

WCN-SMcCall
ENV-4.00
PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our April 16 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The next meeting will be at the National Park Service Elk Creek Marina conference center on Blue Mesa Reservoir on Thursday, August 21 at 12:30. Additional details will be sent out later.

Highlights of the April meeting include:

--A tour of the Redlands fish passageway was conducted in the morning.

--Above average snow conditions are still present, although snowpack in the drainage above the Aspinall Unit declined from 185 percent of normal on February 1 to 125 percent on April 1. Preliminary figures for April 15 were up to 147 percent. Blue Mesa Reservoir has been lowered approximately 70 feet to provide storage and control for the runoff.

--Blue Mesa is expected to fill in July. Average flows of the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon National Monument and Gunnison Gorge are estimated at: April-2,200 cfs; May-1,660 cfs; June-1,710 cfs; July-1,630 cfs; August-850 cfs; September-970 cfs; October-1,150 cfs; November and December-1,550 cfs. Flows will be relatively low (around 1,600 cfs) for the first 10-14 days of May when the transformer at Crystal Powerplant is replaced. When runoff peaks in May or June, **higher and less predictable flows** may occur in the river.

If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

Ed Warner
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure

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

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

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT
Attention: UC-288, UC-297, UC-600, UC-320, UC-332
(ea w/copy of encl)

bc: WCN-CDeAngelis, -DMutz, -EWarner, -CStanton, -MSteves, -LWest, -SMcCall,
-JWright, -RStorbo, -KFogelquist
(ea w/copy of encl)

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
April 16, 1997

Operation Meeting: An attendance list for the operation meeting is attached. The purpose of these meetings-- held in January, April, and August-- is to develop recommendations for operation of Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal Reservoirs. These recommendations are then included in the overall 24-month study for Reclamation Upper Colorado reservoirs. Recommendations are based on projected inflows to the reservoirs, the need to protect existing water rights, minimum flow levels, target elevations for reservoirs, flows for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, hydropower needs and other factors. In addition, the meetings are used to coordinate activities between agencies, water users, and others. Handouts provided included background data on projected inflows to the reservoirs and potential operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable inflows.

Long-term operation planning was also discussed at the meeting. Studies on the Gunnison River endangered fish and on the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument's reserved water right are being completed and the operation meetings will be used more in the future to discuss operations related to these issues.

January-April 1997 Operation: In this period, reservoir releases were increased in order to provide storage space for the large predicted runoff. Peak flows in the Gunnison Gorge in March were over 3,800 cfs, primarily in response to a 185 percent of normal snowpack measured on February 1. As snowpack estimates declined in late March and early April, releases were decreased. Transformer replacement problems at Crystal continued to limit hydropower production flows to around 1,850 cfs. No major problems occurred during the period.

Proposed April-August Operation: Snow measurements in the Gunnison Basin were approximately 125 percent of normal on April 1 and 147 percent on April 15, and most probable inflow to the Aspinall Reservoirs this year is projected at 135 percent of normal as of April 15. Runoff forecasts dropped over 200,000 acre-feet between February 1 and April 1. Under most probable conditions, Blue Mesa Reservoir will fill in late June or early July. **Average** monthly flow projections in the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge under most probable conditions were presented: 2,120 cfs in April; 1,660 cfs in May; 1,710 cfs in June; 1,630 cfs in July; 850 cfs in August; 970 cfs in September; 1,150 cfs in October and 1,550 cfs in November and December. These projections are based on April 1 snow course data and will change as changes in snowpack occur. Daily peaks may be significantly higher than monthly averages and will be influenced by air temperatures and precipitation during the runoff period. It should be remembered that flows during high runoff years such as predicted are very **difficult to predict** and can **change suddenly**.

Recreation levels at Blue Mesa will be lower than normal at the start of the recreation season, levels should start to increase by the last week of April. The group discussed the planned operation. When the transformer at Crystal is replaced around May 1 only the bypass (2,000 cfs) and spillway will be available to pass water downstream. This could cause perhaps significant daily flow fluctuations due to daily snowmelt cycles and could affect rainbow trout eggs--spawning began in early April. After considerable discussion, it was decided to begin lowering releases on April 16 at Crystal down to around 2,000 cfs and try to maintain this through May 10-14 when the transformer replacement will be completed. This hopefully will provide more stability to the river (unless there is significant inflow from the Cimarron Creek in early May) and be least damaging to rainbow reproduction.

Also discussed was provision of peak flows for downstream endangered fish. The large drawdown at Blue Mesa will provide much more flexibility in dealing with the high runoff, but does not necessarily facilitate peak flows. In basic terms, the decision was made in February to operate in a flood control mode because of the unusually high snowpack. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) would have preferred peak flows in May or June, rather than the high flows in March. It was agreed that the situation will be monitored and Reclamation will meet with FWS in early May to try to still plan a peak flow for the lower Gunnison.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife changed their 600 cfs request to September 23, with flows remaining at 600 cfs until September 26. This level is needed in the Ute Park area by 10 am on the 23rd and flows can increase after noon on the 26th. No other special flows were requested.

