** - Technical issues with the draft flow recommendations were reviewed by a contractor, and new ideas are being reviewed. One product of this review process is an alternative spring flow recommendation identifying two critical flow values for channel maintenance: 8,000 and 14,000 cfs. This alternative may actually use a larger volume of water than the peaks outlined in the Service's original draft recommendations.

Generally the original draft report called 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.

**State Engineer**-Very dry conditions are forcing river administration; there may be a breathing spell during runoff, as limited as it may be, but there will be problems from June on. The Gunnison Tunnel placed a call on the river April 18 and the Redlands Diversion on April 24. Is coordinating with water user organizations and Reclamation.

**Upper Gunnison Water Conservation District**-The District is serving as an information center on ongoing river administration. Will be meeting to discuss the second-fill water at Taylor Park. Greatest water needs may be in June or early July. Will be shortages this year. Has asked the Director of Department of Natural Resources to formalize Reclamation's support of the CWCB's 300 cfs instream flow right downstream from Crystal.

**Colorado Division of Wildlife** -Would like to stock 90,000 Colorado River strain rainbow trout in the Ute Park area. These are 5" fish that should be somewhat resistant to whirling disease because of their size. Will plan on early July stocking in hopes that flows will be around 600 cfs. In April, 4,000 marked rainbows were stocked downstream from the Smith Fork, half were lightly exposed to whirling disease and half not. Survival rates will be monitored to learn more about whirling disease.

In low water years, walk-in fishing increases in the Gorge. Warmer waters are a concern, at temperatures above 65 degrees F disease can increase; also at low flows there is less water to dilute sediment inflows from summer thunderstorms. It was noted that temperatures reached nearly 70 degrees F downstream from the Smith Fork in the last low water years; temperatures reached near 80 degrees in areas near Austin. Reclamation will work with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and BLM to coordinate temperature monitoring.

On the whirling disease front, a stock of rainbow trout that was sent from the U.S. to Germany in 1880 has been located and appears to have some resistance to whirling disease. Dependent on health/disease monitoring, these fish might be available in 3-5 years.

**Colorado River Water Conservation District** - Peter Fleming was introduced as a new attorney working with the District. The District expressed support for the overall Aspinal Unit operation meeting process. The interim contract to supply water below the Redlands for endangered fish passage is very important for many uses in the basin in addition to environmental uses. The District provided a letter suggesting that exchanges and short-term contracts may be important in addressing this year's drought conditions.

**Colorado Water Conservation Board** - CWCB has a drought task force web page. Reminded the group that the 300 cfs instream flow right has a stipulation to drop to 200 cfs under certain dry conditions.

**Bureau of Land Management** -Low flows in the Gunnison Gorge may lead to more walk-in visitors, rafting will be more difficult. The Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area Planning process is ongoing—the planning will ultimately be reported in an EIS. For more information: [www.Gunnison-Gorge-EIS.com](http://www.Gunnison-Gorge-EIS.com).

**Trout Unlimited**-Working with Drought Task Force. Looking at water acquisition ideas for this summer.

**Western Area Power Administration** - In fairly good shape for the summer; next winter will be a problem when minimum flows occur in different areas.

**Uncompahgre Valley Water Users** - Water users at 80 percent ration now (down to 70% on May 1). Presently using some of their Ridgway Reservoir storage and the Tunnel is full. Concerned with effect on sweet corn and other crops.

**Redlands Water and Power**-Placed a call on the river yesterday. Has been sealing diversion dam to reduce leakage.

**Tri County Water**-Ridgway Reservoir is being administered and may not fill this year.

**US Geological Survey**-Is busy with rating curves for area stream gages—extending curves down.

**Gunnison Basin Power** - This year is an opportunity for studies on the implications of drought—how the environment responds and how institutions function.

**High Country Citizens/Sierra Club**-Working on the selenium task force for the lower Gunnison Basin and supports additional funding for irrigation system improvement. Supports recent CWCB instream filings in the basin. Steve Glazier brought up the question of whether the Aspinall Unit should be operating to keep calls off of the river as suggested in past correspondence. Mike Gross mentioned that a review of decrees for the Aspinall Unit suggest that one purpose of the Unit is to help against river calls. Reclamation indicated that this is an ongoing discussion and will need to be addressed in the EIS on flow recommendations.

**Next Meeting-Tuesday August 20<sup>th</sup> at Elk Creek Visitor Center on Blue Mesa at 12:30. Also an interim meeting will be held in Grand Junction June 13<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 to address drought issues—location will be announced.**