

WCG-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our April 22, 2005, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held at Reclamation's Grand Junction office. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

-The Gunnison Basin has had 7 straight years of below average runoff; however, projections for 2005 show runoff at 108 percent of average and snowpack at 117 percent in the basin. April-July inflow to Blue Mesa in 2004 was only 422,000 acre-feet; present projections for 2005 are 770,000 acre-feet.

-Blue Mesa is projected to fill this year under most probable conditions; in 2004 the reservoir was 200,000 acre-feet short of filling.

-Black Canyon flows have increased to around 1,500 cfs in response to improved snowpack. Projections show flows of around 1,000 cfs through the summer; and depending on May 1 forecasts, a peak of around 3,000-3,500 cfs is planned during May. It should be noted that plans for any peak depend on May forecast conditions.

-A presentation on river forecasting was made and information provided on websites for forecasting information--one of the better sites is www.cbrfc.noaa.gov.

-Reclamation has initiated an environmental impact statement on Aspinall Unit operations—see www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/ or contact aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov for information.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or summaries, please let us know. The next operation meeting will be on Thursday, August 25 at 1 p.m. at the National Park Service Elk Creek Visitor Center on Blue Mesa. If you have questions, please call me at 970 248-0652.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure
Distribution (see attached list)

bc: 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-436, UC-438, UC-600, UC-700, UC-720

Director, Technical Service Center, Denver CO

Attention: D-8510

WCG-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, BUilenberg, SMcCall, CStanton, EKnight, MSteves,
DCrabbtree, TStroh, JHock

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage

(ea w/encl)

WBR:SMcCall:rb:5/3/05:970 248-0638:Aspinall minutes april 22

Distribution List –
 April 22, 2005 Aspinall Operation Meeting
 *An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Daily Sentinel.....Sally Spauding*, Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan
Delta County Independent Bob Borchardt*
Gunnison Country Times Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel
Montrose Daily Press Jason Monroe, Caitlin Switzer
Western Resource Advocates Bart Miller
Club 20 Reeves Brown
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Environmental Defense Fund Jim Martin
Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark, Ramon Reed
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
Xcel Energy..... Fred Eggleston
Matt Owens Fly Company Matt Owens
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby*, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternell John Trammell
Western Colorado Congress Randy See, Fred Wetlaufer
Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Colorado River Water Conservation District Dave Kanzer*, Don Meyer*, Eric Kuhn, Bill Trampe,
 David Halford, Ray Tenney
Ridgway Guide Service..... Tim Peterson
Self George Sheldon, Bo Gates, Marlene Zanatell, Jim Cochran,
 Jim Hokit
Colorado River Energy Distributors..... Leslie
 James*
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Tri County Water Mike Berry, Kathleen Margetts*, Richard Margetts* (Project
 7)
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, Karen Shirley*, Kathleen
 Curry, Mark Schumacher, Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel*, Jim Slattery, Ken Spann
City of Grand Junction Terry Franklin, Greg Trainor
Delta County Commissioners Jan McCracken, Wayne Wolf, Olen Lund
Delta County Duane Freeman
City of Delta Barry Bullard, Richard Sales, Wilma Ervin
Delta County Emergency Management Rob Fiedler
Gunnison County Commissioners Hap Channell, Paula Swenson, 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, Jay Skinner*, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson, Mark Uppendahl*
Colorado Water Conservation Board Randy Seaholm*, Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison*, Rick Brown,

Steve Miller

Wyoming State Engineers Office..... John Shields
Congressman John SalazarRichard Baca
Senator Wayne AllardDerek Wagner
Senator Ken Salazar Trudy Kareus, Mary Beth Buescher
Army Corps of Engineers..... Ken Jacobson
Bureau of Land Management Dennis Murphy, Jim Ferguson, Roy Smith, Rooster Barnhart*, Karen Tucker, Forest Zerbe, Jesse Kirthorp, Peter Dennett, Julie Stotler
Fish and Wildlife Service..... Al Pfister, Chuck McAda*, Patty Gelatt*, George Smith
National Park Service Bill Wellman*, Myron Chase, Ken Stahlnecker*, Mark Wondzell, Melissa Trammell, Michael Dale*, Bill Johnson, DanGude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee, Norm Henderson*
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 Boulgarz, Joe Sullivan
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, Heather Patno*
Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer, Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton*, Don Phillips*, Dick Girvan, David Steinmark, Ted Dunn, Dan Crabtree*, Chris Cutler*, Terry Stroh*, Arlo Allen, Jane Blair*, Paul Davidson*, Justyn Hock*, Erik Knight*, Nancy Coulam*, Dennis Kubly, Dave Harpman, Dawn Munger, and Rick Vinton
Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
April 22, 2005

Participation: This meeting was held at Reclamation's Office in Grand Junction. 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 specific operations for the Aspinall Unit and for the overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which include 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 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. 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 has been 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.

January-April 2005 Operations: Inflows to Blue Mesa were generally in the 300-500 cfs range during the period and increased to over 1,000 cfs in April. By April 10 Crystal releases had increased to around 2,200 cfs. Blue Mesa content decreased from 480,000 af on January 1 to around 420,000 af on April 1. Blue Mesa is projected to fill this year based on most probable water supplies.

The increase in releases is related to the forecasted inflow and the projection that runoff into Blue Mesa will be over 100 percent of normal. The increased releases reduce the amount of water that may need to bypass the Crystal powerplant later in the spring. The April 1 most probable runoff was projected to be 770,000 af. (This is considered an “average wet year” –this type runoff would be expected to be exceeded in 45 % of years). On the cautious side, it was noted that late April and May weather conditions can change the forecast.

