

WCN-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our August 20, 2002 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held at the Elk Creek Visitors Center on Blue Mesa.

Highlights of the operation meeting include:

-Actual inflow to the Aspinall Unit for the April through July period was 156,000 acre-feet or 22 percent of normal; this is a record low for the Unit. January forecasts predicted 69 percent and this declined consistently through the year.

-Very little storage occurred in Blue Mesa this year; inflow to Blue Mesa remained below 500 cfs generally from the 3rd week in June through August. Blue Mesa is expected to continue to drop, reaching an elevation of around 7427 in December (approximately 92 feet down).

-Releases from Crystal Dam were dictated by downstream water rights and the agreement to provide flows below the Redlands Diversion Dam (200 cfs in June, 250 in July and August, and 100 in September). Black Canyon flows ranged from around 350 cfs in early spring to 500-700 cfs in July and August.

-Morrow Point drawdown began in August; the reservoir is being drawn down to allow cleaning of trash racks in early September.

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 scheduled for 12:30, Wednesday January 15th in Montrose at the Holiday Inn Express, 1391 South Townsend. 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: w/ enclosure

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-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, EKnight, MSteves,
JWright, DCrabtree, JHock (ea w/ encl)

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage

Distribution List -August 20, 2002 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Argonne National LaboratoryJohn Hayse, Kirk Lagory
City of Grand Junction..... Terry Franklin*, Greg Trainor
Club 20..... Reeves Brown
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Daily Sentinel.....Gary Harmon, 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
Helton & Williamsen, P.C. Duane Helton
High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra ClubSteve Glazer*, Shara Rutberg*
Matt Owens Fly Company Matt Owens
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby*, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternell*
Western Colorado Congress Fred Wetlaufer
University of Montana..... Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District. . Dave Kanzer*, Marlene Zanetell*. David Halford, Ray Tenney
Colorado River Energy Distributors..... .Cliff Barrett
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Redlands Water and Power Company.....Gregg Strong*, Mike Gross*
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association.....Marc Catlin*
Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland*
Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District..... Kathleen Klein*, Mark Schumacher,
Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel*, Jim Slattery, Ken Spann*
Delta County Commissioners.....Donna Ferganchick, Jim Ventrello
Delta County.....Duane Freeman
City of Delta..... Richard Sales, Wilma Ervin
Gunnison County Commissioners
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, David Graf*, Pat Martinez,
Rick Anderson
Colorado Water Conservation BoardRandy Seaholm; Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison*
Wyoming State Engineers Office..... John Shields
Congressman Scott McInnisKelly Watson, Ann Martinez, Joy Peck
Senator Wayne AllardBeth Washburn*
Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell George Rossman
Army Corps of Engineers..... Ken Jacobson
Bureau of Land ManagementAllan Belt, Dennis Murphy*, Jim Ferguson, Carl Bauer, Roy Smith,
Rooster Barnhart, Karen Tucker
Fish and Wildlife Service..... Rick Krueger, Al Pfister, Chuck McAda*, Terry Ireland
George Smith
National Park ServiceSheridan Steele, Myron Chase*, Ken Stahlnecker*, Mark Wondzell*
Michael Dale*, Bill Johnson*, DanGude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee
National Weather Service..... Bill Reed, Brian Avery
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Andrea Ray*, Klaus Weickmann
U.S. Geological SurveyPaul 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, Ken Otto, Gary Burton; Margaret Matte
Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer. Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton*,
 John Ozga*, Gary McDermott, Don Phillips*, Dick Girvan, Dan Crabtree, Chris Cutler, Terry Stroh, Arlo
 Allen, Jane Blair, Paul Davidson*, Tom Chart, Christine Karas, Tony Morton
Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert
Excel Energy..... Fred Eggleston
Gunnison Country TimesAlan Wartes
Tri County WaterMike Berry*, Kathleen Margetts*

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

August 20, 2002

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 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 draft flow recommendations for endangered fish were 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:

General: Blue Mesa Reservoir capacities were explained. 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 total 829,500. Discussions during operation meetings use live capacity.

April-August 2002 Operations: Forecasted inflows to the Unit declined steadily from January through July. January forecasts were 69 percent, while actual April through July inflow was 22 percent, a record low for the Unit. Very little storage occurred in Blue Mesa this year; although limited storage was permitted in June when the call by the downstream senior Gunnison Tunnel was off.

Senior water rights and the 2002 agreement related to the Redlands Fish Ladder contract largely controlled summer operations. The Redlands agreement calls for the Redlands Diversion to limit their call to 600 cfs rather than 750 cfs; the Colorado River Water Conservancy District compensates Redlands for lost power revenues; Xcel Energy cooperates with rate adjustments;

the Fish and Wildlife Service agrees to reduce endangered fish flows downstream from the Redlands; and the Aspinall Unit maintains the 600 cfs for the Redlands and also endangered fish flows downstream (200 cfs in June, 250 in July and August, and 100 in September). The agreement worked reasonably well through the summer, although water travel time from Crystal, high losses between Crystal and the Redlands (evapotranspiration?), and other factors made exactly meeting flows difficult. Flows through the Black Canyon ranged from around 350 cfs in the early spring to 500-700 cfs in July and August.

