

WCG-SMcCall
AS/ENV 4.00/PRJ 13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our August 17, 2000, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit.

Highlights of the meeting include:

–Actual inflow to Blue Mesa for April-July 2000 was 504,000 acre-feet (72% of average). The inflow was significantly less than the 630,000 acre-feet forecast on April 15. As late as June 1, forecasts showed that Blue Mesa would fill; however, runoff dropped rapidly and the reservoir did not fill.

–A peak flow of 3,200 cfs was provided through the Gunnison Gorge around the 21st of May; efforts this year to match the North Fork peak were unsuccessful. Summer flows in the Gunnison Gorge have been around 1,000-1,200 cfs. In late July, Crystal releases were set to provide a constant maximum power output; this has resulted in daily fluctuations of up to 250 cfs.

–For the remainder of the year, flows through the Gunnison Gorge should gradually decrease to around 700-800 cfs. There will be a research flow of 600 cfs in late September.

–Maintenance activities were discussed, including potential plans for cleaning trash racks at Morrow Point this fall and, in 2002, removing material deposited at the upper end of Crystal Reservoir. The potential for these activities, to increase sediment discharge into the Gunnison Gorge and Black Canyon National Park, was discussed. Further planning and scheduling of the trash rack cleaning is ongoing.

–The Fish and Wildlife Service updated the status of flow recommendations for endangered fish species, and quantification of the reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park was discussed.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or the summaries of the meetings,

please let us know. The next operation meeting is tentatively scheduled for **Thursday, January 18th, at 12:30 in Montrose. The location will be announced later.** If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

Ed Warner
Resources Division Manager

Enclosure

Distribution (see attached list)

bc: Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100 1820 South Rio Grande Avenue,
Montrose CO 81401

Regional Solicitor's Office, Attention: Scott Loveless
125 South State Street, Room 6201, Salt Lake City UT 84138

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT
Attention: UC-400, UC-434, UC-438, UC-600, UC-723, UC-720, UC-726

Director, Technical Service Center, Denver CO
Attention: D-8510

WCG-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, SMcCall, JOzga, CStanton, KFogelquist, MSteves,
RStorbo, JWright, DCrabtree

WCD-RSwickard, JSimons

(all w/encl)

WBR:SMcCall:rb:9/5/2000:0638:aspinall aug17

Identical letter sent - see attached list

Distribution List -August 17, 2000 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse
City of Grand Junction Greg Trainor
Club 20 Shane Henry
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Daily Sentinel Dave Buchanan*
Environmental Defense Fund Jim Martin
Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark*, Ramon Reed*
Gunnison Country Times Pat Daniel
Gunnison River Expeditions Hank Hotze, Bo Gates
Helton & Williamsen, P.C. Duane Helton
High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club Steve Glazer*
Matt Owens Fly Company Matt Owens
KNFS Environmental Services (Trans Colorado Pipeline Project) Craig Meis
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby*
Western Colorado Congress Fred Wetlaufer
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District Dave Kanzer*, David Halford, Ray Tenney
Colorado River Energy Distributors Cliff Barrett
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Redlands Water and Power Company Gregg Strong*
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association Marc Catlin*, Jim Hokit*
Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland
Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District Kathleen Klein*, Mark Schumacher*, Tyler Martineau*, Dennis Steckel, Jim Slattery
Delta County Commissioners Donna Ferganchick, Jim Ventrello
Gunnison County Commissioners Marlene Zanetell*
Colorado Department of Agriculture Jim Miller
Colorado Division of Water Resources Wayne Schieldt*, Frank Kugel, Richard Rozman
Colorado Division of Wildlife ... Daniel Brauch*, Sherman Hebein*, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson
Colorado Water Conservation Board Randy Seaholm*; Ray Alvarado*
Wyoming State Engineers Office John Shields
Congressman Scott McInnis Don Hower
Senator Wayne Allard Shane Henry
Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell George Rossman*, Katie Aggler
Army Corps of Engineers Grady McNure
Bureau of Land Management .. Allan Belt, Dennis Murphy, Jim Ferguson, Carl Bauer, Roy Smith
Fish and Wildlife Service .. Rick Krueger, Frank Pfeifer, Al Pfister, Chuck McAda*, Terry Ireland
Reed Harris, Henry Maddux, George Smith
National Park Service Sheridan Steele*, Myron Chase; Ken Stahlnecker, Mark Wondzell*

Ron Thomas, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee*

National Weather Service Bill Reed, Brian Avery
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Andrea Ray, Klaus Weickmann
U.S. Geological Survey Paul von Guerard, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller
Land and Water Fund Bart Miller*

