

WCG-SMcCall  
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our April 22, 2004 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held in Grand Junction. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

- The Gunnison Basin is in its seventh straight year of below average river flows, and the cumulative deficit in streamflow is the greatest since records began being kept in the early 1900's. Snow courses in the Gunnison Basin were at 72 percent of average on April 15 (dropping from 138 percent in mid-January). Based on April 15<sup>th</sup> data, the April-July inflow to Blue Mesa is projected at 460,000 acre-feet or 64 percent of average.
  
- Blue Mesa is not expected to fill this year; the reservoir will be approximately 150,000 acre-feet short of filling (15-20 vertical feet).
  
- Black Canyon flows were maintained at a little above 300 cfs this winter. Under most probable conditions, flows were not predicted to increase June or July when they could reach the 600-800 cfs range. Concerns with a 300 cfs flow during May and June were expressed from a recreation and safety standpoint.
  
- Testing at the Crystal powerplant has been delayed—probably until July—a ramping plan to reduce river fluctuations was presented at the meeting.
  
- The Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS on Aspinall Unit Operations has been published and scoping meetings have been completed.

Following the meeting, Reclamation decided to increase Black Canyon flows to 350 cfs in early May to increase flexibility in Crystal releases and Gunnison Tunnel operations.

Snowpack and runoff conditions **can change** in May, so all projections should be considered preliminary at this time.

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 at the Elk Creek Visitor Center at Blue Mesa on August 26<sup>th</sup> at 1 p.m. If you have questions, please call me at 970 248-0652.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree  
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure  
Distribution (see attached list)

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

D-8510

UC-400, UC-434, UC-438, UC-600, UC-700, UC-724, UC-725

CCI-100

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

WCD-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage  
(ea w/encl)

WBR:SMcCall:rb:04/27/2004:970 248-0638:Aspinall summary

Distribution List –April 22, 2004 Aspinall Operation Meeting

\*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

**Argonne National Laboratory** ..... John Hayse\*, Kirk Lagory\*  
**City of Grand Junction**..... Terry Franklin, Greg Trainor  
**Club 20** .....Reeves Brown  
**Colorado State University** ..... Brett Johnson  
**Daily Sentinel**..... Erin McIntyre, Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan\*  
**Delta County Independent** .....Bob Borchardt  
**Environmental Defense Fund** .....Jim Martin  
**Gunnison Basin POWER** ..... Ralph (Butch) Clark, Ramon Reed  
**Gunnison Country Times** ..... Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel  
**Gunnison River Expeditions** ..... Hank Hotze  
**Helton & Williamsen, P.C.** ..... Duane Helton  
**High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club**.....Steve Glazer\*, Wendy McDermott,  
Steve Schechter, Shara Rutberg  
**Matt Owens Fly Company** .....Matt Owens  
**Montrose Daily Press** ..... Jason Monroe, Caitlin Switzer  
**Trout Unlimited** ..... Pat Oglesby\*, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternell, John Trammell  
**Western Colorado Congress** .....Randy See\*, Fred Wetlaufer  
**University of Montana** ..... Jack Stanford  
**Co. River Water Conservation District**..... Dave Kanzer\*, Eric Kuhn, Bill Trampe, David Halford,  
Ray Tenney  
**Colorado River Energy Distributors**..... Leslie James\*  
**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** Greg Peterson, Karen Shirley\*, Kathleen Curry\*, Mark  
Schumacher, Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel, Jim Slattery, Ken Spann  
**Delta County Commissioners**..... Jan McCracken, Wayne Wolf, Ted Hayden  
**Delta County**.....Duane Freeman  
**City of Delta**.....Barry Bullard, Richard Sales, Wilma Ervin  
**Delta County Emergency Management**.....Rob Fiedler  
**Gunnison County Commissioners** ..... Fred Field, Perry Anderson, Jim Starr  
**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, Dan Kowalski, David Graf,  
Ryan Swygman, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson  
**Colorado Water Conservation Board** Randy Seaholm, Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison\*, Rick Brown,  
Steve Miller  
**Wyoming State Engineers Office**..... John Shields  
**Congressman Scott McInnis** ..... Bill Endriss\*  
**Senator Wayne Allard** ..... Beth Washburn, Derek Wagner  
**Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell** ..... George Rossman\*  
**Army Corps of Engineers**..... Ken Jacobson  
**Bureau of Land Management** ..... Dennis Murphy\*, Jim Ferguson, Carl Bauer, Roy Smith,  
Rooster Barnhart, Karen Tucker\*, Will Crim, Matt Salava, Spencer Green, Julie Stotler  
**Fish and Wildlife Service**..... Rick Krueger, 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  
**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 Boulgar\*  
**Land and Water Fund** ..... Bart Miller  
**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  
**Bureau of Reclamation**...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer\*, Ed Warner\*, Steve McCall\*, Coll Stanton\*,  
 John Ozga, Gary McDermott\*, Don Phillips, Dick Girvan, David Steinmark\*, Ted Dunn, Dan Crabtree\*,  
 Chris Cutler, Terry Stroh\*, Arlo Allen, Jane Blair\*, Paul Davidson\*, Tom Chart\*, Justyn Hock\*, Erik  
 Knight\*, Nancy Coulam, Dennis Kubly  
**Interior Solicitors Office**..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy  
**Department of Justice**.....Dave Gehlert  
**Xcel Energy**..... Fred Eggleston  
**Tri County Water** .....Mike Berry\*, Kathleen Margetts,  
 Richard Margetts (Project 7)  
**Ridgway Guide Service**..... Tim Peterson  
**Self** .....George Sheldon, Marlene  
 Zanatell, Jim Cochran, Jim Hokit

