

WCG-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our August 25, 2005, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held at the National Park Service Visitor Center on Blue Mesa Reservoir. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

- The Gunnison Basin is in its 8th straight year of below average snowmelt runoff. April – July inflow to Blue Mesa in 2005 was 589,000 acre-feet compared to an average of 710,000 acre-feet.
- Blue Mesa did not fill again this year; the reservoir was approximately 200,000 acre-feet short of filling. A full reservoir is considered to be about 829,500 acre-feet. The Reservoir reached a peak elevation of 7,498.65 feet on July 16, 2005, which is 1.65 feet higher than last year's peak elevation.
- Black Canyon flows were maintained at about 350 cfs last winter and began to increase in February in anticipation of an average runoff. Black Canyon flows were roughly 1,300 cfs through mid-May and were then reduced to the current level of about 500 cfs as it became evident the expected runoff was not going to materialize.

- A presentation on river forecasting was made and information provided on websites for forecasting information---one of the better sites is www.cbrfc.noaa.gov.

-Reclamation has initiated an environmental impact statement on Aspinall Unit operations—see www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/ or contact aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov for information.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or summaries, please let us know. The next operation meeting will be on Thursday, January 19th at 1:00 p.m. at the Montrose Pavilion. If you have questions, please call me at 970 248-0652.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure

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

John Bezdek, Office of Interior Solicitor, 1849 C St. NW, Mail Stop 6412, Washington, D.C. 20240

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT
Attention: UC-400, UC-434, UC-436, UC-438, UC-600, UC-700, UC-720

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

WCG-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, BUilenberg, SMcCall, CStanton, EKnight, MSteves,
DCrabtree, TStroh, JHock

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage
(each w/encl)

WBR:DCrabtree:rb:9/26/05:970 248-0652:Aspinall aug 25
Identical letter sent – see attached list

Distribution List –
 August 2005 Aspinall Operation Meeting
 *An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Daily Sentinel..... Sally Spaulding, Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan*

Delta County IndependentBob Borchardt

Gunnison Country Times Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel, Toni Todd*

Montrose Daily PressJason Monroe, Caitlin Switzer

Western Resource Advocates Bart Miller

Club 20Reeves Brown

Colorado State University Brett Johnson

Environmental Defense FundJim Martin

Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark*, Ramon Reed

Gunnison River Expeditions Hank Hotze

Helton & Williamsen, P.C. Duane Helton

High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra ClubSteve Glazer*, Wendy McDermott,
 Steve Schechter, Shara Rutberg

Xcel Energy..... Fred Eggleston

Matt Owens Fly CompanyMatt Owens

Trout UnlimitedPat Oglesby*, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternell John Trammell

Western Colorado CongressRandy See, Fred Wetlaufer

Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory

University of Montana Jack Stanford

Colorado River Water Conservation DistrictDave Kanzer*, Don Meyer, Eric Kuhn, Bill Trampe,
 David Halford, Ray Tenney

Ridgway Guide Service.....Tim Peterson

SelfGeorge Sheldon, Bo Gates, Marlene Zanatell, Jim Cochran,
 Jim Hokit, Lynn Johnson*

Colorado River Energy Distributors.....Leslie James

North Fork Water Conservancy District..... Tom Alvey

Tri County WaterMike Berry, Kathleen Margetts, Richard Margetts (Project 7)

Redlands Water and Power Company Gregg Strong*, Mike Gross, Verdon Moore*

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association..... Marc Catlin

Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland

Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District.....Greg Peterson, Karen Shirley*, Kathleen
 Curry, 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.....Barry Bullard, Richard Sales, Wilma Ervin

Delta County Emergency Management.....Rob Fiedler

Gunnison County Commissioners Hap Channell, Paula Swenson, Jim Starr

Colorado Department of Agriculture..... Jim Miller

Colorado Division of Water Resources Wayne Schieldt*, Frank Kugel,
 Richard Rozman, and Cory Denison*

Colorado Division of Wildlife Daniel Brauch, Sherman Hebein, Dan Kowalski*, David Graf,
 Ryan Swygman, Jay Skinner, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson, Mark Uppendahl

Colorado Water Conservation Board Randy Seaholm, Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison*,
 Rick Brown, and Steve Miller

Colorado Basin River Forecast CenterBrenda Alcorn*

Wyoming State Engineers Office..... John Shields
Congressman John SalazarRichard Baca
Senator Wayne AllardDerek Wagner
Senator Ken Salazar Trudy Kareus, Mary Beth Buescher
Army Corps of Engineers..... Ken Jacobson
Bureau of Land Management Dennis Murphy, Jim Ferguson, Roy Smith, Rooster Barnhart, Karen Tucker, Forest Zerbe, Jesse Kirthorp, Peter Dennett, Julie Stotler
Fish and Wildlife Service..... Al Pfister, Chuck McAda, Patty Gelatt*, George Smith
National Park Service Bill Wellman, Myron Chase, Ken Stahlnecker*, Mark Wondzell, Melissa Trammell, Michael Dale*, Bill Johnson, DanGude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee, Norm Henderson
National Weather Service..... Bill Reed, Brian Avery
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration..... Andrea Ray*, Robert Webb, Klaus Weickmann, Brad Udall
U.S. Geological Survey.....Paul von Guerard, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller, Gerhard Kuhn, Bob Boulgarz, Joe Sullivan
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, Heather Patno
Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer, Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton*, Don Phillips*, Dick Girvan, David Steinmark*, Ted Dunn, Dan Crabtree*, Chris Cutler, Terry Stroh*, Arlo Allen, Jane Blair*, Paul Davidson*, Justyn Hock*, Erik Knight*, Nancy Coulam, Dennis Kubly, Dave Harpman, Dawn Munger, Rick Vinton, Vern Harrell*
Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
August 25, 2005