Western Area Power Administration Shane Collins*, Clayton Palmer
Jeff Ackerman, Kathy Crane*, Ken Green, Annette Falvo;
Gary Burton; Margaret Matte

Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer, Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton*,
Karen Fogelquist, John Ozga, Russ Storbo, Ruth Rydiger, Gary McDermott, Don Phillips*, Arlo
Allen, Jane Blair*, Paul Davidson*, Larry Crist, Christine Karas, Tony Morton

Interior Solicitors Office.....Scott Loveless, John Bezdek*, Peter
Fahmy

Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert*

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

August 17, 2000

Participation: This meeting was held at the Elk Creek Visitor Center on Blue Mesa Reservoir. Attendees are noted on the distribution list.

Purpose of Meeting: The purpose of these 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 an overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which includes 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, flood control needs, existing water rights, minimum instream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flow needs for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, hydropower needs 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 April-August 2000 operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs; and potential operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable water supply forecasts.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. Many of the field studies leading to flow recommendations to help recover downstream endangered fish and to quantify a Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park have been completed. The Fish and Wildlife Service review draft of a 'Synthesis Report' that includes flow recommendations for endangered fish was also discussed. 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:

April-August 2000 Operations: On April 1, the water forecasted to flow into Blue Mesa during April-July was predicted by the National Weather Service to be 630,000 acre-feet; actual inflow turned out to be 504,000 (72% of average) due to dry spring conditions. As late as June 1, Blue Mesa was predicted to fill; however, very dry conditions continued and the reservoir did not fill. The majority of the inflow came in May; normally this occurs in June. This year was considered a moderately dry year (classifications are dry, moderately dry, average dry, average wet, moderately wet, and wet).

Black Canyon-Gunnison Gorge flows remained in the 800-1,000 cfs range during the period; increasing to around 1,100 cfs in late July and August. On May 21st, a peak flow of 3,200 cfs was provided through the Gorge. Approximately 20,000 acre-feet of water was bypassed around Crystal powerplant to provide the peak. The peak was timed to match a normal peak on the North Fork, but high early spring temperatures caused the North Fork to peak early this year.

Preliminary endangered fish flow recommendations would call for a peak flow of around 7,000 cfs at the Whitewater gage in a year like this. This goal was not reached (peaks were a little over 5,000 cfs at Whitewater) because the natural North Fork peak and the Crystal release peak did not coincide. “Base” flows for endangered fish in a moderately dry year are around 1,050 cfs at Whitewater, and this goal has been met or exceeded. Flows below the Redlands Diversion remained above 300 cfs throughout the period. A research low flow request from the National Park Service in July was not implemented due to concerns with not meeting the 300 cfs below the Redlands.

Reclamation showed a graph of the daily water fluctuations that have been occurring downstream from Crystal since mid-July. Daily fluctuations of up to 250 cfs have occurred. It was explained that Crystal releases were set to provide a constant, maximum power output on July 27th. As Crystal reservoir levels went up and down, the amount of water necessary to produce the constant power varied. This was considered a very unusual situation and was continued due to power restrictions at Glen Canyon and Flaming Gorge and due to power demands in the southwest. Reclamation indicated that they did not foresee this occurring next summer or on a regular basis, and that this year the fluctuations would end sometime in September.

The Fish and Wildlife Service thought that the fluctuations of this magnitude would probably not harm downstream endangered fish, but could have adverse effects on the trout fishery or other resources. The Colorado Division of Wildlife thought that velocity and depth changes with the fluctuations could strand small fish and affect angler safety. Western Area Power Administration suggested further discussion on this issue. (Reclamation plans to hold a pre-meeting before the January 18th operation meeting to discuss the issue with interested parties; further information will be provided to recipients of this summary).

August-December 2000 Operation: Blue Mesa will reach the winter target elevation of 7,490 feet early this year; elevations should be around 7,485 feet in December. Fall flows through the Black Canyon are planned to be around 800-900 cfs; Reclamation will consider reducing this to 600-700 cfs to store additional water. Between September 26 and September 29, flows will be lowered to 600 cfs to assist the Colorado Division of Wildlife in their trout inventory.

Aspinall Unit Maintenance Work: Don Phillips reviewed the general operation and maintenance (O&M) schedule for the dams; all three dams will undergo normal O&M this fall which should not affect releases. The trash racks at Morrow Point have never been cleaned, and this work needs to be done in the near future. A proposal to do the work this fall was discussed-the reservoir would have to be lowered to 7,070.5 feet in elevation to allow the trash to be removed. Lowering would commence in early September. This is 60 feet lower than any historical operation. Last year, Crystal was lowered in a similar manner and significant amounts of sediment entered the river, resulting in cancellation of research activities, potential damage to insect life and fisheries, and loss of approximately 6 weeks of recreation and commercial guiding.

