

WCG-SMcCall  
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our January 22, 2004, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held in Montrose.

Highlights of the operation meeting include:

-Snow courses in the Gunnison Basin were at 123 percent of average on January 9, but dropped to 109 percent on January 20 (based on 30 year average). Based on January 1 conditions, the inflow to Blue Mesa is projected at 95 percent of normal or 685,000 acre-feet.

-Live storage in Blue Mesa as of September 1, 2003 was 409,000 acre feet (average on that date is 665,000; September 1, 2002 was around 316,000). January 1, 2004 content was around 380,000 acre-feet (average is around 534,000 acre-feet). Based on January 1 snowpack conditions, Blue Mesa is projected to nearly fill by the end of the 2004 runoff.

-Black Canyon flows have been maintained at 300 cfs this winter. Under most probable conditions, flows will begin increasing in March and be in the 600-800 cfs range during the primary recreation season.

-Testing at the Crystal powerplant has been delayed—probably until early spring—a ramping plan to reduce river fluctuations was presented at the meeting.

- The Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS on Aspinall Unit Operations has been published and scoping meetings are scheduled for February.

Snowpack and runoff conditions **can change significantly** between January and May, so all projections should be considered very preliminary at this time.

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 our office in Grand Junction on April 22, at 1 p.m. If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0652.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree  
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure

Distribution (see attached list)

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

CCI-100

UC-400, UC-434, UC-438, UC-600, UC-700, UC-724, UC-725

D-8510

WCG-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, BUilenberg, SMcCall, JOzga, CStanton, EKnight,  
MSteves, DCrabtree, JHock

WCD-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage

(ea w/encl)

Distribution List –January 22, 2004 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** .....Randy See\*, Fred Wetlaufer  
**University of Montana** ..... Jack Stanford  
**Co. River Water Conservancy 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  
**Delta County Emergency Management**.....Rob Fiedler\*  
**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** ..... 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** ..... Bill Wellman\*, 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**..... Brad Warren\*, 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  
January 22, 2004

**Participation:** This meeting was held at the Pavilion in Montrose. 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 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. 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 and an Aspinall Operations EIS is being initiated. 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.

August-January Operations: Inflows to Blue Mesa remained below average during this period. Black Canyon flows were reduced to the 300 cfs minimum in September and have remained at that level. Blue Mesa storage has increased approximately 17,000 acre-feet since October 31st; live storage on January 1 was approximately 378,000 acre-feet. This is 157,000 acre-feet below average.

January-April 2004 Operations: Snow courses in the Gunnison Basin were at 123% of the 1971-2000 average on January 9 but decreased to 109% by January 20. January 1 April-July most probable inflow forecast to Blue Mesa was 685,000 acre-feet or 95% of average (maximum probable 1,030,000, minimum probable 340,000). On January 15, inflow forecast declined to 650,000.

Under most probable conditions, Blue Mesa would be expected to nearly fill by the end of the spring runoff. Black Canyon flows would be expected to start increasing above 300 cfs in March and be in the 600-800 cfs range for the recreation season. Reclamation's initial proposal for this year's operations does not include a peak flow release. It should be noted that **significant changes in runoff forecasts can occur** between January and May and therefore all projections are very subject to change.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife will conduct electro fishing in the Ute Park

Area the first week of October and would prefer flows in the 300-400 cfs range.

### **Maintenance Activities:**

In the August operations meeting, the need to test equipment at Crystal Dam powerplant was discussed. The contractor has provided information on the flows needed for testing, but additional repairs on the turbine have been identified. This will delay the testing—testing may occur in late April or early May but exact dates cannot be predicted yet.

The testing flows needed by the contractor range from 300 to 2,300 cfs, with rapid changes between flow levels. Reclamation presented a ramping plan using Crystal's bypass to even out or moderate sudden changes in the river flow. WAPA asked why ramping was needed; in response, concerns with the fishery and recreation safety were pointed out. The ramping plan would use approximately 6,000 acre-feet of storage. Reclamation will keep the operation meeting group updated on the testing schedule.

