

WCG-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our January 17, 2008 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held in Montrose. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

-January 1 forecast for 2008 spring runoff into Blue Mesa is around 108 percent of average. This forecast is encouraging; however, history has shown that the forecast can change significantly between January and the end of the runoff season because January is still early in the snow accumulation period.

-Based on the January 1 forecast, summer flows downstream from the Gunnison Tunnel should be around 1,100 cfs; a determination of whether water is available for a spring peak will be made on May 1. Blue Mesa is anticipated to fill this year.

-The Colorado Division of Wildlife made an excellent presentation on the Gunnison River trout fishery and the relation of fish populations and river flows (link to presentation will be available on the on the operations summary website:
<http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/water/rsvrs/mtgs/amcurrnt.html>

-Reclamation is planning an inspection of the Crystal stilling basin in the February-March period. The inspection requires low flow conditions and plans are being made to reduce potential impacts. More information will be provided to interested parties as plans are developed.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or summaries, please let us know. The next operation meeting will be on Thursday, April 24 at Reclamation's office in Grand Junction. If you have any questions, please call me at 970 248-0652.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure
Distribution (see attached list)

bc: CC-100

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

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UC-110, UC-400, UC-434, UC-436, UC-438, UC-600, UC-700, UC-720
D-885100

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

WCD-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage
(each w/encl)

WBR:SMcCall:Aspinall summary January 18

Identical letter sent – see attached list

Distribution List –

January 17, 2008 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Daily Sentinel..... Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan
Delta County Independent Bob Borchardt
Gunnison Country Times Michelle Burkhart, Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel
Montrose Daily Press James Shea, Jason Monroe, Caitlin Switzer, Matt Hildner
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, Al DeGrange
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*Marshall Pendergrass*
Western Colorado Congress Randy See, Fred Wetlaufer
Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Ridgway Guide Service..... Tim Peterson
Self Curt Treichel, Lynn Johnson, George Sheldon, Bo Gates, Marlene
Zanatell, Jim Cochran, Jim Hokit, Richard Girvan*
Colorado River Energy Distributors..... Leslie James, Kent Holsinger
Colorado River Water Conservation District Dave Kanzer*, Don Meyer, Jim Pokrandt*, Eric
Kuhn, Bill Trampe, David Halford, Ray Tenney
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Tri County Water Mike Berry*, Ion Spor, Kathleen Margetts
Project 7 Richard Margetts
Redlands Water and Power Company Charles Mitisek*, Mike Gross
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association..... Marc Catlin*
Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland
Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District John McClow*, Frank Kugel*, Greg Peterson,
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..... Dales Hukle, Barry Bullard, Jim Brown, 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*, Bob Hurford*, Richard Rozman
Colorado Division of Wildlife Mike Japhet*, Daniel Brauch, Sherman Hebein, Dan Kowalski*, David Graf,
Ryan Swygan, 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*, Edd Franz*, Forest Zerbe, Jesse Kirthorp, Peter Dennett, Julie Stotler, Ryan Mathis*
Fish and Wildlife Service..... Al Pfister, Chuck McAda, Patty Gelatt*, George Smith
National Park Service Connie Rudd, Ken Stahlnecker, Dave Roberts*, Matt Malick, Mark Wondzell, Melissa Trammell, Michael Dale*, Bill Johnson, DanGude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee, Norm Henderson
National Weather Service.....Brenda Alcorn, 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, Steve Anders, Kirby Wynn, Trisha Solberg*
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, Jennifer Turnbull*, Chris Brown
Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton, Don Phillips*, Joe Austin*, David Steinmark, Grant Watson*, Ted Dunn* Dan Crabtree*, Chris Cutler, Terry Stroh, Jane Blair*, Max Striker*, Paul Davidson*, Justyn Hock, Erik Knight*, Nancy Coulam, Heather Patno, Dennis Kubly, Dave Harpman, Dawn Munger, Rick Vinton
Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert
Colorado U/CADSWES.....Edie Zagona, Satish Regonda
University of Colorado..... Christina Alford