Several concerns were expressed concerning the Morrow Point proposal: Exposed sediment could enter the system and cause cancellation of Colorado Division of Wildlife research for the second year in a row; and recreation use could be lost for a period during the fall. There was a general agreement at the meeting that the work needed to be done, but that it should be carefully planned and probably delayed one year to allow this to occur. No final decision was made at the meeting. Several mitigation suggestions were brought up: do not peak Blue Mesa during the drawdown; do not drawdown to sediment areas until Division of Wildlife research is completed; make better determination of sediment stored in Morrow Point; and monitor water quality during the operation.

More frequent cleaning of the trash racks at Crystal and Morrow Point was suggested as a way to reduce future river sediment problems.

A proposal will also be developed to excavate gravel bars at the upper end of Crystal Reservoir in 2002. These deposits come from Cimarron Creek and reduce the power “head” at Morrow Point. People should start thinking about this proposal and bring up their thoughts at future operation meetings.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Justice Department - Dave Gehlert with the Justice Department updated the group on the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park Federal reserved water right. The main activity since April has been development of a Riverware model, a decision tool to determine how Federal interests, such as Aspinall Unit purposes, could be impacted by the right. The goal is to have a Federal position on the water right by December, 2000. A claim would be filed in State Water Court, eventually resulting in a quantified water right. At some stage in the process, public meetings will be held.

The results from the model being developed will be used to address potential impacts to the Aspinall Unit. The model now takes into consideration flood control rules, trout fishery needs, winter and summer target elevations, and other rules. The initial model results will serve as a baseline from which impacts of reserved right flows or endangered fish flows can be addressed.

Butch Clark with Gunnison Power asked about public access to the model and supporting information. Reclamation will send him historic Crystal release data. Upper Gunnison District asked about use of the “State Model” to consider effects on water rights administration; the Colorado Water Conservation Board indicated they would be doing this activity. The Conservation Board continued to stress that Colorado wants to look at the reserved right and endangered fish flows together to see the total effect on water resources.

Fish and Wildlife Service - FWS has completed a draft of the synthesis report, and peer review has been completed. The report has been revised and provided to the Biology Committee of the Recovery Program for a 45-day review. Generally, the draft report calls for a more natural hydrograph, with magnitude of the spring peak varying with the amount of unregulated inflow to Blue Mesa. A base flow of 300 cfs downstream from the Redlands Diversion is discussed in the

report. The types of peaks discussed are listed below (draft) –these are flows at the Whitewater gage so they include flows from the North Fork, Uncompahgre and other tributaries, as well as from the Aspinall Unit:

Extremely dry year–4,000 cfs or greater
Moderately dry year- 7,000 cfs or greater
Average dry year-9,500 cfs or greater
Average wet year-12,500 cfs or greater
Moderately wet year-16,000 cfs or greater
Wet year-20,000 cfs or greater

Colorado Division of Wildlife - Rainbow trout from the Gunnison River below Crystal were spawned in April for eventual stocking back into the Gunnison to reduce the impact of whirling disease on the rainbow fishery. Around 26,000 rainbow eggs were collected.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - Mike Gross was reported last seen in the Yukon. The District is also working on the 60,000 acre-foot subordination agreement to help determine existing depletions.

Sierra Club/High Country Citizens - The Sierra Club released its Colorado River Report last week; it is designed as an education tool. Contact Steve Glazer for an electronic copy.

Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District - reported that the interim contract on endangered fish flows below the Redlands was signed. The District is working on the subordination agreement depletions and water studies in the Gunnison Basin.

Colorado Water Conservation Board - Thanked the Fish and Wildlife Service for their work on the synthesis work. The Board is updating their long range plans and will be preparing a new Gunnison Basin fact sheet.

Colorado State Engineer - So far, 2000 has been a dry year. There was a call on the Uncompahgre River on June 26, about a month earlier than usual. Was able to avoid a Redlands call, but there was a major call on the San Miguel and a call on the East River at Crested Butte, which is unusual.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users - Asked the National Park Service about the “boundary study” being conducted. The NPS reported that the study will look at present boundaries and make recommendations to Congress for land management actions and possible land acquisitions.

National Park Service - Tour boat runs will end around September 12.

Gunnison Basin Power - Watershed planning is ongoing.

Next Meeting: 12:30 on January 18th in Montrose. Location will be announced. A morning

meeting will also be scheduled to discuss fluctuations downstream from Crystal Dam.