

Aspinall Unit Operations Meeting
April 27, 2017, 1:00 PM

Background: A Record of Decision for the Aspinall Unit Operations Environmental Impact Statement was signed on May 3, 2012. The EIS modifies the operations of the Aspinall Unit to provide sufficient releases of water at times, quantities, and durations necessary to avoid jeopardy to endangered fish species and adverse modification of their designated critical habitat while maintaining and continuing to meet authorized purposes of the Aspinall Unit. Meetings regarding the operations of the Aspinall Unit are open to stakeholders, and take place tri-annually, with meetings occurring in January, April, and August of each year.

Gunnison River Basin Runoff Forecasts – Ashley Nielson (CBRFC)

Water year 2017 had a slow start, with the Gunnison Basin receiving only 35% of its average precipitation. However, due to periodic “atmospheric rivers,” narrow corridors of significant moisture was transported farther inland than usual, and the Gunnison received 85% and 170% of its average precipitation in November and December, respectively. During January and February, the Gunnison Basin received 245% and 105% of average precipitation, and many SNOTEL sites in the basin were within the top four highest precipitation years in the 30-37 years on record.

During March, precipitation went the opposite, extreme direction, with the Gunnison Basin receiving only 55% of average precipitation. Mean daily temperatures reached 15-25 degrees above average. From March to April, snow conditions in the Gunnison basin dropped from between anywhere between 150-300% of average to around 90-110% of average. The lack of precipitation and the higher temperatures resulted in a decrease in forecasted reservoir inflows and an early runoff in some areas.

The North Fork Gunnison River peaks are utilized by Reclamation to help meet the peak flows described in the Aspinall Operations Record of Decision (ROD). The Somerset Local flow drives the seasonal peak on the North Fork as it is the larger contributor. This peak often coincides with higher flows from Paonia Reservoir due to the reservoir passing inflows until later in the runoff season. The timing of these two peak flows coincide most of the time; if they don't, it could reduce the peak flow on the North Fork. Models have indicated that there has already been significant snow melt in this area. Higher flows will return in May, however they may not greatly exceed recent levels. This could affect the amount of water which would need to be released from the Aspinall Unit in order to meet the peak flow requirements outlined in the ROD. The longest period of higher sustained flows on the North Fork still appears it will occur between the 2nd week of May and early June.

CBRFC currently does not anticipate a change or even a slight rise to the Blue Mesa inflow forecast if the precipitation forecast pans out. However, a dry start to May could impact the mid-May forecast. The model error on May 1st is around 11% historically.

Weather Outlook – Aldis Strautins (NWS)

Drought conditions in the western United States have improved significantly with the introduction of moisture from atmospheric rivers over the winter. Overall, this winter

experienced higher than average temperatures. ENSO modeling shows we will transition into a weak El Nino this fall, and we are currently in a neutral area. The weather outlook for the area is above average temperatures with above average precipitation through the summer and fall. The area will return to equal chances for above/below average temperatures and precipitation by the November-December-January timeframe.

2017 Aspinnall Unit Operations – Erik Knight (USBR)

Runoff Forecast: The April 15th forecasted unregulated inflow to Blue Mesa Reservoir is 850,000 AF, which is within the moderately wet category. The moderately wet category includes a duration requirement of 40 days of half-bankfull stage (8,070 cfs) at the Whitewater gage, with a 10 day peak flow duration of 14,350 cfs at the Whitewater gage. Blue Mesa Reservoir is expected to fill to 710 Kaf by the end of June, which is about 85% full.

Projected Operations: Assuming the forecast doesn't change, the Black Canyon water right peak flow is 6,427 cfs. If the forecast remains the same and Reclamation is in a moderately wet year, the Gunnison River flow scenario includes a Black Canyon peak of 9,700 cfs and a Whitewater peak of 14,700 cfs. This will require a 10-day ramp up and a 9-day ramp down. All three reservoirs of the Aspinnall Unit are expected to spill. The projected peak flows at Delta are 12,800 cfs. Baseflow targets at Whitewater would be 1,050 cfs for the remainder of the year.

Specific dates to expect releases for the peak flows are uncertain; however, Reclamation will attempt to meet the peak flow requirement while the North Fork River is peaking, and the North Fork historically peaks during the second half of May. Many different factors and considerations go into how and when Reclamation can meet the peak flow target at Whitewater, including the amount of water/head which is in Blue Mesa, and correspondingly, Reclamation's ability to spill enough water.

Special Flow Requests

BLM: BLM stated that it would be nice if flows in the Black Canyon could be below 5,000 cfs by June first to facilitate success of the stonefly hatch.

CPW: CPW will be conducting their annual sampling the week of October 2nd. The sampling is most successful at flows between 800 – 1000 cfs.

