

Aspinall Unit Operations Meeting April 26, 2022

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 typically occurring in January, April, and August of each year.

Weather Outlook – Aldis Strautins (NWS)

Fall was dry in 2021 with warmer than normal temperatures. Early December was also dry but late December provided significant snowfall to the basin. Conditions turned dry after that and April was near record dry in the Gunnison Basin. Snowmelt kicked into gear as of the second week of April. La Nina conditions are expected to continue into the late summer and fall. Upcoming weather looks to be warm and dry.

Water Supply Outlook – Ashley Nielson (CBRFC)

Soil moisture conditions have improved from near record dry levels last year but still remain below normal across the majority of the Gunnison River Basin. Water year precipitation is near normal in the Gunnison River Basin. There is a strong north-south divide with the northern half of the basin having better conditions than the southern half of the basin. Snowmelt below 11000 ft has begun, which is earlier than normal. Gunnison Basin runoff forecasts range between 70% and 102% of average. Blue Mesa is currently projected to see 83% of average runoff. Minimal precipitation expected in the Gunnison River basin over the next week. April precipitation will most likely end below normal.

Aspinall Unit Operations

Operations Past and Present: Blue Mesa Reservoir content is currently 243,000 AF, which is 29% full. Gunnison River flows at Whitewater are currently well above the baseflow target. The Gunnison Tunnel has been shutdown due to an erosion issue near the South Canal. Crystal releases have been reduced accordingly and river flows downstream are around 350 cfs.

Weather and Snow Conditions: Early winter snow conditions were below average but December came in at over 225% of average for the monthly snow accumulation. February thru May snow accumulation was between 70% and 80% of average. Snowpack in the Upper Gunnison Basin peaked at just above normal, and very similar to 2020.

Runoff Forecasts and Future Operations: Most runoff forecasts for rivers in the Gunnison Basin are currently at 70-100% of average. The April 15th forecast for April-July inflow to Blue Mesa Reservoir is 505,000 acre-feet. This forecast puts 2022 in the Moderately Dry year hydrologic category. If the forecast remains unchanged, the Moderately Dry year category calls for a 1 day

peak flow of 5,000 cfs in the lower Gunnison River as measured at the Whitewater gage. This is a reduced peak flow target per the drought rules discussed in the Aspinall Operations EIS. Under the Moderately Dry year category, there are no half bankfull or peak flow duration targets.

In order to achieve the ROD targets in the lower Gunnison River it is expected that flows in the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon will peak near 2,800 cfs. The entire spring operation is projected to take 11 days. Blue Mesa Reservoir is expected to reach a maximum content of ~450,000 acre-feet, about 47 feet below the full reservoir level. A change back to the Average Dry category would result in lower reservoir levels at Blue Mesa than the current Mod Dry category projections. After the spring operation has concluded, Aspinall releases will continue to meet the baseflow targets. Flows in the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon are projected to range between 300 cfs and 400 cfs during the summer and fall months

After the spring peak operation, the Aspinall Unit will make releases to meet the baseflow targets at Whitewater. Summertime targets will be reduced to 900 cfs from 1050 cfs due to the activation of the drought rule.

Blue Mesa Reservoir content is anticipated to fill to 447,000 AF by late June and then is projected to end the calendar year at an elevation 25 feet below the winter target. There are currently no planned DROA releases at Aspinall for Water Year 2022.

Special Flow Requests and Discussion

Reports of Agencies and Organizations

WAPA – Sunday tunnel shutdown – did a good job keeping the river at usual tolerances. Cost \$95k in hydro revenues. Coordination is appreciated. New rate – appreciate the coordination to minimize the impact to hydropower.

CBRFC – May 7th water supply webinars

CREDA – Expressed appreciation for working on the DROA framework and efforts keeping GCD above min power pool. Customers have choices in the market, supply chain issues are affecting prices ex. over \$200 in June.

CPW – stocked kokanee 2 weeks ago into BM. Challenges with drought, stocking stayed on schedule. Went into BM in good shape, irrigators were able to help. East Portal rainbow spawn occurred, collected 50k rainbow to go into hatchery system that are whirling disease resistant.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Open fish ladder today. Good to work ESA concerns in with the DROA ops.

Tri County WCD – Fish screen was completed this year. Thanks to all the partners. Ridgway releases will ramp down when the Gunnison Tunnel takes more water and will work with the UVWUA. Project 7 treatment plan being planned will require a pilot treatment plant at Ridgway – done by Project 7. Mike introduced Sandy Flowers to the group. Kathleen will retire this year.

Trout Unlimited – Thank you for staying with the fish screen and programs for reducing the smallmouth population.

USGS – Field technicians have been working crazy getting the gages in order. New gages near Somerset online this week, new gage on LaRue Creek soon. Trying to put together a gage on Rubidoux Creek. Water temp sensors coming online May 1st on Taylor River (Almont and another location?) Should get some new WQ monitors at Taylor Park Reservoir – specific conductance and temp, adding those at the Almont gage online later this summer. More coming on Cimmaron.

Redlands Water & Power – Thanks for help with the gate work on the river along with FWS. Was a success. Installing some new cameras to be able to monitor staff gage at the canal. New report for future improvements through 2040. Fish screen began operating since last Monday 4/18.

UGRWCD – Concerned about dust on snow events and impact on runoff. Staying conservative with forecast into Taylor Park Reservoir. GAP weather radar station is being installed by Blue Mesa. Board approved \$35k contribution to supplement study on algal blooms. April 15 operations ended for generating snow making. Submitted Drought Contingency application to Reclamation. Upper Gunnison on June 10th at I-Bar ranch. 10-12th Gunnison River festival. Park Superintendent determined they will not be using the docks and marinas this year and to focus on maintaining boat ramp access. They did see a lot of algal blooms.

CWCB – CWCB May 17-18th in Breckenridge, 2nd day will be water plan workshop and drought resiliency toolkit. Moving toward resiliency for Colorado with a larger variety thing to consider. Thanks for Tri-County and Reclamation for Ridgway screen. And our DROA efforts. Grants – mostly in the fall, but programs can be found on the website.

Colorado DWR – Greg is the assistant division engineer, replacing Jason Ullman.

Colorado River District – A few updates: The CRD is putting time to better understanding the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. We are happy to connect on the topic. During our April Board meeting, our Board approved Community Funding Partnerships (CFP) for 3 projects in the Gunnison basin. We are organizing the lower Gunnison state on the River event on May 16th in Montrose. Also, Mark Roeber is the CRD's new Delta County director!

National Park Service – Ramp Access may be restricted to Elk Creek Ramp. Will focus on elk creek but may open Iola ramp. Superintendent will meet with Upper Gunnison. As Sonja mentioned, we're working on year 2 of our intensive study with USGS to look at HABs in Blue Mesa. Hopefully, we'll be able to report out final results and reports in 2023.