

WCN-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our January 31, 2000 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. Thank-you to Western Area Power Administration and Reclamation's Montrose Office for hosting this meeting in Montrose.

Highlights of the meeting include:

–Based on January snow readings, the most probable April-July inflow to Blue Mesa Reservoir for this year is predicted at 475,000 acre-feet or 68 percent of normal.

--Average monthly flows planned for the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon National Park and Gunnison Gorge under most probable conditions will be lowered to 500 cfs by April and would be around 800 cfs during the summer. Under these conditions, Blue Mesa would reach within 9 feet of filling. These initial plans will change if precipitation patterns change between now and runoff.

–The Fish and Wildlife Service has released their synthesis report on Gunnison River endangered fish for peer review. Preliminary flow recommendations for flows at the Whitewater gage were 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 will be held on **Thursday, April 20 at 12:30 in the Reclamation Office in Grand Junction (2764 Compass Drive)**. If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ed Warner
Water Resources Group Chief

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 (ea w/encl)

Director, Technical Service Center, Denver CO
Attention: D-8510 (w/encl)

WCN-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, SMcCall, JOzga, CStanton, KFogelquist, MSteves,
RStorbo, JWright (ea w/ encl)

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons

Distribution List - January 31, 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 Wetlauffer
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District Mike Gross*, 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 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*, Chuck McAda, Terry Ireland
Reed Harris, Henry Maddux, George Smith
National Park Service Sheridan Steele*, Myron Chase*; Ken Stahlnecker*, Mark Wondzell*
Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee*
National Weather Service Brian Avery*

National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Andrea Ray, Klaus Weickmann

U.S. Geological Survey Paul von Guerard*, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller

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*, Laurie
Jones, Chris Lakin, John Miller, Liz Rankin*, David Steinmark, Richard Stodt, Jane Tellechea, 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

January 31, 2000

Participation: This meeting was held in Montrose at the WAPA-Reclamation Curecanti Office. 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 August-December 1999 operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs; and preliminary 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 River National Monument have been completed. The Fish and Wildlife Service completed a peer review draft of the 'Synthesis Report' that will include flow recommendations for endangered fish. 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.

August-December 1999 Operation: Actual April-July runoff into Blue Mesa in 1999 was near average at 676,000 acre-feet. While the volume was near average, the distribution was not. A very dry winter and early spring was followed by a very wet late spring and summer. In early August flows in the Black Canyon reached 2,600 cfs in response to rainfall. In late September Crystal Reservoir was lowered so that trash racks could be cleaned. As the reservoir was lowered sediment deposits were exposed and eroded into the water. This resulted in a high sediment load in the river downstream from Crystal. Starting on October 1, flows were increased downstream to flush sediment from the river; flows reached 4,550 cfs and then were lowered to 1,200 cfs on October 15. Between November 9th and 13th flows were lowered to around 700 cfs to assist a Colorado Division of Wildlife fishery inventory between the Smith Fork and North Fork.. Blue Mesa's December elevation target of 7,491 was reached. In early January flows through the canyon were reduced to around 800 cfs in response to the low snowpack conditions.

Preliminary January-April 2000 Operation: Based on January 1 snow course information, the most

probable April-July inflow to Blue Mesa is 475,000 acre-feet or 68 percent of the 30-year average. The maximum probable inflow is 820,000 acre-feet; minimum is 128,000 acre-feet. Under the most probable conditions, Blue Mesa would be short 9 feet from filling. Plans are to lower flows through the Black Canyon/Gunnison Gorge to 500 cfs by April in response to this. Flows through the Black Canyon would range around 800 cfs through the summer. **It was noted that snowpack conditions can change considerably up or down between now and runoff, so these projections should be considered preliminary.** At this time, a spring peak was not shown under most probable conditions. This will be revisited with the Fish and Wildlife Service between now and the April meeting. Preliminary endangered fish flow recommendations for the lower Gunnison River in this type year (moderately dry) would call for around 7,000 cfs at the Whitewater Gage. Flows through the Black Canyon would probably have to be increased to 1,500-2,500 for a short period during runoff to meet this number.

Aspinall Unit Maintenance Work: Don Phillips reviewed the general O&M schedule for the dams and provided more detail on work at Crystal Dam last year. During normal maintenance at Crystal in February, 1999 a vibration on the ring follower gate was detected. Similar circumstances led to a major problem at Flaming Gorge Dam recently. In order to complete repairs, trash needed to be removed from inlet structures on the dam. In April divers were able to partially complete the cleaning. In September the reservoir was drawn down approximately 40 feet to 6700 feet to allow the cleaning to be completed. The cleaning of the inlets was successful. As Crystal was drawn down, however, sediment that had been deposited in the reservoir over the last 20 years was exposed and eroded into the water in the reservoir and the river downstream. The river became much more turbid than anticipated. This led to the flushing flow mentioned previously. Similar work will be scheduled approximately every three years. There were several questions asked on this work—for example, could it be done in the early spring to allow a normal spring peak to flush the river—Reclamation agreed to look into options for later discussion.