Morrow Point spillways will be tested this spring by opening the gates 6-12 inches. This should not affect flows downstream from Crystal.

There was some dredging work done at the Cimarron-Crystal Reservoir confluence last fall. Water quality was not affected. Colorado Department of Transportation used the material.

### **Black Canyon Water Rights:**

The Colorado Water Conservation Board updated the group on the status of the water rights for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. In 1978 a decree was issued for a reserved right for the Park with a 1933 date, but the right was not quantified. In 2001, a quantification application was filed for a 1933 right with a 300 cfs base, shoulder flows, and a 1-day peak of varying magnitudes. There were 380 objections filed to this quantification application and, in 2002, the water court stayed litigation to allow the right to be negotiated.

In April 2003, a memorandum was signed by Colorado, Reclamation, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service agreeing to a 2-part water right: a 1933 300 cfs reserved right

from the Park to the North Fork confluence and a 2003 state instream flow right for peak and shoulder flows.

Finalization of the 300 cfs reserved right is pending resolution of a suit filed that basically questions whether the 300 cfs is adequate.

In December 2003, the application to appropriate the state instream flow for spring and shoulder flows was filed. The opposition statement period ends February 27<sup>th</sup>. The instream flow right would protect flows up to 14,000 cfs between May 1 and July 31, but would not be exercised to result in flows above 10,000 cfs between Crystal and Delta (or 20,000 cfs at Whitewater) unless floodplain improvements were made to protect improvements. Exercise of the water right also would not interfere with meeting Aspinall Unit authorized purposes.

Water available to the instream flow right would be estimated based on May 1 forecasted inflow, minus water needed to physically fill Blue Mesa, Taylor Park, and Silver Jack and minus water needed to maintain 300 cfs minimum flows, Gunnison Tunnel diversions, upper Gunnison subordination needs, and other Aspinall Unit purposes. The instream flow right will be implemented through the Aspinall operations meetings; Reclamation will prepare estimates of water available for discussion.

The Uncompahgre Valley Water Users asked whether Gunnison Tunnel Diversion Dam improvements were included in the above referenced “floodplain improvements.” Upper Gunnison mentioned that the vagueness of the instream flow right was a concern.

High Country Citizens asked how reliable the May 1 forecast was compared to actual runoff. This comparison has been done for past years and there always is potential for error—sometimes the runoff is higher or lower than estimated on May 1.

In response to a question from WAPA, Reclamation indicated that water availability for the right has been determined, based on a 26-year record. WAPA suggested that release of the water available to the instream flow right needs to be discussed at the operation meetings--this is Reclamation’s intent.

WAPA also suggested that the Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service report on how river resources are affected by the flows provided.

**Aspinall Unit Environmental Impact Statement:**

The Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS on operations of the Aspinall Unit was published in the Federal Register on January 21, 2004. The EIS will develop and analyze alternative operation plans to assist in meeting endangered fish flow recommendations while continuing to meet Unit purposes. Scoping meetings are scheduled as follows:

Feb. 24, 6:30-9:30, Gunnison Co. Multipurpose Bldg.

Feb. 25, 6:30-9:30, Delta Middle School Auditorium

Feb. 26, 6:30-9:30, Liff Auditorium (Mesa State College), Grand Junction

During the scoping period, information and ideas on alternatives, baseline, and significant issues would be appreciated. Reclamation plans to develop a range of alternatives.

For further information, contact Justyn Hock at 970-248-0625 or write [aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov](mailto:aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov).

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

**Senator Campbell’s Office** – George Rossman has been joined by Amanda Chrysler in the Grand Junction Office. Craig Ferguson is the Washington Office contact on Natural Resources.

**National Park Service** – Bill Wellman, the new Curecanti/Black Canyon Superintendent was introduced.

**Colorado Division of Wildlife**-The Division thanked NPS for their creel census assistance at Blue Mesa—now has 1993-2003 data. Kokanee make up 84% of the Blue Mesa harvest and fishing was good in 2003. The kokanee run was early this year and many fish were not ready for spawning when they reached the hatchery on the East River. Six million eggs were collected.

