

WCN-SMcCall  
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our April 20, 2006 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held at Reclamation's office in Grand Junction. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

- Runoff forecasts are around 94 percent of average for Blue Mesa Reservoir and the reservoir is projected to fill this year.

- Black Canyon flows should be around 1,000 to 1,200 cubic-feet per second (cfs) this summer based on present snowpack conditions---as always it should be remembered that snowpack conditions can change prior to runoff and if the forecast decreases, flows in the Black Canyon may decrease.

-Overall reservoirs in the Gunnison Basin have good carryover storage and should fill this year.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or summaries, please let us know. The next operation meeting will be on Thursday, August 24<sup>th</sup> at 1 p.m. at the National Park Service Elk Creek Visitors Center on Blue Mesa. 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-436, 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, TStroh, JHock (ea w/ encl)

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage

Distribution List –  
April 20 2006 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** ..... James Shea, 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  
**Colorado River Water Conservation District** .....Dave Kanzer\*, Don Meyer, Eric Kuhn, Bill Trampe,  
David Halford, Ray Tenney  
**Ridgway Guide Service**.....Tim Peterson  
**Self** .....George Sheldon, Bo Gates, Marlene Zanatell, Jim Cochran, Jim  
Hokit  
**Colorado River Energy Distributors**.....Leslie James  
**North Fork Water Conservancy District** ..... Tom Alvey  
**Tri County Water** .....Mike Berry, Ion Spor\*, 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, Olen Lund  
**Delta County**.....Duane Freeman  
**City of Delta**.....Dales Hukle, Barry Bullard, Richard Sales, Wilma Ervin  
**Delta County Emergency Management**.....Rob Fiedler\*  
**Gunnison County Commissioners** ..... Hap Channell, Paula Swenson, Jim Starr  
**Colorado Department of Agriculture**..... Jim Miller  
**Colorado Division of Water Resources** ..... Wayne Schieldt\*, Frank Kugel, Richard Rozman  
**Colorado Division of Wildlife** Mike Japhet\*, Daniel Brauch, Sherman Hebein, Dan Kowalski\*, David Graf,  
Ryan Swygan, Jay Skinner, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson, Mark Uppendahl  
**Colorado Water Conservation Board** Randy Seaholm, Ray Alvarado, Michelle Garrison\*, Rick Brown,  
Steve Miller

**Wyoming State Engineers Office**..... John Shields  
**Congressman John Salazar** .....Richard Baca  
**Senator Wayne Allard** .....Derek Wagner  
**Senator Ken Salazar** ..... Trudy Kareus, Mary Beth Buescher  
**Army Corps of Engineers**..... Ken Jacobson  
**Bureau of Land Management** ..... Dennis Murphy, Jim Ferguson, Roy Smith, Rooster Barnhart, Karen Tucker, John Arkins\*, Forest Zerbe, Jesse Kirthorp, Peter Dennett, Julie Stotler  
**Fish and Wildlife Service**..... Al Pfister, Chuck McAda, Patty Gelatt\*, George Smith\*  
**National Park Service** ..... Bill Wellman, Ken Stahlnecker\*, Matt Malick, Mark Wondzell, Melissa Trammell\*, Michael Dale\*, Bill Johnson, DanGude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee, Norm Henderson  
**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\*, Jennifer Turnbull\*  
**Bureau of Reclamation**...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer, Ed Warner\*, Steve McCall\*, Coll Stanton\*, Don Phillips\*, Dick Girvan, David Steinmark\*, Ted Dunn, Dan Crabtree\*, Chris Cutler\*, Terry Stroh\*, 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  
**Colorado U/CADSWES**.....Edie Zagona, Satish Regonda,

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting  
April 20, 2006

**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 specific operations for the Aspinall Unit and for the 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 2006 operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs for 2006; and potential operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable runoff forecasts.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. Field studies leading to flow recommendations (Fish and Wildlife Service Flow Recommendations) to help recover downstream endangered fish and studies 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 published, and an Aspinall Operations EIS has been initiated to evaluate alternative operations to help meet these recommendations. 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.

**Climate/Snow Coverage Reports:**

Brian Avery of the National Weather Service gave an overview of conditions. No major flooding is predicted in western Colorado this spring. Short term forecasts for the rest of April call for above normal precipitation and temperature. May through July conditions are anticipated to be warmer and drier.

Michelle Garrison with the Colorado Water Conservation Board reported on programs to estimate snow cover using satellite and other resources. As this work is refined, this program could improve forecasting and flood control planning. April 16 results show snow pack

generally less than in 2005, with less water content upstream from the Aspinall Unit. Information on this program can be found at:

[www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/water/rsvrs/mtgs/amcurrnt.html](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/water/rsvrs/mtgs/amcurrnt.html)

## **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 2006 Operations:

Unit releases were around 500-700 cfs prior to the opening of the Gunnison Tunnel. Releases were dropped to around 300 cfs for a week in February to assist the BLM in crossing the river to plug an abandoned well near Austin. By April 17, releases were 1500 cfs with the Gunnison Tunnel diverting 950 cfs.