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting  
April 22, 2004

**Participation:** This meeting was held at Reclamation's office in Grand Junction. 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 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 January-April 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.

January-April Operations: Inflows to Blue Mesa remained below average during most of the period. Black Canyon flows were reduced to the 300 cfs minimum in September and have remained at that level. Blue Mesa storage has increased approximately 64,000 acre-feet since January 1st; live storage on April 1 was approximately 421,000 acre-feet. This is 80,000 acre-feet below average.

April-August 2004 Operations: Snow courses in the Gunnison Basin were at 72% of the 1971-2000 average on April 1; and April-July most probable inflow forecast to Blue Mesa is projected at 460,000 acre-feet or 64% of average.

Under most probable conditions, Blue Mesa would be expected to be 150,000 acre-feet short of

filling by the end of the spring runoff (15-20 feet from full). Black Canyon flows would be expected to remain at 325 cfs throughout most of the runoff period and be in the 600-800 cfs range beginning in July. Reclamation's proposal for this year's operations does not include a peak flow release. (In some years rapid snowpack in the Cimarron drainage can cause a brief increase in flows, such as occurred in 2003). It should be noted that **changes in runoff forecasts can occur** between April and June and therefore all projections are subject to change.

An open discussion was held on proposed flows. There are concerns with low flows in May and particularly June (peak river use month)---flows of 300-325 are dangerous to private and commercial rafters, water temperatures increase during hot spells, and more crowding occurs. The Bureau of Land Management recommends flows of 450 cfs in May and 450-600 in June to address safety and recreation needs. Western Area Power Administration recommended no additional flows downstream until Crystal powerplant is functioning.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife will conduct electro fishing in the Ute Park Area the first week of October and would prefer flows in the 300-400 cfs range.

### **Maintenance Activities:**

In the January operations meeting, the need to test equipment at Crystal Dam powerplant was discussed. The contractor has provided information on the flows needed for testing, but additional repairs on the turbine have been identified. This has delayed the testing---testing may occur in July but exact dates cannot be predicted yet.

The powerplant testing flows needed by the contractor range from 300 to 2,300 cfs, with rapid changes between flow levels. Reclamation presented a ramping plan using Crystal's bypass to even out or moderate sudden changes in the river flow. Reclamation will keep the operation meeting group and public updated on the testing schedule. Flows in the Black Canyon could range between 400 and 1,200 cfs; however the use of the bypass outlets will be used to minimize fluctuations in the approximately 15 days of testing.

Morrow Point spillways will be tested this spring by opening each gate 6-12 inches. This should not affect flows downstream from Crystal. Following these tests, the Morrow Point stilling basin will be inspected/repared. The Curecanti field division will contact the Colorado Division of Wildlife when this occurs to allow for fish salvage.

### **Black Canyon Water Rights:**

The Colorado Water Conservation Board updated the group on the status of the water rights for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. In 1978, a decree was issued for a reserved right for the Park with a 1933 date, but the right was not quantified. In 2001, a quantification application was filed for a 1933 right with a 300 cfs base, shoulder flows, and a 1-day peak of varying magnitudes. There were 380 objections filed to this quantification application and in 2002 the water court stayed litigation to allow the right to be negotiated.

In April 2003, a memorandum was signed by Colorado, Reclamation, the National Park Service,

and the Fish and Wildlife Service agreeing to a 2-part water right: a 1933 300 cfs reserved right from the Park to the North Fork confluence, and a 2003 state instream flow right for peak and shoulder flows.

Finalization of the 300 cfs reserved right is pending resolution of a suit filed that basically questions whether the 300 cfs is adequate. This week the Court declined to dismiss the proceedings.