The Division is leading an effort to improve fish passage at the diversion downstream from Twin Bridges—the work is being coordinated with water users and the Upper Gunnison District and is planned to be completed prior to runoff.

The Gunnison Gorge fishery is in pretty good shape. Rainbows were stocked again last summer; brown trout make up the highest biomass of the fishery, but rainbows are increasing due to stocking efforts.

**Colorado River Water Conservation District-** Expressed appreciation to Redlands for cooperating on plans to reduce the river call this winter to 650 cfs and allow more upstream storage by junior reservoirs. The District has contracted with HDR to improve forecasting ability and has approved \$10,000 to assist in selenium remediation in the Uncompahgre Valley. The District plans on being active in the Aspinall Operations EIS.

**Bureau of Land Management-**Gunnison Gorge RMP/FEIS has been completed.

**Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy District-**Announced that the new manager, Karen Shirley, will begin work in February. They are concerned about an April call by downstream seniors. Their augmentation plan is pending in Water Court. Coll Stanton's spreadsheet has been very helpful; the District would like to work on it in relation to augmentation plans.

The District asked about a quote in the Pueblo paper saying there was 288,000 acre-feet available in Blue Mesa—source of this number is not known.

**Tri-County-**Ridgway content is around 70,000 acre-feet and should fill this spring. Releases may begin to increase in March to make room for the runoff.

**USGS** – The gain/loss study is being completed for the Whitewater to Grand Junction reach of the Gunnison River. People were reminded that icing conditions affect gage readings this time of year. Also turbidity information is being collected at the Gunnison Tunnel Gage on the Gunnison River.

**Redlands** – Redlands has been occupied with icing conditions this winter. New panels have been installed on the diversion dam – these are 1-foot higher.

**Sierra Club/High Country Citizens** – Continues to work on Pathfinder Project and local water quality concerns. Is also concerned with the decline in funding for selenium programs. In the big picture, suggested a need for Colorado River Basin shortage sharing and coordination plans with upfront public discussions. Water sustainability report for the Gunnison Basin is available at [www.hccaonline.org](http://www.hccaonline.org).

**Gunnison Basin Power** – Stressed that coordination needed for the many planning efforts in the Basin. Suggested work on the Middle Rio Grande as a reference (contact Forest Service, Ft. Collins) on how activities are integrated with water.

**Western Area Power Administration** – WAPA would like to discuss river fluctuations with the CDOW. The Basin Fund is increasing based on lowered commitments of energy to customers.

**Colorado Water Resources** – Upper Gunnison's augmentation work and Redlands call reductions have helped with water administration. The entire Gunnison Basin has recently been designated as over appropriated and therefore augmentation plans are needed for the entire basin.

**Trout Unlimited** – Concerned with the amount of water that will be available to the pending instream flow right for the Black Canyon—use of the water should be optimized. Appreciates Coll Stanton's work on moderating flow effects of the upcoming Crystal testing.

**Uncompahgre Valley Water Users** -- Monitoring the snowpack.

**Fish and Wildlife Service** – Four endangered fish used the Redlands Fish Ladder in 2003—3 pikeminnow and one bonytail. The bonytail was from a stocking and is the first example of a bonytail

using the Gunnison. One of the pikeminnows was captured in the river at Moab in May and used the ladder in July.

Since the ladder was completed, it has been used by 62 pikeminnow, 6 razorbacks, and 1 bonytail. In October of 2003, pikeminnow were stocked near Delta. Larval fish sampling was completed in 2003 but results are not available yet. In 2002 larval razorbacks were identified indicating successful reproduction in the Gunnison.

**Other** – The next Basin SWASI meeting will be February 17 at Holiday Inn in Montrose. Round Table meeting at 2 p.m. and public comments at 6 p.m.

**Next Meeting: The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Thursday April 22 at the Reclamation Office in Grand Junction.**