Reports of Agencies

NPS – There is a new marina at Elk Creek, but they are struggling to get electricity to it. They are also getting a new tour boat, and plan on launching it at Morrow Point this summer. Kim Hartwig went from acting to permanent Chief of Resource Management. Their ANS inspection stations will be fully staffed this summer, and all boat ramps will be open.

NWS – They are making some formatting changes to their flash flood and flood warning/watch information in October. They may need to discuss this with folks who use that data more often. Their website has experienced periodic issues, so if anyone experiences issues, please let them know so they can work on fixing them.

UVWUA – They have five hydropower plants up and running, and are providing approximately 20% of the power required in Delta and Montrose counties. They are involved

in a water banking study. Dr. Burt with Cal Poly has determined that it is not feasible to line/pipe canals on the west side of their project. UVWUA will pursue recommendations of installing structures to better control flows and make the canals more efficient.

USGS – Nothing to report.

Tri-County – Tony Mitchell is the new dam tender and superintendent, and has been with Tri-County since last June. They are working on filling Ridgway Reservoir without spilling because there are small mouth bass in the reservoir. Their target is to get the reservoir approximately 2 feet below the spillway.

Upper Gunnison – The USGS is putting in a new gage at the Gunnison white water park. This will help establish their water right from May – September. It will also measure the temperature.

BLM – BLM appreciates the updates from Reclamation on Aspinall Operations so they can continue to get the word out.

FWS – Don Anderson introduced himself as the new Upper Colorado River Recovery Program instream flow coordinator and hydrologist.

CPW – CPW is planning their third small mouth bass tournament at Ridgway Reservoir this summer. They coupled the previous two with population modeling to determine required efforts needed for the long-term decline in the population. Modeling indicated that doing a longer tournament could create a long-term impact, so the tournament will be longer this year. CPW is able to fund the Ridgway ANS inspection station this year.

Kokanee salmon numbers at Blue Mesa Reservoir are rebounding. Part of this is attributed to their habitat rebounding once the 2013 drought passed. In addition, they have been working on reducing the number of lake trout to reduce predation on the Kokanee. They have reduced approximately 30% of the lake trout population to date. They had a record 17 million egg take in 2016. They have also reduced the bag limit for Kokanee salmon from ten to five. CPW will be able to find 6 inspectors to run their ANS stations this year, so all the boat ramps will remain open.

River District – Their annual reports are available. The Mesa County State of the River meeting is going to be on May 15th at the Avalon in Grand Junction. The Gunnison State of the River meeting will be held on May 31st at the Montrose Pavilion. These two meetings will be Eric Kuhn's last State of the River meetings before retirement.

Delta County Emergency Management – They expressed thanks for being kept in the loop.

TU – TU has been working on smaller tributary projects. They encourage a continued communications stream. They are holding a meeting for North Fork water users in Hotchkiss on May 18th.

Black Canyon Anglers – They expressed thanks for being kept in the loop.

Gunnison River Pro – The earlier the releases could be made to meet the required peaks, the better.

WAPA – Energy prices are affordable right now.

Mesa County – They are pleased with how the Colorado River is looking. They haven't had to close the river since 2011. They are in their 4th year of active response to the West Salt Creek landslide. The landslide resulted in the loss of approximately 1/3 of the volume of a pond at the top of the creek, and a flood wave over 14 feet in height came down the creek. They are keeping an eye on it.

Center for Snow and Avalanche Studies – The Center provided an update on dust on snow conditions. There have been a total of four dust on snow events so far this year. The third event took place at the end of March, and the fourth event took place between April 8th and 9th. Dust layers merged in the snow until about April 21st, and then it came to the surface. Since then, the layer has returned to about 6 to 7 inches below the surface. These conditions are currently classified as “average.”

CWCB – They are hoping for a new director to be on board by June. Lauren Ris is acting director in the meantime. Their next board meeting will be held the week of May 17th and 18th at Pagosa Springs. Their July board meeting will be held in Crested Butte, and will include more discussion on the Gunnison Basin.

Rebecca – CU Graduate Student – She is doing a study at how water users look at drought risk management (where they get their information, etc.). It was an interesting meeting.

Dept. of Water Resources – Dick Wolfe, the Colorado State Engineer, is retiring in June. Steve Tuck, the District 40 Water Commissioner is retiring at the end of April after serving 46 years. He is being replaced by Luke Reschke. The Department is looking to publish their data on a more frequent basis. They currently publish it every spring, and this may increase to monthly.

BOR Power Office – They are ready to move forward with the 2017 Aspinall Operations.