Long-term Operation Planning

The FWS reported that the draft synthesis report is due in December, 1997. This report will summarize results of endangered fish studies and describe flow needs of the fish and their habitat. Flow models were discussed. One use of the models is to test alternative flow recommendations to help determine if they can be implemented within the framework of existing water rights and other factors. The models can also help identify impacts on other resources. Models for the Gunnison Basin are in various stages of completion and having these available is a top priority for long-term operation planning.

Agency/Organization Activities and Comments

National Park Service - Work for 1997 will include support of the limnology studies on Blue Mesa, the paleontology excavations at Blue Mesa in July and August, and archaeology surveys of the reservoir basin exposed by the large runoff. No special studies are planned in the Black Canyon this year.

Colorado Division of Wildlife - Sherman Hebein reported that the Division still plans to stock 3-5" Colorado River strain rainbows in the Gunnison Gorge in the fall of 1997 to compensate for whirling disease losses. Loss of fish at the Glenwood Hatchery may affect the numbers that can be stocked. Two

million kokanee salmon were released down the East and Gunnison Rivers to Blue Mesa in April. Thanks to the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users for helping with flow levels via Taylor Park releases. Will assist in Blue Mesa limnology studies this summer and will work with NPS on the continuing Blue Mesa creel census. Sherman Hebein will check with Gordon Mueller on the effect of Blue Mesa lighting on kokanee entrainment and report back at next meeting.

Western Area Power Administration - WAPA requested the NPS coordinate with them on date of Morrow Point tour boat

Fish and Wildlife Service - Much of work will be on Synthesis Report. Redlands fish ladder will be monitored this year. There will be some stocking of razorback suckers in the Gunnison River with numbers to be determined later.

Bureau of Reclamation - The transformer at Crystal is now scheduled for replacement around May 1. There will be major work done at Blue Mesa powerplants between August and December but this should not affect operations. The final report on fish entrainment has been completed and is available at Reclamation's Grand Junction office. Reclamation reported that work would be initiated on supplemental NEPA reports on the AB Lateral Hydropower Project early this summer. A final EIS on the project was completed in 1991.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - The District requested an update on the "NPS contract" process, in reference to efforts to resolve and quantify the Black Canyon Monument's reserved water right. NPS plans to tie into the endangered species consultation schedule so that issues can be resolved concurrently. NPS still believes a contract is important to accomplish this.

High Country Citizens/Sierra Club - Group is active in rule making on water quality issues. There will be a public meeting in Gunnison on June 10. Sierra Club working on several river task forces.

Colorado Water Conservation Board - Gene Jensock has retired but will be working for the Board on a retainer for one year. Working on a draft of Gunnison Basin accounting.

Division Engineer - Has completed Ridgway Reservoir accounting plan. Will be working on Union Park case.

Next Meeting - The next operation meeting will be on **August 21 at 12:30** at the Elk Creek visitors center conference room on Blue Mesa.

Distribution List - April 16, 1997 Aspinall Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse
Club 20 Greg Walcher, Shane Henry
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Environmental Defense Fund Jim Martin
Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark
Gunnison River Expeditions Hank Hotze, Bo Gates
High Country Citizens Alliance Steve Glazer*
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby*
Western Colorado Congress Fred Wetlaufer
University of Montana Jack Stanford
City of Grand Junction Greg Trainor
Colorado River Water Conservation District Mike Gross, Dave Kanzer*
Ray Tenney
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Redlands Water and Power Company Gregg Strong*
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association Jim Hokit*, Mark Catlin*
Upper Colorado River Commission Anne Englert
Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District Tyler Martineau*
Colorado Department of Agriculture Jim Miller
Colorado Division of Water Resources Ken Knox, Wayne Schieldt*
Colorado Division of Wildlife Rick Anderson
Robert Caskey, Pat Martinez
Sherman Hebein*
Dan Braugh*
Colorado Water Conservation Board Peter Evans, Randy Seaholm*
Wyoming State Engineers Office John Shields
Army Corps of Engineers Grady McNure
Bureau of Land Management John Arkins, Allan Belt
Roy Smith
Dennis Murphy
Fish and Wildlife Service John Hamill
Reed Harris
Chuck McAda*
Terry Ireland*, Rick Krueger
George Smith, Sam Williamson
National Park Service Chuck Pettee*, Mark Wondzell*
Rick Harris*, Sheridan Steele*
Myron Chase*, Dave Roberts
National Weather Service Jim Pringle
U.S. Geological Survey Paul von Guerard, Mike Whiteman*, Bob Jenkins
John Elliot
Gordon Mueller
Jonathan Friedman
Western Area Power Administration Gene Iley*, Gary Burton*
Jeff Ackerman*, Kathy Crane
Clayton Palmer
Reclamation Coll Stanton*, Ed Warner*
Steve McCall*, Russ Storbo*, Lorrie West*

Rick Gold, Paul Davidson, Chris Karas, Ron Sutton, Tony Morton
Tom Ryan*, Rob Davis*, Gary McDermott*