Discussion of Operations: Concern was expressed on the effect of silt on the fishery and recreation use of the river. Commercial trips were canceled and private users avoided the river. The Colorado Division of Wildlife thought that the flushing flow had done a good job of moving the silt—the flushing flows goals were to remove the newly deposited sediment from backwater areas that are habitat for tubifex worms, the intermediate host for whirling disease, and to restore gravel spawning areas. Whether there was a long-term adverse effect on the fishery is more difficult to tell, however. During their November fish survey, the Division observed more fish covered with saprolegnia—a fungus—than they normally observe.

Special Flow Requests: The Division of Wildlife plan to collect rainbow trout immediately below Crystal in April for spawning purposes. Stable flows would benefit this operation. At the present time, flows of 500 cfs are planned at that time; Reclamation will keep the Division updated on any anticipated fluctuations. The Division will also request 600 cfs flows in September for fishery surveys. The exact dates have not been set yet. The Division will also work through Reclamation's Curecanti Office on timing of collections of kokanee downstream from Morrow Point.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Fish and Wildlife Service - FWS has completed a draft of the synthesis report and it is out for peer review. Comments are due March 1 after which it will be revised and sent to the Recovery Program for approval. Generally the 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-17,000 cfs or greater

Wet year-22,500 cfs or greater

The Service also reported that 5 Colorado pikeminnows used the Redlands fish ladder in 1999. Razorback suckers will be stocked in the Gunnison River again this fall–these are stocked near Confluence Park at Delta and normally work their way downstream. The Service requested to be kept informed of any flow changes in the fall so they can coordinate their stocking efforts.

National Park Service - NPS continues to work on reserved water right for Black Canyon. David Gehlert with the Justice Department was introduced–he will take the lead in negotiating the right.

Several questions were asked of David:

Will the Colorado Water Conservation Board be brought into the negotiation? Yes, once Justice has a better idea of the approach to be used.

How can the Colorado River Water Conservation District have input now? Discussions are not open yet; will get to a point soon to bring others in. National Park Service favors negotiation vs. litigation.

Does the Federal family include WAPA? Yes. When brought in? Soon.

Does National Park status affect reserved right? No, no change.

Is right being coordinated with the Fish and Wildlife Service? Yes.

Colorado Division of Wildlife - The Division is continuing creel census work at Blue Mesa; level of use is being maintained but kokanee catch rate is down. Division is very concerned with the kokanee decline–lake trout predation may be the major problem. Research on interaction of kokanee and lake trout will start this summer. The Division hopes to stock the Gunnison River with rainbow trout in 2001 (naturally reproducing rainbows are almost gone from the Gunnison downstream of the Aspinall Unit due to whirling disease). The fish for spawning will be collected between Crystal Dam and the Gunnison Tunnel in April so it would help to have stable flows during this period (Reclamation will give

the Division advance warning if this cannot happen).

Bureau of Reclamation - Work on the voluntary EIS on endangered fish operations will begin when flow recommendations and the synthesis report are available. Work is on schedule on renewing the 5-year interim agreement with the Service and Colorado Water Conservation Board to provide flows to the Redlands fish ladder. The existing agreement ends in August 2000.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - The District expressed support for the Subordination Agreement (60,000 acre-feet depletion above Aspinall Unit). They are studying existing depletions between Blue Mesa and Crystal and are also studying augmentation needs to protect junior rights from lower Gunnison senior right calls.

Sierra Club/High Country Citizens -Also supports the Subordination Agreement. The organizations are working on watershed planning and selenium issues in the basin.

Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District - Asked the status of the interim agreement for providing flows downstream from the Redlands and expressed the importance of renewing the agreement. Also working on Subordination Agreement and on watershed planning.

Western Area Power Administration - Western requested that they be kept informed of any changes in schedules on endangered species and reserved water right programs and would like to be included in discussions of these programs.

Gunnison POWER - Brought up the idea of watershed planning—would like to involve the people in this meeting in watershed planning.

Gunnison County - Reviewed some of the land use/planning the county is involved in around Blue Mesa Reservoir.

National Weather Service- Since last summer, long-term models show warmer and drier conditions. The latest 90-day model shows relatively warm/dry conditions thru April.

State Engineer - In April of 1999, we came very close to a “Redlands call”. Concerned that we may see this again this April and recommends earlier coordination to plan for this event.

Bureau of Land Management - the recent legislation that created a National Park also affected BLM land status. They will be starting a planning effort on these lands—Karen Tucker will lead.

Gunnison River Expeditions -was unable to attend the meeting but previously reported that the muddy waters in the fall had caused a significant loss of recreation; a significant economic loss to guides

and outfitters. They were also concerned that the impacts could have been better predicted and people informed more in advance.

Next Meeting: **12:30 on Thursday, April 20**, Reclamation office in Grand Junction (2764 Compass Drive).