

WCN-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our August 26, 2004 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held at the NPS Visitor Center on Blue Mesa Reservoir. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

- The Gunnison Basin is in its 7th straight year of below average runoff and the cumulative deficit in streamflow is the greatest since records began being kept in the early 1900's. April-July inflow to Blue Mesa in 2004 was only 422,000 acre-feet compared to an average of 710,000.
- Blue Mesa did not fill this year; the reservoir was approximately 200,000 acre-feet short of filling (full reservoir is considered 829,500 acre-feet).
- Black Canyon flows were maintained at a little above 300 cfs last winter and began to increase in early May. Canyon flows peaked around July 15th at 750 cfs and by late August were around 550 cfs. The need to conserve water and the need to meet endangered fish flows downstream from the Redlands Diversion were the major factors guiding operations this summer.
- Testing at the Crystal powerplant has been delayed—probably until late-September-October—a ramping plan to reduce river fluctuations was presented at the meeting.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or summaries, please let us know. The next operation meeting will be in on Thursday, January 20th at 1 p.m. at the **Montrose Pavillon**. If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0652.

Sincerely,

/s/

Dan Crabtree
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-700, UC-720, (ea w/encl)

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

WCN-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, BUilenberg, SMcCall, CStanton, EKnight, MSteves,
DCrabortree, JHock (ea w/ encl)

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage

Distribution List –August 26, 2004 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Daily Sentinel.....Sally Spauding*, Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan
Delta County Independent Bob Borchardt
Gunnison Country Times Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel
Montrose Daily Press Jason Monroe, Caitlin Switzer
Western Resource Advocates Bart Miller
Club 20 Reeves Brown
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Environmental Defense Fund Jim 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 Club Steve Glazer*, Wendy McDermott,
Steve Schechter, Shara Rutberg
Xcel Energy..... Fred Eggleston*
Matt Owens Fly Company Matt Owens
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby*, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternell, John Trammell
Western Colorado Congress Randy See, Fred Wetlaufer
Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District..... Dave Kanzer*, Eric Kuhn, Bill Trampe, David Halford,
Ray Tenney
Ridgway Guide Service..... Tim Peterson
Self George Sheldon, Marlene Zanatell, Jim Cochran, Jim Hokit
Colorado River Energy Distributors..... Leslie James
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Tri County Water Mike Berry*, Kathleen Margetts, Richard Margetts (Project
7)
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
City of Grand Junction..... Terry Franklin, Greg Trainor
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, Forest Zerbe*, Jesse Kirthorpt*, Peter Dennett*, Will Crim, Matt
 Salava, Spencer Green, 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
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*,
 Gary McDermott, 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*, and Rick Vinton*
Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

August 26, 2004

Participation: This meeting was held at the National Park Service's Visitor Center on 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 an 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: Inflows to Blue Mesa remained below average during the period. April-July inflow was 422,000 acre-feet; average inflow is 710,000. This year's inflow would be expected to be exceeded in 90 percent of years. Black Canyon flows were reduced to a little above 300 cfs minimum last winter and began increasing in mid-May. Canyon flows peaked around 750 cfs in early July and were back to around 550 cfs in late August. Operations through the period were controlled by 2 factors: the need to conserve water and recover from the prolonged drought and the need to maintain river flows downstream from the Redlands Diversion Dam for endangered fish.

August-January 2004-2005 Operations: Flows are projected to gradually be reduced and should fall to around 350 cfs by mid-October. While next year's water conditions cannot be predicted

with great accuracy, Reclamation's 24-Month Study assumes that Blue Mesa inflow next year will be around 78 percent of normal; Blue Mesa will probably fill next summer if this inflow materializes.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife discussed conducting electro fishing in the Ute Park Area the first week of October or last week of September and would prefer flows in the 300-400 cfs range. At the time of the meeting, the work was most likely to occur Oct 5th thru 8th; scheduling has been made difficult because of the uncertainties in timing of Crystal testing (discussed below). **(As of September 8, the electrofishing has been cancelled for 2004)**

Maintenance Activities:

Repairs at Crystal Dam powerplant need to be tested before power production can resume. The testing was projected to most likely occur sometime between September 15th and early October.

