

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
August 28, 2008

Participation: This meeting was held at the Elk Creek Visitors Center on Blue Mesa Reservoir. Attendees are noted on the distribution list located at the end of this document. This document and meeting handouts can be found at <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/water/rsvrs/mtgs/amcurrnt.html>

Purpose of Meeting: The purpose of operation meetings-- held in January, April, and August-- is to gather to help determine 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, hydropower and flood control needs, existing water rights, minimum instream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flow needs for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, 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 2008 operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs for the remainder of 2008; and potential operation plans under probable maximum, most probable, and probable minimum runoff forecasts for the future.

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 have been completed for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

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.

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-August 2008 Operations:

Unit releases were around 1,200 cfs on January 1 and were increased to around 1,800 cfs in January and February in response to the increasing snowpack to avoid the need to bypass power plants later in the year.

In March Reclamation conducted sonar and dive inspections of the Crystal Dam stilling basin. This required ceasing releases for up to 3 hours to conduct the work. Inspections occurred on March 6 and March 18 and 19. Water was maintained downstream by regulating releases from the pool upstream of the Gunnison Tunnel Diversion Dam. Releases were ramped during the inspections to protect the fishery and ramping rates were adjusted based on observations during the initial inspection.

Blue Mesa inflow forecasts in early January were above average at 780,000 af; increased to 1,060,000 in March and 1,120,000 in June. Actual inflow ended up at 1,006,000 af, which is considered a moderately wet type year in terms of inflow. Overall, actual inflow was 114,000 af less than expected and Blue Mesa did not fill. Blue Mesa contained 765,000 af at the end of July; the reservoir was short about 67,000 af from filling which amounts to a little over 7 feet in elevation.

In late March and into April releases were increased and bypasses at Crystal began. Releases averaged over 5,000 cfs in May and nearly 4,000 cfs in June. By July, releases were down to the 2,100 cfs range. Daily flows peaked at 7,200 cfs in the Black Canyon 14,000 cfs at Delta, and 15,600 cfs at Whitewater.

For the remainder of the year, Crystal releases will decline to the 1,200-1,500 cfs range. There are no special maintenance activities planned that might affect river flows.

Input was requested from those in attendance concerning 2008 operations:

The CDOW requested flows in the 700-1,000 cfs range through the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge October 7-10 for the annual trout inventory. This year's inventory is important to determine effects of low flows during the Crystal inspection and of higher spring flows. Similar flows would assist planned stocking later in October and November.

Other Reservoirs:

Crawford, Fruitgrowers, Paonia, Silver Jack, Taylor Park and Ridgway filled this year; Taylor Park was short ___ af from filling.

Forecasts: The Natural Resources Conservation Service made a presentation on development of inflow forecasts. NRCS and the National Weather Service work together to produce the official forecasts (see www.cbrfc.noaa.gov). Presentation can be viewed at: <ftp://ftp.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/pub/outgoing/BlueMesaInflowErrorV2forprinter.ppt>. Forecasts are based on snow/water/reservoir conditions, weather patterns, and comparisons with historical data. Many variables affect the forecast and the actual inflow and it is not surprising that actual

inflows are more or less than forecasts. Errors of 15-20% can be expected in May when many operation decisions are made. In recent years forecasts have been high and spring precipitation has been lower than average. The fall of 2007 was dry and soil moisture conditions may have been a factor in 2008 forecast errors.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Colorado Division of Wildlife – Surveyed the Gunnison River downstream from Escalante Creek this summer. There is an excellent native fish community. Reported 7 razorbacks and 2 bonytail. Bonytail probably came out of the Craig backwater pond where they had been stocked. Spring Aspinall operations were a good balance for the tailwater fishery and endangered fish downstream. High water slowed warming of the river and set back cycles of fish and insects. Appreciated spring operations and communication.

Colorado Water Conservation Board – Continuing work on reserved right. Reviewing Preliminary Draft EIS. Working on Compact issues. State of Arizona wants to divert water from Lake Powell and call it lower basin water.

Bureau of Land Management: Stonefly hatch was delayed due to the high water; was one of the most amazing hatches seen; lots of guided fishing trips cancelled due to high water—use down by approximately 1/3. Conditions were dangerous at peak flows but no serious injuries reported.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservation District: Taylor operation group has been balancing needs of users. Early high releases to avoid spills caused some problems with filling reservoir as did releases for rafting. Some negative feedback from irrigators who must possibly get in the river to push up diversion dams. Contacted NRCS to look for additional Snotel sites. Looking for Snotel partners.

Colorado State Engineer: No major flood/erosion problems and water right calls delayed because of good flows.

Tri-County: Inflow was 126% of average; reservoir filled on July 1. Irrigation demands will start to decrease soon. Winter minimums will probably be in 45-50 cfs range.

Colorado River Water Conservation District: Working on Aspinall EIS and Black Canyon Right. Looking forward to successful completion. Tom Alvey will be new director from Delta County.

High Country Citizens/Sierra Club: Satisfied with the Black Canyon Water Right. Paying close attention to Aspinall EIS. Working on Gunnison Basin Roundtable projections of non-consumptive water needs and on several water quality issues.

Western Area Power: There have been significant maintenance problems across the west this summer with major transformers down in New Mexico and Montana. Steady flows planned at

Glenn Canyon this fall (September and October) so Blue Mesa and Morrow Point peaking will be very important.

North Fork Water: Has been good water year; doing repair work on Fire Mountain Canal.

Gunnison Basin Power: In future water will be more and more important and shortages loom. In our area, better forecasting would help deal with this.