BOR Regional Office – They are looking forward to coordinating with the Area Office to successfully implement the 2017 Aspinall Operations.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, August 17, 2017 at the Elk Creek Visitors Center at Blue Mesa Reservoir

April 27, 2017 Aspinall Operation Meeting Attendance
***indicates person attended meeting in person or by phone**

- Argonne National Laboratory**.....John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
- Black Canyon Anglers**..... Derek Kehmeier*, Richard Dudginski
- Bureau of Land Management**.....Rooster Barnhart*, Edd Franz, Wanda Lassiter, Chris Smith, Jason Young, Kevin Kobe, Katy Smith, Kevin Kobe*
- Bureau of Reclamation**.....Ed Warner*, Ted Dunn*, Ryan Christianson*, Jenny Ward*, Paul Davidson, Justyn Liff*, Erik Knight*,Rick Clayton*, Grant Watson*, Larry Lingerfelt*, Randy Kramer, David Speas*, David Klein*, Dale Carpenter*, Lesley McWhirter
- CSAS-CODOS**.....Jeff Derry
- City of Grand Junction**.....Terry Franklin, Greg Trainor
- Club 20**.....Reeves Brown
- Colorado Department of Agriculture**.....Jim Miller

Colorado Mesa University.....Hannah Holm
Colorado River Energy Distributors.....Leslie James
Colorado River Water Conservation District...Dave Kanzer*, Jim Pokrandt*, Eric Kuhn,
 Sonja Chavez
Colorado State University.....Brett Johnson
Colorado Division of Water Resources....Pat McDermott, Bob Hurford*, Scott King,
 Richard Rozman, Luke Reschke, Jason Ullmann
Colorado Parks and Wildlife..... Jay Skinner, John Alves, Dan Brauch*,
 Dan Kowalski, David Graf, Eric Gardunio*
Colorado Water Conservation Board...Michelle Garrison*, Ray Alvarado, Steve Miller ,
 Karen Kwon
Daily Sentinel.....Dave Buchanan
Delta County Independent.....Bob Borchardt
Delta County Commissioners.....
Delta County.....
City of Delta.....Steve Glammeyer, Glen Black
Delta County Emergency Management.....Jeff Wright*
Dolores WCD.....Ken Curtis
Fire Mountain Canal Co.....Steve Fletcher*
Fish and Wildlife Service.....Dale Ryden, Don Anderson*
Gunnison Country Times.....Michelle Burkhart
Gunnison Basin POWER..... Butch Clark, Ramon Reed
Gunnison County Commissioners.....
Gunnison River Expeditions.....Al DeGrange
High Country Citizens Alliance.....Steve Glazer, Jennifer Boch, Wendy McDermott
Interior Solicitor.....John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Mesa County Emergency Management.....Andy Martsolf*
City of Montrose.....Stephen Alcorn, Bob Nicholson
Montrose Daily Press.....Katharhynn Heidelberg
National Drought Mitigation Center.....Donna Woudenberg
NOAA.....Andrea Ray, Robert Webb, Klaus Wolter, Brad Udall, Kevin
 Werner, Chad McNutt, Ashley Nielson*, Brenda Alcorn, John Lhotak, Greg Smith
National Park Service.....Michael Dale*, Kim Hartwig*, Christine Landrum,
 Mark Wondzell, Melissa Trammell, Jenny Rebenack, Rob Billerbeck, Bruce Noble*, Gene
 Seagle

National Weather Service..... Aldis Strautins*
NRCS.....Brian Domonkos, Lexi Landers, Karl Wetlaufer, Mage Hultstrand
North Fork Water Conservancy.....Tom Alvey
Precision Water Resources Engineering.....Mike Coleman
Project 7.....Adam Turner
Recovery Program.....Tom Pitts, Tom Chart
Redland Water and Power.....
Ridgway Guide Service.....Tim Paterson, Matt McCannel
Tri-County Water.....Mike Berry*, Ion Spor, Kathleen Margetts, Teddy Earley,
 Tony Mitchell*
Trout Unlimited.....Pat Oglesby, Marshall Pendergrass, Cary Denison* Drew
 Peternell, John Trammell, Jesse Kruthaupt
UVWUA...Ed Suppes*, Steve Anderson*, Steve Shea, Dennis Veo*, Michelle Decker,
 Tim Barrientos*
Upper Gunnison River Water.....John McClow*, Frank Kugel*, Ken Spann, Brett
 Redden*
USGS.....Ken Leib, Bob Jenkins, Steve Anders*, Trisha Solberg,
 Bryan Moore, Bob Kimbrough
Xcel Energy.....Kelly Flenniken
Western Area Power...Clayton Palmer, Jeff Ackerman, Jerry Wilhite*, Tim Vigil,
 Tanya Newman, Chrystal Dean, Tyson Taylor, Steve Johnson, Rachelle Grubbs*