

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

January 22, 2009

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 2008 operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs for 2009; and potential operation plans under probable runoff forecasts for 2009.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. The Department of Interior now has a decreed water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and an Aspinall Operations Draft EIS will soon be released for public comment. The EIS evaluates alternative operations to help meet the Fish and Wildlife Service's Flow Recommendations for endangered fish. 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 2008 Operations:

The elevation of Blue Mesa Reservoir on December 31 was 0.24 ft above the icing target elevation of 7490.0. Unit releases were 2,000 cfs in August and September, 1,350 to 1,900 cfs in October and 700 to 800 cfs in November and December.

2009 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 750,000 AF or 104 percent of average. The January mid-month forecast was unchanged. The January 1 forecast for the Gunnison River near Grand Junction was about 1.7 million AF or around 109 percent of average. Based on these values, the year is categorized as “average wet”.

According to the 24 Month Study, 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 release is not modeled; however, conditions are close to facilitating a peak so a decision will not be made until May.

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.

Bryon Lawrence from the National Weather Service provided a brief summary of the long range forecast. A weak La Nina condition could be forming over the next few months with a more neutral ENSO later in the summer. Current forecast for February is EC or equal chances of precipitation. Bryon provided the following water supply links:

<http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/westernwater/>

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

<http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/product/peak/peak.cgi>

Input was requested from those in attendance concerning 2009 operations:

The Uncompahgre Valley Water Users requested a reduced flow during the first part of March in order to facilitate repairs on the East Portal Diversion Dam which was damaged during last year’s peak release. Their request included flows at 400 cfs for two days.

After the meeting, the Colorado Division of Wildlife notified Reclamation they are planning to sample fish in the Gunnison Gorge from October 6-9 and requested flows in the 700-900 cfs range.

Trout Unlimited asked why there was no indication of an attempt to meet the newly decreed Black Canyon Water Right in the proposed operation. Reclamation responded that the water right is new and has not been included in the 24 Month Study Model, in addition however, it is still very early in the season and the Water Right will be considered during the development of the spring release operations plan. Reclamation plans to meet the terms and conditions negotiated and set forth in the decree.

Other Reservoirs:

Crawford, Fruitgrowers, Paonia, Silver Jack, Taylor Park and Ridgway are expected to fill this year under most probable conditions.

Special Presentation: Chris Landry, Executive Director of the Snow and Avalanche Study Center in Silverton gave a presentation on the effects of dust accumulation on snowmelt and runoff characteristics. The basic conclusion is that dirty snow absorbs more of the sun's energy and causes the snow to melt much quicker. His power point presentation can be found at <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/water/rsvrs/mtgs/amcurrnt.html>

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Colorado Division of Wildlife – Dan Kowalski provided an email with CDOW's summary of Gunnison River fishery conditions. The summary was distributed to attendees at the meeting.

Colorado Water Conservation Board – Board meeting will be week of January 25th in Denver. Severance package water related grant requests are due soon. 2008 was the first year the Colorado River was operated under the 2007 operation agreement between the Upper and Lower Basin States. 8.9 million ac-ft vs. 8.25 million ac-ft (previously required) delivered from Lake Powell in 2008.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users: Need flow reduction to 400 cfs for two days during the first part of March for East Portal Diversion Dam maintenance.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservation District: The District has been concerned about the accuracy of the forecast for the Upper Taylor. They are cost-sharing with the NRCS for installation of an additional Snotel Site above Taylor Reservoir.

Colorado State Engineer: The State is developing a policy paper on the administration of the Black Canyon Water Right. Position open in Montrose.

Tri-County: Ridgway is 81% full and releasing 51 cfs. Looking forward to completion of seismic study so hydropower and water treatment plant planning can continue. Doing winter maintenance at Ridgway.

Colorado Water Conservation District: Would like a Cooperating Agency meeting during the PBO process. Commended agencies involved in Black Canyon Water Right process and the win-win outcome. River District has a large grant program related to new water supplies. Will conduct State of the River meetings in May. Check out website for water education videos.

National Park Service – Appreciated everyone's work on the decree. Looking forward to implementation.

High Country Citizens Alliance – Gunnison Basin Roundtable finalizing non-consumptive use attributes map. Working on selenium education issues for the Roundtable.

Montrose Power Office – Normal spring maintenance, including Morrow Point transformer testing.