The powerplant testing flows needed range from 300 to 2,300 cfs, with rapid changes between flow levels. Reclamation has prepared 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 theoretically range between 400 and 1,600 cfs during the test; however the bypass outlets will be used to minimize fluctuations during the testing. When dates are more certain, Reclamation will contact the BLM and NPS and other interested parties.

Black Canyon Water Rights:

As background, 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.

In December 2003, the application to appropriate the state instream flow for spring and shoulder flows was filed. The opposition statement period ends February 27th. 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 was published in May. Reclamation indicated that there were internal discussions on the best way to proceed with this activity and that we hoped progress could resume in the early fall.

Several organizations—such as the Colorado River Water Conservation District and High Country Citizens--expressed concern with the delays and recommended the EIS process resume and be an open public process.

For further information, contact Justyn Hock at 970-248-0625 or write aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

National Park Service –Reported that water sampling has continued for 15 years at Curecanti. Based on recent sampling, NPS believes segments of waterways meet the criteria for “outstanding waters” and NPS plans on pursuing designation through state of Colorado this fall. There were several questions on what such a designation would accomplish and who or what would it affect. For further information contact Matt Malick, NPS, at 970-641-2337.

Colorado Division of Wildlife- Gunnison Gorge fisheries are doing well with excellent brown trout populations and improvements in rainbow populations. CDOW plans on stocking additional rainbow trout this fall in the Gorge. Kokanee have begun moving upstream.

Colorado River Water Conservation District- Concerned with seeming halt in progress on Aspinall EIS; very supportive of eventual Programmatic Biological Opinion to give ESA coverage to basin water users.

Bureau of Land Management-Gunnison Gorge RMP/FEIS Management Plan on hold pending court challenges.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy District-Augmentation water is being sold under third party 40-year contracts.

Tri-County-Ridgway was within 1-2 feet of filling this spring. Inflow has held up well in the Uncompahgre Basin this spring and summer.

Redlands – Construction of fish screen on Redlands Canal will begin November 1. There will

be no power diversions this winter. Concerned with accuracy of “below Redlands” gage--- believes gage may have reported higher flows than actually were occurring during some of this years low water periods.

Sierra Club/High Country Citizens – Initiating Coal Creek Water Coalition (tributary of Slate River) watershed management plan. Has appealed BLM’s Gunnison Gorge Management Plan because it did not recommend Wild & Scenic River status. Concerned that states are not developing management plans to address significant long-term droughts.

Western Area Power Administration – Concerned about using bypass flows for ramping to reduce impacts to fisheries (Ramping for Crystal tests this fall is pretty minor so WAPA not opposing in this instance). In better water years, WAPA would encourage CDOW to do monitoring studies over weekends to reduce power impacts. Makes no difference this year due to hydrologic conditions.

Colorado Water Resources –Mainstem Gunnison and Uncompahgre were in good shape this summer, considering the dry conditions. However, some of upstream tributaries such as Slate and Tomichi are showing impacts of reduced groundwater due to the prolonged drought.

Trout Unlimited – Encourages Reclamation to plan Crystal powerplant testing so as not to interfere with CDOW fish sampling. Working with BLM on boat access in Austin area.

Fish and Wildlife Service – This year 5 pikeminnow and 3 razorbacks have used fish ladder— one of the pikeminnow had been previously tagged in the Green River. Overall 60,000 native fish including 77 endangered fish have used the lateral since 1996. There was a coal train derailment this June during a period of low flows. A pikeminnow died in the fish ladder at the time but it is not known if this was related to the coal spill. Larval sampling continued in 2004; in 2003 7 larval razorbacks were collected showing some reproduction in the Gunnison. Approximately 1,200 6-10” pikeminnow were stocked in the Gunnison this year.

Mike Gross – Aspinall EIS and PBO are important and he is concerned with delays. Gunnison River operations were good this year as many needs were met---can be attributed to providing water to downstream seniors as called for in Aspinall decrees.

Gunnison Basin Power – Encourages placing information on websites to keep people updated on Gunnison River information.

Next Meeting: **The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Thursday January 20th in Montrose at the Pavillon.**