National Park Service: NPS had requested flows of 10,000 cfs in Black Canyon. Peaks did reach 7,300 cfs. Should be noted that 10,000 cfs does twice as much channel maintenance as 7,000 cfs. Opening of Morrow Point boat tour delayed with high Blue Mesa releases but will extend season to mitigate for early lost revenue. Visitation down a bit, probably due to gas prices, but folks pleased with their experience. Have active mussel prevention program at Blue Mesa.

NOAA: Unveiling a new forecast verification web site.
<http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/westernwater/map.php?map=wsup>

NRCS: Looked at potential Snotel sites. Working with Upper Gunnison to facilitate new installation. More soil moisture data may be helpful.

Trout Unlimited: Communication was good this spring; appreciated operation; in general recommend peak flows in May as opposed to June.

Fish and Wildlife Service: 3,000 razorbacks were stocked in the river near Delta this year. 1 razorback has used fish ladder so far this year. Recovery Program did peak and low flow aerial photography on the Gunnison this year.

Aspinall Operations 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 and generally call for higher spring flows. Two basic types of alternatives are being looked at: 1) using water in excess of that needed to fill Blue Mesa and meet other purposes to create a spring peak and 2) dependent on type of water year, attempt to meet specific flow targets at the Whitewater gage on the lower Gunnison. Significant issues in the EIS relate to use of storage water for spring peaks, flood control, hydropower effects, effects on trout fishery and recreation, and resolution of Black Canyon reserved right. Preliminary draft of EIS is being reviewed by cooperating agencies and summary impacts were handed out at the operations meeting. See: www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao/; for information---select "Aspinall Unit Operations EIS" under the "General" heading. Contact aspinalleis@uc.usbr.gov for information.

Next Meeting: The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m., Thursday, January 22 in Montrose. Exact location to be decided.

Distribution List –
August 28, 2008 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Daily Sentinel..... Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan
Delta County Independent Bob Borchardt
Gunnison Country Times Michelle Burkhart, Will Shoemaker*, Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel
Montrose Daily Press Jason Monroe, Lisa Hnyh*, 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, Al DeGrange
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, Marshall Pendergrass*,
Matt Mayer, Mac Cunningham
Western Colorado Congress Randy See, Fred Wetlaufer
Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Ridgway Guide Service..... Tim Peterson
Black Canyon Anglers..... Richard Dudginski
Self Curt Treichel, Lynn Johnson*, George Sheldon, Bo Gates, Marlene
Zanatell, Jim Cochran, Jim Hokit, Richard Girvan, Joe Waggoner*
Colorado River Energy Distributors..... Leslie James, Kent Holsinger
Colorado River Water Conservation District Dave Kanzer*, Don Meyer, Jim Pokrandt*, Eric
Kuhn, Bill Trampe, David Halford, Ray Tenney
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey*
Tri County Water Mike Berry*, Ion Spor, Kathleen
Margetts
Project 7 Richard
Margetts
Redlands Water and Power Company Charles Mitisek, Mike Gross
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association..... Marc Catlin
Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland
Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District John McClow*, Frank Kugel*, Greg Peterson,
Kathleen Curry, Mark Schumacher, Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel*, Jim Slattery, Ken Spann
City of Grand Junction..... Terry Franklin, Rick Bukus, Greg Trainor
Delta County Commissioners..... Jan McCracken, Wayne Wolf, Olen Lund
Delta County..... Duane Freeman
City of Delta..... Lanny Sloan*, Steve Glammeyer*, Barry Bullard, Jim
Brown, Wilma Ervin
Delta County Emergency Management..... Rob Fiedler
Mesa County Emergency Management..... Chadd Searcy
Gunnison County Commissioners Hap Channell, Paula Swenson, Jim Starr

Gunnison County Emergency ManagementScott Morrill
Colorado Department of Agriculture..... Jim Miller
Colorado Division of Water Resources Wayne Schieldt*, Pat McDermott, Bob Hurford*, 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
Colorado Department Emergency ManagementSteve Denney*
Wyoming State Engineers Office..... John Shields
Congressman John SalazarRichard Baca
Senator Wayne AllardDerek Wagner
Senator Ken Salazar Trudy Kareus, Mary Beth Buescher
Army Corps of Engineers..... Ken Jacobson
Bureau of Land ManagementDennis Murphy, Roy Smith, Rooster Barnhart*, Karen Tucker, Edd Rranz*, Forest Zerbe, Jesse Kirthorp, Peter Dennett, Julie Stotler, Ryan Mathis
Fish and Wildlife Service.....Al Pfister, Chuck McAda, Patty Gelatt*
National Park ServiceConnie Rudd*, Ken Stahlnecker*, Dave Roberts, Matt Malick, Mark Wondzell, Melissa Trammell, Michael Dale* Bill Johnson, DanGude Bockus, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee, Norm Henderson
National Weather Service..... Bryon Lawrence*, Brenda Alcorn, Bill Reed, Aldis Strautins
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration..... Andrea Ray, Robert Webb, Klaus Weickmann, Brad Udall
NRCS..... Tom Pagano*,Mike Gillespie*, John Scott*
U.S. Geological Survey..... Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller, Gerhard Kuhn, Bob Boulgarz, Joe Sullivan, Steve Anders, Kirby Wynn, Trisha Solberg
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, Jennifer Turnbull*, Chris Brown
Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Don Phillips*, Joe Austin, David Steinmark, Grant Watson, Ted Dunn*, Dan Crabtree*, Chris Cutler, Terry Stroh, Jane Blair*, Max Striker, Paul Davidson*, Justyn Hock, Erik Knight*, Nancy Coulam, Heather Patno, Dennis Kubly, Dave Harpman, Dawn Munger, Katrina Grantz*, Mark Neely*, Rick Vinton
Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy
Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert
Colorado U/CADSWES.....Edie Zagona, Satish Regonda
University of Colorado..... Christina Alford
Colorado Basin River Forecast Center..... Brenda Alcorn, John Lhotak*