

WCN-SMcCall  
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our August 21, 2003 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held at the Elk Creek Visitors Center on Blue Mesa Reservoir.

Highlights of the operation meeting include:

- April to July inflow to Blue Mesa Reservoir was only 60 percent of normal in 2003.
- Live storage in Blue Mesa as of August 1 was 421,000 acre feet (average on this date is 700,000; August 1, 2002 was around 320,000). Blue Mesa will be drawn down approximately 70 feet by the end of the year and approximately 85 feet by early spring 2004.
- Black Canyon flows in early April were around 250 cfs; a peak of 1,300 cfs in early June occurred due to rapid snowmelt; summer flows have been around 700 cfs and are predicted to decline in the early fall to around 300 cfs.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or the summaries of the meetings, please let us know. The next operation meeting will be held at the Pavillion in Montrose at 1 p.m. on January 22. If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

/s/

Dan Crabtree  
Water Resources 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-700, UC-724, UC-725, (ea w/encl)

Director, Technical Service Center, Denver CO  
Attention: D-8510 (w/encl)

WCN-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, BUilenberg, SMcCall, JOzga, CStanton, EKnight, MSteves,  
DCrabortree, JHock (ea w/ encl)

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage

Distribution List –August 21, 2003 Aspinall Operation Meeting

\*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

**Argonne National Laboratory** ..... John Hayse, Kirk Lagory  
**City of Grand Junction**..... Terry Franklin\*, Greg Trainor  
**Club 20** ..... Reeves Brown  
**Colorado State University** ..... Brett Johnson  
**Daily Sentinel**..... Erin McIntyre, Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan  
**Delta County Independent** ..... Bob Borchardt  
**Environmental Defense Fund** ..... Jim Martin  
**Gunnison Basin POWER** ..... Ralph (Butch) Clark\*, Ramon Reed\*  
**Gunnison Country Times** ..... Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel  
**Gunnison River Expeditions** ..... Hank Hotze  
**Helton & Williamsen, P.C.** ..... Duane Helton  
**High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club**..... Steve Glazer\*, Wendy McDermott\*,  
Steve Schechter, Shara Rutberg  
**Matt Owens Fly Company** ..... Matt Owens  
**Montrose Daily Press** ..... Jason Monroe\*, Caitlin Switzer  
**Trout Unlimited** ..... Pat Oglesby\*, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternell\*, John Trammell  
**Western Colorado Congress** ..... Fred Wetlaufer  
**University of Montana** ..... Jack Stanford  
**Co. River Water Conservation District**..... Dave Kanzer\*, Eric Kuhn, Bill Trampe, 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** ..Greg Peterson, Kathleen Curry\*, Mark Schumacher,  
Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel, Jim Slattery, Ken Spann  
**Delta County Commissioners**..... Jan McCracken, Wayne Wolf, Ted Hayden  
**Delta County**..... Duane Freeman  
**City of Delta**..... Barry Bullard\* Richard Sales\*, Wilma  
Ervin  
**Gunnison County Commissioners** ..... Fred Field, Perry Anderson, Jim Starr  
**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, Dan Kowalski, David Graf,  
Ryan Swygman, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson  
**Colorado Water Conservation Board** . Randy Seaholm, Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison\*, Rick Brown,  
Steve Miller  
**Wyoming State Engineers Office**..... John Shields  
**Congressman Scott McInnis** ..... David Ludlan, Kelly Watson, Ann Martinez, Joy Peck  
**Senator Wayne Allard** ..... Beth Washburn, Derek Wagner  
**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,  
Rooster Barnhart, Karen Tucker\*, Will Crim\*, Matt Salava, Spencer Green\*, Julie Stotler\*  
**Fish and Wildlife Service**..... Rick Krueger, Al Pfister, Chuck McAda, Patty Gelatt, Terry Ireland,  
George Smith

**National Park Service** ..... Myron Chase\*, Ken Stahlnecker\*, Mark Wondzell\*,  
 Shasta McCoy\*, Michael Dale\*, Bill Johnson, DanGude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee  
**National Weather Service**..... Bill Reed, Brian Avery  
**National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration**..... Andrea Ray\*, Robert Webb, Klaus Weickmann,  
 Brad Udall  
**U.S. Geological Survey** .. Paul von Guerard, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller, Gerhard Kuhn, Bob Boulgar\*  
**Land and Water Fund** ..... Bart Miller  
**Western Area Power Administration**..... Nancy Scheid, Clayton Palmer\*,  
 Jeff Ackerman, Kathy Crane\*, Ken Green, Annette Falvo, Ken Otto, Gary Burton; Margaret Matte, Dave  
 Shelton\*  
**Bureau of Reclamation**...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer, Ed Warner\*, Steve McCall\*, Coll Stanton,  
 John Ozga\*, Gary McDermott, Don Phillips\*, Dick Girvan, David Steinmark\*, Ted Dunn, Dan Crabtree,  
 Chris Cutler, Terry Stroh\*, Arlo Allen, Jane Blair, Paul Davidson\*, Tom Chart, Justyn Hock, Erik  
 Knight\*, Nancy Coulam\*, Dennis Kubly\*  
**Interior Solicitors Office**..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy  
**Department of Justice**.....Dave Gehlert  
**Xcel Energy**..... Fred Eggleston\*  
**Tri County Water** .....Mike Berry, Kathleen Margetts\*,  
 Richard Margetts (Project 7)  
**Self** .....George Sheldon, Marlene  
 Zanatell, Jim Cochran, Jim Hokit

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting  
August 21, 2003

**Participation:** This meeting was held at the National Park Service's Elk Creek visitors center on Blue Mesa. Attendees are noted on the distribution list.