In December 2003, the application to appropriate the state instream flow for spring and shoulder flows was filed. The opposition statement period ends February 27<sup>th</sup>. The instream flow right would protect flows up to 14,000 cfs between May 1 and July 31, but would not be exercised to result in flows above 10,000 cfs between Crystal and Delta (or 20,000 cfs at Whitewater) unless floodplain improvements were made to protect improvements. Exercise of the water right also would not interfere with meeting Aspinall Unit authorized purposes.

Water available to the instream flow right would be estimated based on May 1 forecasted inflow minus water needed to physically fill Blue Mesa, Taylor Park, and Silver Jack and minus water needed to maintain 300 cfs minimum flows, Gunnison Tunnel diversions, upper Gunnison subordination needs, and other Aspinall Unit purposes. The instream flow right will be implemented through the Aspinall operations meetings; Reclamation will prepare estimates of water available for discussion.

#### **Aspinall Unit Environmental Impact Statement:**

The Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS on operations of the Aspinall Unit was published in the Federal Register on January 21, 2004, and scoping meetings were held in February. Scoping comments were due by April 15 and a summary of the scoping process will be completed in May. The EIS will develop and analyze alternative operation plans related to endangered fish flow recommendations while continuing to meet Unit purposes.

Early activities will be selection of cooperating agencies and initial determinations of alternatives and an environmental baseline.

For further information, contact Justyn Hock at 970-248-0625, or write [aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov](mailto:aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov).

#### **Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:**

**Senator Campbell's Office** –will report on the meeting to Senator Campbell and staff.

**Congressman McGinnis's Office** – will report on the meeting to Congressman and staff.

**National Park Service** –Morrow Point boat tour will operate from Memorial Day to Labor Day, 6 days/week.

**Colorado Division of Wildlife**-The Division stocked 2.7 million kokanee on March 31—this was earlier than usual and was designed to precede the beginning of irrigation diversions. The

Division is leading an effort to improve fish passage at the diversion downstream from Twin Bridges—hope to resolve problems and do the work in late July. Work is being coordinated with water users and the Upper Gunnison District.

**Colorado River Water Conservation District-** Redlands agreement (to reduce river calls) ends on April 30<sup>th</sup>. The District Board probably won't support similar call protection in the future. They believe Reclamation has a responsibility under existing water decrees to meet senior water right needs. The District will request cooperating agency status for the Aspinall EIS. District has awarded several grants in the Gunnison Basin for water conservation and other activities.

**Bureau of Land Management-**Gunnison Gorge RMP/FEIS Record of Decision is scheduled to be completed in June.

**Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy District-**Augmentation water is being sold under 40-year contracts. Diversions in basin started early this year; reported that PAM applications in some ditches appears to be very successful in reducing seepage.

**Tri-County-**Ridgway should fill this spring. Releases should be 300 cfs plus irrigation demand through July.

**USGS** – Working on a project with Redlands to determine effect of PAM application on seepage.

**Redlands** – Planning for fish screen is progressing; construction scheduled for this fall.

**Sierra Club/High Country Citizens** – Initiating Coal Creek Water Coalition (tributary of Slate River) watershed management plan. Wants to know status of review of Colorado River 5 year operating criteria. Water sustainability report for the Gunnison Basin is available at [www.hccaonline.org](http://www.hccaonline.org).

**Western Area Power Administration** – WAPA has completed new power contracts that address lower expectations in hydropower production due to drought. Commitment level dropped approximately 13 percent.

**Colorado Water Resources** –The entire Gunnison Basin has been designated as over appropriated and therefore augmentation plans are needed for new water rights in the entire basin.

**Trout Unlimited** –Is providing scoping comments on Aspinall EIS. Flows of 450 cfs in May-June would be helpful for fishery and associated public use.

**Uncompahgre Valley Water Users** – Tunnel is at 700 cfs; planting is a little behind schedule due to rains. Concerned with releasing more water than necessary from the system.

**Fish and Wildlife Service** – Will stock razorback suckers in the Gunnison again this year and will sample for razorback larva for the 3<sup>rd</sup> straight year. If flows are increased in May-June for



recreation/safety/trout fishery, these flows should not be credited to endangered fish needs.

**Ridgway Independent Guide Service** – reiterated that flows of 300 cfs in the Gunnison Gorge are unsafe and bad for riparian resources and public use.

**Other** – The next Basin SWASI meeting will be April 27<sup>th</sup> at Holiday Inn in Montrose. Round Table meeting at 2 p.m. and public comments at 6 p.m.

**Next Meeting: The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Thursday August 26<sup>th</sup> at the National Park Service's Elk Creek Visitor Center on Blue Mesa.**