The flow capacity at Crystal Powerplant has increased as a result of maintenance work last year; the exact capacity will not be known until later in the year but appears to be in the 2,150 cfs range.

April-August 2005 Operations: A preliminary operation proposal was presented by Reclamation that showed Crystal releases around 2,200 cfs until late August and Blue Mesa reservoir filling. Flows through the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge should be around 1,000 cfs through the summer. Present projections show that inflow in “excess” of that needed to fill Blue Mesa and fully utilize the Crystal powerplant may be available.

Reclamation’s proposal is to release excess volume through the powerplant bypass during spring runoff. If there is still “excess water” projected on May 1, the excess will be “bundled” into a spring peak. At the time of the meeting, there was approximately 14,000 af of “excess” water projected (the 24 month study shows 47,000 af of excess water but does not fully reflect the new Crystal powerplant capacity). An example of a one day peak release of 4,200 cfs was described—would take 9 days while ramping up at 500 cfs per day and ramping down at 400 cfs per day.

If May 1 forecasts support a peak, its timing will be influenced by flows at Delta (avoid flood damage) while at the same time attempting to match the North Fork peak. BLM and CDOW indicated that a 5 day advance notice would be helpful for informing the public of the timing.

Input was requested from those in attendance concerning operations:

- FWS supported a spring peak and efforts to match the North Fork peak.
- NPS indicated that a 5,000 cfs peak would be very good for park resources but that the peak as proposed would also be beneficial.
- CDOW indicated that late May would be the best timing for the peak and ramping rates could be relaxed (above 2,500 cfs could ramp up 500 cfs 2 times per day and down 400 cfs 2 times per day).
- The State Engineers Office cautioned to keep an eye on the North Fork to try and avoid flood damage in Delta area.
- High Country Citizens supported a spring peak and encouraged matching the North Fork.
- WAPA reminded the group that the timing of the release of water in excess of power generation needs should meet some purpose.

There was a discussion of the Dallas Creek and Dolores Projects’ biological opinions. Briefly these opinions call for an upstream Reclamation reservoir to release water to offset impacts of Dallas/Dolores depletions on endangered fish. The question was asked whether operations of the Aspinall Unit are satisfying those opinions. The FWS indicated that this depends on the

outcome of the Aspinall Unit EIS on endangered fish operations.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife requested flows in the 400-500 cfs range September 27-30 to facilitate fishery inventories. The 2004 inventory was cancelled due to uncertainties in flows during the Crystal testing, so this year's inventory is very important for fishery management.

River Forecasting:

Chris Cutler, Reclamation's liaison with the National Weather Service, made a presentation on how river forecasts are developed. Forecasts are developed in cooperation with the National Resource Conservation Service and NOAA. Several websites were reviewed that provide a wide variety of information. Some examples:

<http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov>

<http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/notice/snowpack.html>

<http://www.drought.unl.edu/dm/index.html>

<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/>

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 and scoping meetings were held in February. Cooperating agencies have been selected and initial meetings held. The EIS will look at Aspinall Unit operation changes to help meet endangered fish flow recommendations while protecting other Unit purposes. Website information is available at www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/.

Work is progressing on developing a No Action alternative which will describe Aspinall Unit operations in the absence of flow recommendations. Action alternatives will be identified this spring and Reclamation hopes that a range of alternatives will be available this fall to present to the public.

Cooperating agency meetings are open to the public to attend and observe. Opportunity for public questions and comments is provided at the end of the meetings. The next meeting will be on May 20th at 9:30 a.m. in Grand Junction---contact aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov for information.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

National Park Service –Marinas should open May 1 and the Morrow Point boat tour is scheduled to start on Memorial Day weekend. Concerning the spring peak, 5,000 cfs would be very good for Park resources; however, they support the proposed operation with a lesser peak. The height of the peak is more important than its duration.

Colorado Division of Wildlife- Kokanee salmon were released from Roaring Judy Hatchery on April 15. Will be spawning rainbows in East Portal area next 2 weeks to help preserve the Gunnison River rainbow strain. DOW is also working to develop a rainbow strain with Whirling Disease resistance. Working with Reclamation on the Aspinall EIS and is concerned with both the reservoir and river fisheries.

Colorado River Water Conservation District- The District is participating in the Aspinall EIS process and is interested in Aspinall operations serving as ESA protection for Gunnison Basin depletions.

Sierra Club/High Country Citizens – Working on water quality standards in the basin. Encourages less conflict in the Aspinall EIS process.

Western Area Power Administration – Requested as much lead time as possible on the timing of a peak. Will work with NPS on Morrow Point boat use. Reminded people to keep an eye on Cimarron inflow to reduce chances of Crystal spill.

Fish and Wildlife Service – In 2005 Gunnison River work will include operating the Redlands fish ladder and additional stocking of razorback suckers in the fall. The 4th year of larval razorback sucker sampling will occur. Redlands fish screen is on schedule.

Colorado Water Conservation Board – Working as a cooperating agency on the Aspinall Unit EIS. Encourages reviews of Unit decrees and authorized purposes to reconcile. Interested in protecting marketable yield of Blue Mesa—because new storage is so difficult to develop. CWCB is working on instream flow filings in the North Fork drainage.

State Engineer: Should be a good water year; all Grand Mesa reservoirs should fill. Be cautious of high flows coming off of the Grand Mesa this spring.

Next Meeting: The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Thursday August 25th the NPS Elk Creek Visitor Center on Blue Mesa.