Based on January 1 snow conditions, the forecasted runoff into Blue Mesa was approximately 105 percent (765,000 af): but by April 15<sup>th</sup> this had dropped to 675,000 af or 94 percent of the 1971-2000 average. This compares to 770,000 af on April 15<sup>th</sup> in 2005. These forecasts are preliminary and can change due to late April and May weather conditions.

A preliminary operation proposal was presented by Reclamation that showed Crystal releases increasing beginning in April and leveling off around 2,200 cfs through the summer. This will result in flows in the Black Canyon/Gunnison Gorge of 1,000-1,200 cfs during the summer and filling Blue Mesa with the current forecasted inflow. If the forecast decreases, flows in the Black Canyon will most likely decrease.

At the present time a spring peak is not predicted; however, there is a chance that a bypass of the Crystal powerplant may be necessary resulting in Black Canyon flows of 2-3,000 cfs for a short period.

Input was requested from those in attendance concerning operations:

- The Colorado Division of Wildlife requested flows in the 550-600 cfs range during the last week of September to facilitate fishery inventories in the Gunnison Gorge.
- The National Park Service would like to accomplish vegetation monitoring the week of July 17<sup>th</sup> and would prefer flows in the 500-600 cfs range to allow river crossings. WAPA has some concerns with this because of the high power demand in July. The BLM did not anticipate significant recreation impacts with the request. Reclamation will further evaluate this request.
  
- The Colorado Division of Wildlife will be spawning rainbow trout between Crystal and

the Gunnison Tunnel Diversion Dam between April 27 and May 11 and would like to be notified in advance of significant flow changes.

### **Forecasting Presentation:**

Satish Regonda, a graduate student at Colorado University, made a presentation on a new method for forecasting spring runoff. Historically, January forecasts are not very accurate. New methods of incorporating large scale climatic patterns into the forecast are being investigated. For electronic copies of presentation contact [CCutler@uc.usbr.gov](mailto:CCutler@uc.usbr.gov).

### **Gunnison Basin Programmatic Biological Opinion:**

The Upper Colorado River Recovery Program held meetings to discuss a PBO. It is generally agreed that a PBO would have to follow the Aspinall EIS since the selected EIS plan would be a significant part of the PBO. Tom Pitts will be working with water users to explain aspects of the PBO and to develop ideas on coordinating PBO/EIS activities.

### **Gunnison Basin Reservoir Report:**

Reclamation reservoirs in the Gunnison Basin are expected to fill this year. Ridgway should spill in mid-May as should Paonia and Fruitgrowers. Reclamation's website has been updated to include more reservoir and river flow information. See: [www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/).

### **Aspinall Unit EIS:**

The EIS is being prepared to evaluate a range of alternatives to help meet endangered fish flow recommendations while continuing to meet Aspinall Unit purposes. Flow Recommendations have been developed by the Recovery Program for endangered fish habitat downstream from Delta. Progress is being made on developing hydrology models to analyze the alternatives. See: [www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/).

Cooperating agency meetings are open to the public to attend and observe. Opportunity for public questions and comments is provided at the meetings. The next meetings will be on April 20<sup>th</sup> at 10 a.m. and on June 1 at 10 a.m., both in Reclamation's Grand Junction office---contact [aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov](mailto:aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov) for information.

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

**National Park Service** –The NPS will be doing a lot of maintenance on parking areas/boat ramps this summer. Concerning Black Canyon water right, oral arguments are now scheduled for June 29<sup>th</sup> in Denver.

**Reclamation** – No unusual maintenance is planned for this summer. The importance of using the Unit's "Black Start" capability to restart the regional power system was explained.

**Colorado Division of Wildlife** - Last week 2.7 million kokanee were released from the Roaring Judy Hatchery to Blue Mesa via the Gunnison River. During April and May, Blue Mesa lake trout populations will be studied to compare to similar data collected in 2002.

**Colorado River Water Conservation District** - The District is participating in the Aspinall EIS process and is taking the lead in developing a community based alternative. If interested in this alternative, contact Dave Kanzer – [dkanzer@crwcd.org](mailto:dkanzer@crwcd.org)

**Fish and Wildlife Service** – The Service will sample the Gunnison River for adult and larval endangered fish in 2006 and will continue razorback sucker stocking. Redlands fish ladder will open the week of April 24 and the Redlands Canal fish screen is operating.

**State Engineer:** So far water conditions for 2006 are looking good. Grand Mesa and other reservoirs had good carryover of water storage and should fill this spring.

**Colorado Water Conservation Board** – The Board is working on the Aspinall EIS and on the EIS to evaluate Colorado River shortage criteria and coordinated operations between Lakes Mead and Powell. See the Board's website for further information.

**Uncompahgre Valley Water Users** – Tunnel and ditches have been filled. Working with Reclamation and EPA on lateral piping and canal lining. Also serving on the Gunnison Basin Roundtable---the roundtable has shown the benefit of getting diverse stakeholders in the basin together.

**Next Meeting: The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Thursday August 24 at the National Park Service Elk Creek Visitor Center on Blue Mesa Reservoir.**