

## **Aspinall Unit Operations Meeting January 19, 2023**

**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.

### **Water Supply Outlook – Ashley Nielson (CBRFC)**

Precipitation in the Upper Gunnison Basin was well above average in December and continued into early January. Drought conditions have gone from extreme to almost non-existent in the Gunnison Basin. Soil moisture conditions are near to below normal over the Gunnison River Basin. Soil moisture deficits still exist. Conditions are similar to last fall with the exception of a few headwater basins that have improved conditions and some southern basins that have worse conditions than last year.

Snowpack upstream from Blue Mesa Reservoir is currently at 140% of normal. The current runoff forecast predicts inflows to be 95% of average. Other stream sites within the Gunnison Basin range between 90% and 110% for predicted runoff. It is expected there will be some significant increases with the mid-month forecast.

An active weather pattern is expected to continue into next week with another storm possible early next week. Temperatures are expected to remain colder than normal.

### **Aspinall Unit Operations – Erik Knight (USBR)**

Current Conditions: Blue Mesa Reservoir finished 2022 at an elevation of 7446.5 ft, which is 44 feet below the winter target of 7490 ft. Current content at Blue Mesa Reservoir is 293,000 AF which is 35% full. Releases at Crystal Dam are 350 cfs and flows in the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon are 350 cfs. Flows in the Gunnison River at the Whitewater gage are estimated to be above the baseflow target of 750 cfs. (current readings at the Whitewater gage are ice-affected)

Snowpack: December snow accumulation was fairly good at 115% of average but so far January snow accumulation has been 200% of average. Some snotel sites have already exceeded their normal accumulation for the entire month of January.

Spring Flow Targets: Current runoff forecasts for major streams within the Gunnison Basin range between 90% and 110% of average. The runoff forecast for Blue Mesa Reservoir would put this year into the Average Dry category. In the Average Dry category the ROD peak target would be 8,070 cfs. In an Average Dry year there are 10 days of duration at the half bankfull

flow of 8,070 cfs. This essentially makes the peak at the Whitewater gage a 10 day peak. The Black Canyon water right 1 day peak flow target would be 3,720 cfs if the May 1 forecast is the same as the January 1 forecast. The shoulder flow target would be 420 cfs for the period from May 1 to July 25.

Future Operations: After the spring peak, operations at Aspinall will continue to meet the baseflow targets at the Whitewater gage. In the Average Dry category these targets range between 1050 cfs and 1500 cfs from spring into winter. Blue Mesa Reservoir is currently projected to fill to a maximum content of 557,000 AF (67% full).

No decisions have been made yet regarding Drought Response Operations Plan releases. Meetings and discussions are ongoing regarding any potential future releases, accounting and recovery. There should be more information by the April meeting.

## **Reports from Agencies**

Upper Gunnison River WCD – Cloud seeding is operational in the basin. The new Doppler radar installation has been delayed. There are icing issues on Ohio Cr, but not on the mainstem Gunnison River upstream from Blue Mesa. The Blue Mesa harmful algae study continues. The UGRWCD board meeting will be on January 30<sup>th</sup> at 5:30pm

Colorado Division of Water Resources – Evan Jones is the new Assistant Division Engineer.

Fish & Wildlife Service – The Redlands Fish Passage will open on April 17<sup>th</sup>.

Upper Colorado Recovery Program – Continuing to work on reauthorization for the Recovery Program.

Colorado River District – System Conservation Pilot Program is returning. CRD will be involved. February 1<sup>st</sup> is the deadline to let the UCRC know about participation. Also looking at Demand Management study. State of the River events are scheduled and posted to the CRD website.

USGS – No changes to the monitoring network. Web pages are being modified based on feedback from users.

National Park Service – Working on reconfiguration of marinas at Blue Mesa. Elk Creek marina hopefully open by Memorial Day. Continued participation in harmful algae study with USGS.

Tri-County WCD – Plan to increase releases soon. Fish screen at spillway will be operational this year.

CWCB – As part of 5 Part Plan, the System Conservation Pilot Program is reauthorized. Contact Amy Ostdiek or Michelle Garrison for information. Next board meeting is January 23-24,

available in person or online, and will be recorded for YouTube viewing. Working on streamlining the Grant process.

UVWUA – Taylor Park hydroplant construction will begin this spring. The plant will have a 500 kW capacity.

Redlands Water & Power – Irrigation water will begin on April 17<sup>th</sup>.