Participation: This meeting was held at the NPS Visitor Center at Blue Mesa Reservoir. 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, 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 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. 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 flow recommendations for endangered fish have been completed and an Aspinall Operations EIS has been initiated. 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.

April – August Operations: Initial projections of Blue Mesa filling were dashed by a disappointing runoff and once again inflows to Blue Mesa remained below average for the period. April-July inflow was 589,000 acre-feet; average inflow is 710,000. This year's inflow would be expected to be exceeded in 60 percent of years. Black Canyon flows were roughly 1300 cfs through mid-May and were then reduced to the current level of about 500 cfs as it became evident the expected runoff was not going to materialize.

August-January 2005-2006 Operations: Black Canyon flows are expected to be maintained near the 500 cfs level through September and then reduced to 350 cfs by mid-October. Next year's

water conditions cannot be predicted with great accuracy, but Reclamation's 24-month study assumes Blue Mesa's inflow next year will be about average. Blue Mesa will fill next summer if this inflow materializes.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife requested stable flows, in the range of 550-650 cfs for September 27-30, to facilitate fishery inventories. Colorado Division of Wildlife requested notification if the flows are expected to be closer to 400 cfs during this time period because they would need to change equipment used for the surveys.

River Forecasting:

Brenda Alcorn, with the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC), made a presentation on "What Happened to the Runoff?" in the Gunnison Basin. The CBRFC is part of the National Weather Service of NOAA. Brenda reviewed the forecast model input and output and discussed possible factors in forecast error, the major one being lack of data.

Andrea Ray, with NOAA provided temperature modeling and forecast information for the upcoming fall and winter seasons. This information can be accessed on the web at <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/mbrfc/>

Aspinall Unit Environmental Impact Statement:

A brief powerpoint presentation was made providing and update on the status of the Aspinall Unit Operations Environmental Impact Statement. Major Activities include work on the No Action Alternative and hydrology modeling.

Aspinall Unit EIS Cooperating agency meetings are open to the public to attend and observe. Opportunity for public questions and comments is provided at various points during the meetings. The next meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, September 7 and Tuesday, November 1 at 9:30 a.m. in Reclamation's Grand Junction office. Contact aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov for information or check the web at <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/rm/aspeis/>.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

National Park Service –The Morrow Point boat tour is scheduled to run through Labor Day. The Black Canyon Water Rights Settlement is still in Federal Court. NPS has backed off the November deadline for submitting an application for Outstanding Waters designation. NPS continues to work on this issue and hopes the relaxed deadline date will actually expedite the process in the long-run.

Reclamation Montrose Power Office – Will be doing some more dredging of material washed in on the Cimarron during high runoff during the first couple weeks of October. Work will be done during early morning hours. Working in cooperation with the State, who will be transporting and disposing of material.

Gunnison Basin POWER – Thanked Reclamation for making the EIS documentation available on the web. Recommended a publication entitled, Organizing for Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat in the Platte River Basin on managing watersheds for endangered species by David M. Freeman of Colorado State University.

Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District – Closed on purchase of Meridian Reservoir which will be used for augmentation. Will begin dam rehabilitation. Taylor River users group is interested in finding ways to assist in obtaining tools for improved forecasting.

Redlands – The Fish Screen is, for the most part, complete. Some minor bugs to work out. Looks like it could be operational by the end of September. Good water year.

Colorado Division of Wildlife- The Kokanee are beginning to stage at the upper end of Blue Mesa Reservoir. The egg take is scheduled for the first week of October.

Colorado River Water Conservation District- The District is becoming more active in the North Fork Basin and has applied for an NRCS grant for GIS coordination. Looking at the potential for developing small augmentation water supplies. Complimented Reclamation on operation for the past season.

Sierra Club/High Country Citizens – Encourages less conflict and better progress in the Aspinall EIS process.

Fish and Wildlife Service – In the Redlands Fish Ladder this season, the Service counted 4 Colorado Pikeminnow and 4 Razorback Suckers which were originally stocked in the Gunnison River. River work will include operating the Redlands fish ladder and additional stocking of razorback suckers in the fall.

State Engineer: This has been a good water year. All Grand Mesa reservoirs filled. No River calls.

Next Meeting: The next Operations Meeting is set for 1:00 p.m. Thursday January 19th, 2006 at the Montrose Pavilion.