August-January 2002 Operation: In September, target flows below the Redlands will be reduced to 100 cfs and Gunnison Tunnel demands will decline, so releases from the Unit will decrease. Flows through the Black Canyon will probably be in the 300-400 cfs range, more toward 300 later in the fall. A flow of 200 cfs is possible due to the severe drought conditions. Blue Mesa Reservoir levels will continue to decline to around 7427 feet, 92 feet from full. There is some difficulty in predicting operations this fall and winter: the Redlands senior water right diverts water year-round and this right may pull inflow through the Unit and reduce the potential to store water at Blue Mesa and at other basin reservoirs. The Colorado River Water Conservation District, Redlands Water and Power, and others are studying potential solutions to this problem. Under most probable forecasts Blue Mesa would not fill next year (12 feet short). Most probable conditions are based on the assumption that present dry conditions will occur at the beginning of the period and gradually improve to average conditions by next July.

Aspinall Unit Maintenance Work: Don Phillips reviewed the Morrow Point trash rack cleaning program. The reservoir level is being lowered and will reach 7129 feet in early September. Divers can then clean the trash racks. To date there have been no problems with turbidity or landslides; both are being monitored by Reclamation.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Fish and Wildlife Service – The Redlands fish ladder has been used by endangered fish this summer under the lower than normal flow conditions. Seven pikeminnow and one razorback sucker have used the ladder this summer. Flow recommendations are still being reviewed and discussed by the Recovery Program Biology Committee.

Colorado Division of Wildlife - CDOW continued to emphasize the importance of the kokanee salmon fishery at Blue Mesa—the kokanee run has started and at lower flows there are more impediments for the fish swimming to the Roaring Judy Hatchery. They have asked people to voluntarily release kokanee caught in the river downstream from the Lake City Bridge (upstream of that point, fish must be released). Under normal conditions the river downstream from the bridge is part of Blue Mesa Reservoir. CDOW is monitoring water temperatures—in the Basin there have been temperatures of concern in major tributaries such as the Lake Fork and East. Mainstem Gunnison temperatures have remained adequate for trout. Concerning the Taylor River, a winter flow of 100 cfs is best; however, 50 cfs is adequate.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - District representatives indicated the Redlands agreement has worked well this summer and specifically thanked Redlands and Xcel Energy for their assistance. The River District is working with Redlands and others to reduce potential impacts of winter calls by the Redlands senior water right.

Sierra Club/High Country Citizens – Appreciates some of the flexibility seen this year in the Basin. These organizations are working with the NIWQP –National Irrigation Water Quality Program- on selenium issues in the basin.

Colorado Water Conservation Board - The September Board Meeting will be in Gunnison this year.

U.S. Geological Survey- Has been taking extra measurements this summer to accurately read low water levels.

Bureau of Land Management – Flows through the Gorge have been good this summer considering the drought conditions; recreation use has been high.

Western Area Power Administration – Pray for rain and snow.

National Park Service –Redlands agreement helped both the Black Canyon and Blue Mesa Reservoir this summer. The reserved right is being discussed by Interior at the Washington level. A case management hearing is scheduled for October 3.

Gunnison Basin Power – Cooperation has been good in the Basin. Suggested writing up lessons learned in this drought year to assist people when future droughts occur.

State Engineer – Has been difficult year for water users and those who administer water—looking forward to winter.

Tri County- Ridgway Reservoir is down 30 feet and should drop 5-10 more feet. Asked for clarification of winter minimum flows. (Commitments call for 45 cfs at Colona and 30 cfs below Dam; or inflow in extremely dry years)

Redlands – Pleased with how the Redlands agreement has worked this year.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy – The District contracted water this summer from Blue Mesa and then subcontracted the water for augmentation plans to protect water users. The water was used by 60 contractors. Concerned with the effect of winter calls by the Redlands senior water rights—could curtail winter storage in 13 upper basin reservoirs. District is investigating additional storage in the basin.

Mike Gross –Representing Redlands and Uncompahgre Valley Water Users—reported that UVWUA was using all its supplies. Aspinall Unit flexibility is very important for the basin. With this in mind, it would be a mistake for Reclamation’s EIS on Gunnison flow

recommendations to focus only on flow recommendations—public would benefit from a more multi-purpose approach in the EIS.

NOAA – Most of the west is in a drought situation...highest percentage of the west is being affected since 1934. In addition to being dry, the west slope was hotter than usual this summer. August-October may be wetter than average. Model predictions for the winter are inconclusive, so winter moisture predictions were not made.

Next Meeting: 12:30 on January 15th in Montrose; Holiday Inn Express, 1391 South Townsend.