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

January 17, 2008

Participation: This meeting was held 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 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, hydropower and flood control needs, existing water rights, minimum instream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flow needs for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, 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 2007 operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs for 2008; and potential operation plans under probable maximum, most probable, and probable minimum runoff forecasts for 2008.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. Field studies leading to flow recommendations (Fish and Wildlife Service Flow Recommendations) to help recover downstream endangered fish and studies to quantify a Federal reserved water right have been completed for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

The Fish and Wildlife Service flow recommendations for endangered fish have been completed and published, and an Aspinall Operations EIS has been initiated to evaluate alternative operations to help meet these recommendations. 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- December 2007 Operations:

The December 31 icing target for Blue Mesa was met. Unit releases were around 1,500 cfs - 2,000 cfs through October. Special flows were provided for the Gunnison River trout inventory and trout stocking. Releases were around 1,200 cfs in November and December.

2008 Operations:

Early winter snowfall was lower than normal; however, late December and early January storms increased the snow pack significantly. The January 1 forecasted inflow to Blue Mesa was 780,000 af or 108 percent of average. By January 15, this number increased to 815,000 af. The January 1 forecast for the Gunnison River near Grand Junction was 1.7 million af or around 109 percent of average. Based on these values, the year is categorized as “average wet”.

Under most probable conditions, Crystal will be operated at full power plant capacity from April through August, and Blue Mesa would be expected to fill. Releases have increased in January to avoid the need to bypass power plants later in the year.

Under most probable conditions, a spring peak is not planned; however, conditions are close to facilitating a peak so a decision will not be made until May. If forecasted inflow increases, a peak release may occur. The Colorado River Water Conservation District suggested looking into using Cimarron peak inflows to Crystal to produce a downstream peak.

Black Canyon flows are projected to be in the 1000-1250 cfs range during the recreation season based on most probable conditions.

It was pointed out that it is early in the year, and forecasts may change significantly between now and May.

Input was requested from those in attendance concerning 2008 operations:

If the forecast holds, the Fish and Wildlife Service would like to see a spring peak release to help build a peak at Whitewater. Under the Flow Recommendations during an average wet year, the flow target at Whitewater would be 14,350 cfs. The National Park Service supported this input.

Trout Unlimited requested a peak or flushing flow in the 3,500 cfs range in the Gunnison Gorge to help move sediment that has accumulated during the drought years. This year may be the best opportunity in case the drought continues. The health of the river is important for the fish, recreation, economics, and efforts to return rainbow trout to the river. (TU's letter is on the Aspinall operations website).

High Country Citizens had sent an email suggesting that flows not be increased in January so that more water would be available for a spring peak.

If there is a spring peak, the Colorado Division of Wildlife prefers a May peak over an early June peak to help with rainbow trout fry survival. Under any case, following ramping rates will be important to protect young fish. In response to a question, CDOW said rainbow select spawning areas in April and it is desirable that they spawn in areas that are not dewatered by flow decreases. Flows under 1500-2000 cfs during spawning are desirable.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife is planning fish sampling in the Gunnison Gorge from October 7-10 and requested flows in the 700-900 cfs range.

Other Reservoirs:

Crawford, Fruitgrowers, Paonia, Silver Jack, Taylor Park and Ridgway are expected to fill this year under most probable conditions. In response to a question on why Ridgway Reservoir was so high at this time of year, Tri-County pointed out that to meet water user needs later in the year they operate conservatively to make the best attempt to fill. In response to recent snowfalls, they may increase releases.

Colorado Division of Wildlife Presentation: Dan Kowalski gave a very informative presentation on the relationship between Gunnison River flows and trout populations. The Gorge developed into an outstanding Gold Medal fishery in the 1980's. Dan thanked cooperators such as Uncompahgre Valley Water Users, Trout Unlimited, and Reclamation that have helped where possible with flow maintenance, research, and stocking efforts. However; in the 1990's Whirling Disease decimated the rainbow portion of the fishery. Brown trout have thrived and total trout biomass has been maintained. There is initial evidence that efforts to develop a Whirling Disease resistant rainbow strain may be working; there is some fry survival being seen.