**Purpose of Meeting:** The purpose of operation 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 April-August 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. 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. The Fish and Wildlife Service flow recommendations for endangered fish have been completed. 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:**

General: Blue Mesa Reservoir capacities are described in meetings as follows: The reservoir holds 940,700 acre-feet. Active capacity is 748,400; inactive capacity is 81,100; and dead storage is 111,200. Live capacity is the active plus inactive, which totals 829,500. Discussions during operation meetings use live capacity.

April-January Operations: Reclamation in consultation with the CWCB, CDOW, FWS, and others decided to reduce Black Canyon flows below 300 cfs last winter and early spring to conserve storage in this severe drought. Reclamation's policy is to keep minimum flows of at least 300 cfs in the Black Canyon; however, there are provisions to lower this under severe drought conditions.

April-July inflow to Blue Mesa was 429,000 acre-feet (60 percent of average) and to Crystal 511,000 acre-feet (55 percent of average). These inflows would be expected to be exceeded in 90 percent of years. On August 1, live storage was 421,000 acre-feet in Blue Mesa compared to an average August 1 level of 700,000 and a 2002 August 1 of 320,000.

At the beginning of this time period, flows through the Black Canyon were around 250 cfs. In early June flows reached 1,300 cfs due to unusually rapid snowmelt; at the time of the peak Blue Mesa was not releasing water.

The peak at the Whitewater gage near Grand Junction was around 6,000 cfs. Summer flows ranged from around 750 to 800 cfs and will gradually decline in late August and September. Flows downstream from the Redlands have been around 250-450 cfs since July 1. Operations will try to keep flows at this point around 300 cfs into October.

August - December 2003 Operation: Flows in the Gunnison Gorge will be reduced to 300-350 cfs after October. Dependent on flows in the North Fork and other downstream tributaries, Gunnison Gorge flows will most likely be in the 350 cfs + to 600 cfs range until that time. Blue Mesa is expected to be drawn down 65 feet by January 1 and under most probable conditions will not fill next spring (11 feet short of filling under most probable scenario).

There was some discussion of reducing Gunnison Gorge flows below 300 cfs during the winter to preserve more storage. Several attendees suggested an interim operation meeting to discuss this further if operations below 300 cfs are considered.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife will conduct electro fishing in the Ute Park Area between September 30 and October 3 and would like to see stable flows in the 300-600 cfs range; the low end of the range preferred.

### **Maintenance Activities:**

The Curecanti Field Office plans to dredge material from the confluence of Cimmaron Creek and Crystal Reservoir for approximately 1 week in September or October. The work will be timed to not coincide with CDOW fish inventories. Water quality will be monitored during the work so that dredging plans can be adjusted to minimize turbidity levels downstream.

Crystal Dam powerplant will be out of service beginning in mid-October and upgrades will be completed. The work will need to be tested before the plant can be placed back in service. The contract for the work specifies that upgrades and testing must be completed by April 1. Testing should occur over a 10-15 day period in March and will involve various release levels (0-2300 cfs) through the powerplant. Fluctuations can be moderated by timing and use of bypasses. Several concerns were brought up concerning the testing: public safety with fluctuating flows; effects on reservoir storage; timing in respect to a natural spring peak; and effects on the downstream trout fishery in general and brown trout reproduction specifically. Reclamation will present a plan for the testing at the January operations meeting.

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

**NOAA** – NOAA made a presentation on long range climate predictions. In the future it is hoped that better predictions of runoff timing and inflow forecasts can assist in reservoir operations.

Much of Colorado is still in a moderate to extreme drought. Current conditions in the Pacific are near average and do not support the development of either El Nino or La Nina conditions. Most climate prediction models call for average to below average precipitation in the coming winter. Please see [www.cdc.noaa.gov](http://www.cdc.noaa.gov) for further information.

**National Park Service-** Enforcement agreement for Black Canyon water right was signed. Morrow Point tour boat operated this year.

**Colorado Division of Wildlife-**Kokanee fishing in Blue Mesa has been very good this year. Work is being done on a diversion structure near Dos Rios to make it easier for kokanee to migrate upstream, but trucking fish at this point may be necessary again this year.

**Colorado River Water Conservation District-** Is working on some basic elements or assumptions that the District believes should be part of the Aspinall Unit operations baseline in respect to the upcoming EIS and endangered species consultation.

**Bureau of Land Management-**Gunnison Gorge RMP/EIS will be finalized this winter; working with water users on some changes for the final EIS. Summer flows have been pretty good for floating and there is quite a bit of use. Many other rivers are low, so many people are using the Gunnison.

**Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy District-**Would be very concerned with any decision to reduce releases this winter below 300 cfs because that could lead to a Redlands call that could affect upper basin users. On September 15<sup>th</sup> a trial on recreational boating flows near Gunnison begins. On August 27<sup>th</sup> the Colorado legislative committee on water will meet at the Elk Creek Visitors Center to be briefed on Gunnison Basin issues. Public is welcome.

**Tri-County-**Ridgway releases are around 250 cfs and reservoir content is about 70,000 acre-feet. Ridgway filled this spring.

**USGS** – The gain/loss study will be completed this fall for the Whitewater to Grand Junction reach of the Gunnison River.

**Redlands** – Redlands will be down week of October 20 for maintenance.

**Sierra Club/High Country Citizens** – Water sustainability report for the Gunnison Basin is available at [www.hccaonline.org](http://www.hccaonline.org).

**City of Delta** – Has completed aerial photos as part of flood inundation studies. City reports that at 10,500 cfs water begins to exceed the river bank.

**Next Meeting:** **The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Thursday January 22 at the Pavillion in Montrose.**