USGS – Moving streamflow gage from Hotchkiss to the mouth of the North Fork beginning of March.

CREDA – Educational opportunities – Water for the West Grants due in February. Resources left from Reclamation’s Centennial Celebration to help entities develop education materials.

NOAA – Climate Change Symposium February 24th. Check out website.
<http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/announcement.pdf>

Western Area Power – Significant drop in energy demand and price. Good for purchase of energy. Keeping Crystal and Morrow Point reservoir elevations down in case work at Glen Canyon requires extra energy from Aspinall. Two and three units down at a time for coolant tube maintenance. May need to hold down during the summer as well depending on status of the units. Will coordinate with Park Service tour boat schedule.

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 Fish and Wildlife Service for endangered fish habitat downstream from Delta. 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. The Draft EIS is scheduled for release on February 13th 2009. Public hearings are scheduled for April 7th at the Gunnison Fairgrounds and April 8th at the Bill Heddles Center in Delta. The comment period will be open to April 24th 2009. A Programmatic Biological Assessment has been submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Service for formal consultation and development of a programmatic biological opinion. See http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/rm/aspeis/pdfs/Aspinall_BA_010809.pdf Contact aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov for further information.

Next Meeting: The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m., Thursday, April 23rd in Reclamation’s Grand Junction Office.

Distribution List –

January 22, 2009 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Daily Sentinel..... Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan
Delta County IndependentBob Borchardt
Gunnison Country Times Will Shoemaker, Michelle Burkhart, 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 Dan Lueke*, 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 CompanyMatt Owens
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternell*, John Trammell*, Marshall Pendergrass
Western Colorado CongressRandy See, Fred Wetlaufer
Black Canyon Anglers.....Richard Dudginski
Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Ridgway Guide Service.....Tim Peterson
SelfCurt 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 DistrictDave Kanzer*, Don Meyer, Jim Pokrandt*, Eric
Kuhn, Bill Trampe, David Halford, Ray Tenney
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Tri County WaterMike Berry*, Ion Spor*, Teddy Earley*, Kathleen Margetts
Project 7 Richard Margetts
Redlands Water and Power Company Charles Mitisek, Mike Gross
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association..... Ed Suppes*, Steve Fletcher*, 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.....Lanny Sloan, Steve Glammeyer, Barry Bullard, Jim
Brown, Wilma Ervin
Delta County Emergency Management.....Rob Fiedler
Mesa County Emergency Management.....Chadd Searcy
Gunnison County Emergency ManagementScott Morrill
Gunnison County Commissioners Hap Channell, Paula Swenson, Jim Starr
Colorado Department of Agriculture..... Jim Miller

Colorado Division of Water Resources Bob Hurford*, Richard Rozman
Colorado Division of Wildlife Mike Japhet, Daniel Brauch, Sherman Hebein, Dan Kowalski, David Graf,
 Ryan Swygman, Jay Skinner, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson, Mark Uppendahl
Colorado Department Emergency Management Steve Denney
Colorado Water Conservation Board.....Randy Seaholm*, Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison*, Rick Brown,
 Steve Miller
Congressman John SalazarRichard Baca
Senator Mark Udall
Senator Michael Bennet.....
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*,
National Park ServiceConnie Rudd*, Ken Stahlnecker*, Dave Roberts, Mark Wondzell,
 Melissa Trammell, Michael Dale*, Bill Johnson, DanGude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee, Norm Henderson
National Weather Service..... Doug Crowley*, John Kyle*, Brenda Alcorn, Bill Reed, Bryon Lawrence*
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration..... Andrea Ray, Robert Webb, Klaus Weickmann,
 Brad Udall
U.S. Geological Survey.....Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller, Gerhard Kuhn, Bob Boulgarz,
 Joe Sullivan*, Steve Anders, David Brown*, 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, Don Phillips*, Joe Austin*,
 David Steinmark, Grant Watson*, Ted Dunn* Dan Crabtree*, Terry Stroh, Jane Blair*, Max Striker, Paul
 Davidson*, Justyn Hock, Erik Knight*, Nancy Coulam, Heather Patno, Laurie Jones*
Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert
Colorado U/CADSWES.....Edie Zagona, Satish Regonda
University of Colorado..... Christina Alford
Colorado Basin River Forecast Center..... Brenda Alcorn