

SMcCall-ND  
ENV-4.00  
PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our April 18, 1996, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The next meeting will be in Grand Junction on August 22, beginning at 10:30 a.m.

Highlights of the recent meeting include:

-- The snowmelt inflow forecast increased significantly between our January and April meeting; and as of April 1, runoff into the reservoirs is projected to be 124 percent of normal this year. Blue Mesa Reservoir is expected to fill this year. Flooding of the magnitude seen in 1995 is not anticipated at the present time along the Gunnison River.

-- Peak flows through the Gunnison Gorge should be between 3,000 and 4,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) and should occur between mid-May and the first week of June. May flows through the Gorge are expected to average 3,000 cfs, June 2,800 cfs, July-September 900 cfs, and October-November 1,500 cfs.

-- A work group reported on "accounting" for storage water releases, and Randy Seaholm will revise issues and mail them for review by interested parties.

If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

Ed Warner  
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure

cc: Chief, Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100, 1820 South Rio Grande Avenue, Montrose CO  
81401

Regional Solicitors Office, Attention: Scott Loveless, 125 South State Street, Room 6201, Salt  
Lake City UT 84138

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT  
Attention: UC-288, UC-297, UC-600, UC-320  
(ea w/copy of encl)

bc: DMutz, EWarner, CStanton, MSteves, LWest, SMcCall, JWright  
(ea w/copy of encl)

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Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting  
April 18, 1996

The purpose of these meetings, held three times per year, is to plan the operations for the Aspinall Unit (Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal Reservoirs). Participants in the meeting included representatives of the Colorado River Water Conservation District, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado State Engineer, Bureau of Land Management, Trout Unlimited, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, National Weather Service, Western Area Power Administration, Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association, Upper Colorado River Commission, High Country Citizens Alliance, Sierra Club, and Reclamation. Individual participants are on the attached distribution list. If you have any corrections for, or questions about, this summary or need a copy of handouts, please call Steve McCall at (970) 248-0638.

January-April 1996 Operation: During this period the snowfall increased significantly, and runoff into the Aspinall Unit is now estimated at 124 percent. Releases from Crystal Reservoir increased from around 1,000 cfs to 2,000 cfs. The December 31 target water elevation for Blue Mesa Reservoir was reached on January 3. No major problems occurred during this period. Flows were lowered for a short period to 600 cfs in March to assist in repairs at the Gunnison Tunnel Diversion Dam.

Proposed April-August Operation: Brad Vickers projected a map for the Colorado River Basin that shows, unlike last year, snowpack is concentrated in the north. For the Gunnison Basin, including the North Fork basin, snowpack is at 108 percent of average. Runoff into the Aspinall Unit is projected at 124 percent under most probable conditions. Planned operation printouts and graphs for Blue Mesa content, Crystal Reservoir releases, and streamflows below the Gunnison Tunnel were discussed for the minimum, most, and maximum probable water supply forecasts. The operating plan is based on a most probable runoff forecast.

Blue Mesa Reservoir is expected to fill around July 1. Crystal Reservoir will probably spill, which is not unusual, but the need to bypass around powerplants at Blue Mesa and Morrow Point Dams is not expected to occur. Flows through the Gunnison Gorge will be increased to 1,500 - 2,000 beginning the week of April 22. Average monthly flows through the Gunnison Gorge are estimated as follows: May 3,000 cfs; June 2,800 cfs; July-September 900 cfs; October-November 1,500 cfs. Peak flows in the Gunnison Gorge will be up to 4,000 cfs and should occur in the mid-May to early June period depending on weather conditions.

Some errors in certain handout sheets were noted. These sheets should be corrected:

- Graph of Blue Mesa EOM Content and elevation; change x-axis to read October 1995 - September 1997

- Graph of Expected Flow Below Tunnel; change x-axis to read October 1995 - September 1997

#### Special Flow Requests:

Previously, DOW requested 600 cfs from September 23 to 26 for their annual fish census. The FWS reported that planned operations would provide flows needed for their study activities on endangered fish.

#### Agency/Organization Activities and Comments

**Colorado River Water Conservation District** - Mike Gross requested status of the NPS Contract effort. The contract effort is being coordinated with planning for the Aspinall Unit Biological Opinion which is due in 1998. The goal is to resolve endangered fish issues and the NPS (Black Canyon National Monument) reserved water right issues at the same time.

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District** - Tyler Martineau expressed concern that the present 300 cfs minimum instream flow right in the Gunnison Gorge is also often considered the same as the NPS reserved water right, and this is not the case.

**National Park Service** - The NPS is generally satisfied with the proposed operation. Some concern with the increase projected in October and November, because a natural system would have declining flows in this period. NPS will coordinate tour boat opening on Morrow Point with WAPA. There is no specific data collection efforts planned for the Monument this year. NPS will invite one or two of their researchers to make presentations at the August meeting.

**Colorado Division of Wildlife** - Sherman Hebein reported on creel census work at Blue Mesa. Rainbow trout harvest was up in 1995, but still well below desired levels. Harvest was 33,000 fish compared to a goal of 100,000 fish. The size of kokanee salmon caught has increased. This is good for anglers but probably means there are fewer kokanee in the reservoir. Kokanee fry will be released from Roaring Judy hatchery on April 19; release numbers have been increased. Reclamation and the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users will increase releases from Taylor Park Reservoir to help the salmon reach Blue Mesa Reservoir. The operation criteria of filling Blue Mesa in July has been beneficial to anglers.