Adult fish do well at a wide range of flows in the Gorge. The key limiting factor to the fishery is the survival of rainbow and brown trout fry in the late spring and early summer. May is a key month for browns and June for rainbow. Stable flows, low or moderately low flows, and/or gradual ramping of flow changes are critical for the fry survival.

Fish populations and condition remain very good despite the extended drought and sediment deposition in portions of the river. A flushing flow is not critical at this time; however, periodic high flows are important for habitat maintenance.

Many more topics were covered and the powerpoint presentation is available on Reclamation's Aspinall Operation site on the web.

Operation and Maintenance Activities

Don Phillips with the Curecanti Field Office discussed various activities. Between June and September 2007, the Morrow Point spillway stilling basin repairs were completed. Flow meters are also being installed on outlet works.

Plans are being made to remove rocks from the Blue Mesa stilling basin. Releases would be terminated during the work to allow dewatering of the stilling basin. Flows downstream from Crystal would not be significantly affected. Work is tentatively planned during the week of March 21-29.

An inspection of the Crystal stilling basin is being planned. This basin has never been adequately inspected and inspections are needed under dam safety programs. The first step

would be to perform sonar mapping of the basin from a boat. This could take 1-3 hours. Flows would need to be significantly reduced or perhaps shut down during this period. Work could be done as early as the end of February. The sonar data would then be analyzed, an approximately 2 week effort, following which divers would inspect the basin. Diving could require releases to be terminated for several 3 hour periods.

Reclamation is preparing a plan for the stilling basin work including plans to reduce impacts of low flows. Possibilities for protecting flows include using water stored behind the Gunnison Tunnel diversion dam and pumping from the stilling basin. As more details are developed, information will be provided to the public.

Dependent on how plans to protect flows can be developed, the CDOW expressed concern that impacts could potentially be huge. A flow at 250 cfs for no more than 3 hours might be ok. On the positive side, this is the best time of the year for such an inspection as oxygen levels are higher in the cold water. Uncompahgre Valley Water Users indicated they would be willing to assist in operations of their diversion dam if needed.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Colorado Division of Wildlife – Documented whirling disease resistant rainbow survival in 2007 which is the first good news for awhile on this front.

Colorado Water Conservation Board – Board meeting will be week of January 21st in Denver.

Bureau of Land Management: 2007 was a good recreation year in the Gorge. Heavy use in June during the stone fly hatch. Road to the North Fork/Gunnison confluence on south side of river has been improved and a boat ramp and camping area will be developed there.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users: If flows are reduced for maintenance work at Crystal, they will do some concurrent inspections of the Gunnison Diversion Dam.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservation District: It has been very cold! A May 24 Gunnison River Festival is planned. So far this year, there is more ice in the river but no serious problems yet.

Redlands Water and Power: Has had a good year.

Colorado State Engineer: Announced that Dick Wolfe is new State Engineer and introduced Bob Hurford as Wayne Schieldt's assistant.

Tri-County: Cow Creek gage installation is going well and should be operating this spring. May increase Ridgway releases in response to snowpack.

Trout Unlimited: Will continue to help CDOW with rainbow stocking efforts. Supports a spring peak and concerned with potential low flows during maintenance activities.

Colorado Water Conservation District: Pete Kasper is new president. Deadline for small grant program is January 31. Looking into having water outreach program for the public in Montrose this year.

Aspinall Unit EIS:

The EIS is being prepared to evaluate a range of alternatives to help meet endangered fish flow recommendations while continuing to meet Aspinall Unit purposes. Flow Recommendations have been developed by the Recovery Program for endangered fish habitat downstream from Delta. The schedule has been accelerated in order to complete the process this year. Several alternatives are being considered and selection of a preferred alternative is scheduled for February. Alternatives are designed to increase spring peaks in the lower Gunnison and maintain base flows. Two general types of alternatives are being modeled: alternatives that “bundle” water in excess of Aspinall Unit needs/requirements into a spring peak and those that target a specific peak downstream using excess water and storage water. See:

www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/ ; for information---select “Aspinall Unit Operations EIS” under the “General” heading. Contact aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov for information.

Next Meeting: The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m., Thursday, April 24th in Reclamation’s Grand Junction Office.