**Western Area Power Administration** - Jeff suggests the Morrow Point tour boat operations continue to be coordinated between WAPA and NPS, and Morrow Point reservoir elevation will be raised to be ready for opening day of the tour boat (around May 15).

**Colorado Water Conservation Board** - Randy Seaholm reported that Senator Campbell has drafted new legislation to redesignate the Black Canyon National Monument as a National Park, and to create the Curecanti National Recreation Area and the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area.

**Fish and Wildlife Service** - Fieldwork this year will concentrate on monitoring the Redlands Fish Passage. All fish using the passage will be counted during the initial monitoring. A consultant from the University of Colorado will be studying channel morphology this summer. The proposed operations for the Aspinall Unit will satisfy FWS needs for endangered fish studies and preparation of the Aspinall Unit biological opinion. A draft report on flow needs downstream from the Redlands Diversion will be available in May 1996.

**Bureau of Reclamation** - Reported that Redlands Fish Passage is nearing completion. It was noted that operation information is now available on the Internet.

**Uncompahgre Valley Water Users** - Jim Hokit reported that repairs to the diversion dam have been completed. UVWUA will increase releases from Taylor Park on April 19 to help kokanee salmon reach Blue Mesa. UVWUA also asked if test flows at Glen Canyon and Flaming Gorge will affect Aspinall operations. Brad Vickers said he foresees no effect.

#### Water Accounting

Randy Seaholm of the CWCB is leading a group working on accounting of releases from the Aspinall Unit. The purpose of this is to update accounting procedures and eventually improve computation of deliveries to the Monument, and for other uses. Specific comments were received from the group on the draft "Aspinall Unit Accounting Issues" dated April 5, 1996:

- operation criteria should keep in mind minimum operation levels for boat ramps/docks on Blue Mesa.
- maintaining Blue Mesa Reservoirs elevations after filling for as long as possible in recreation season is a benefit to anglers.
- do not use a release category entitled "no specific purposes", because releases do meet authorized purposes.
- stress a small number of accounts, meeting many purposes.
- change ideal rafting flows to minimum rafting flows.
- items such as recreation flows and power releases could be moved from #4 to #3 on the list, or perhaps combine #'s 3 and 4.

Randy Seaholm will revise the accounting issues write-up and mail it out for review. This will be discussed further at the August meeting.

#### Matrix

Input on the flow matrix should be provided to Reclamation or NPS.

Next Meeting - August 22 in Grand Junction. The meeting will start at 10:30 a.m. rather than the normal time of 12:30. NPS will arrange to have one or two researchers present their findings on resources and flow needs in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument.

Distribution List - April 18, 1996 Aspinall Meeting  
 \*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

<b>Individuals</b> .....	Ruth Hutchins
<b>Argonne National Laboratory</b> .....	Ihor Hlohowskyj
<b>Club 20</b> .....	Greg Walcher
<b>Environmental Defense Fund</b> .....	Jim Martin
<b>Gunnison River Expeditions</b> .....	Hank Hotze Bo Gates
<b>High Country Citizens Alliance</b> .....	*Steve Glaser
<b>Trout Unlimited</b> .....	*Pat Oglesby
<b>Western Colorado Congress</b> .....	Fred Wetlaufer
<b>City of Grand Junction</b> .....	Greg Trainor
<b>Colorado River Water Conservation District</b> .....	*Mike Gross *Dave Kanzer
<b>North Fork Water Conservancy District</b> .....	Tom Alvey
<b>Redlands Water and Power Company</b> .....	Gregg Strong
<b>Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association</b> .....	*Jim Hokit Mark Catlin
<b>Upper Colorado River Commission</b> .....	*Clint Stevens
<b>Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District</b> .....	*Tyler Martineau
<b>Colorado Department of Agriculture</b> .....	Sally Schuff
<b>Colorado Division of Water Resources</b> .....	*Ken Knox Wayne Schieldt
<b>Colorado Division of Wildlife</b> .....	Rick Anderson Robert Caskey *Sherman Hebein Robert Towry
<b>Colorado Water Conservation Board</b> .....	Peter Evans, Gene Jencsok *Randy Seaholm
<b>Wyoming State Engineers Office</b> .....	John Shields
<b>Army Corps of Engineers</b> .....	Grady McNure
<b>Bureau of Land Management</b> .....	*John Arkins Allan Belt Roy Smith
<b>Fish and Wildlife Service</b> .....	John Hamill Reed Harris *Chuck McAda *Keith Rose *Terry Ireland George Smith Sam Williamson
<b>National Park Service</b> .....	*Chuck Pettee *Mark Wondzell *John Chapman *Myron Chase *Dave Roberts
<b>National Weather Service</b> .....	*Jim Pringle
<b>U.S. Geological Survey</b> .....	Paul von Guerard & *Bob Jenkins
<b>Western Area Power Administration</b> .....	*Gary Burton *Jeff Ackerman *Chris Brown Tony Morton