

WCN-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our January 21, 1999, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. Thank you to the Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service (NPS) for hosting this meeting in Montrose.

Highlights of the meeting include:

--The most probable inflow prediction to the Aspinall Unit, based on January 15 snow course information, was 72 percent of normal (this has increased to 85 percent on February 1).

--Average monthly flows planned for the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon National Monument and Gunnison Gorge are around 500 to 600 for February through May; 700 to 1,000 for June through September, and 1,000 for October through December. These initial plans will change as snowpack changes.

--The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and NPS requested a spring peak, and this will be discussed further at the April operation meeting when better information is available on the water supply.

--The NPS reviewed a concept for quantifying the Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument.

--The FWS hopes to have preliminary flow recommendations for endangered fish available in approximately May 1999.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or the summaries of the meeting, please let us know. The next scheduled operation meeting will be held on Thursday, April 15 at 12:30 at Reclamation's Office in Grand Junction. If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

Ed Warner
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure
Distribution (see attached list)

bc: Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100, CCI-400
1820 South Rio Grande Avenue, Montrose CO 81401

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

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT
Attention: UC-282 (Bob Adams), UC-298 (Paul Davidson), UC-600, UC-320
(ea w/encl)

WCN-CDeAngelis, DMutz, EWarner, SMcCall, JOzga, CStanton, LWest, KFogelquist,
MSteves, RStorbo, JWright
WCS-LTowne (ea w/encl)

WBR:SMcCall:rb:2/8/908:0638:aspmeet.smc

Distribution List - January 21, 1999 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse
City of Grand Junction Greg Trainor
Club 20 Shane Henry
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Daily Sentinel Dave Buchanan*
Environmental Defense Fund Jim Martin
Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark*
Gunnison Country Times Paul Wayne Foreman
Gunnison River Expeditions Hank Hotze, Bo Gates
Helton & Williamsen, P.C. Duane Helton*
High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club Steve Glazer*
Matt Owens Fly Company Matt Owens
KNFS Environmental Services (Trans Colorado Pipeline Project) Craig Meis
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby*
Western Colorado Congress Fred Wetlauffer
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District Mike Gross*, Dave Kanzer*, Ray Tenney
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Redlands Water and Power Company Gregg Strong*
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association Marc Catlin*, Jim Hokit*
Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland*
Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District Kathleen Klein*
Mark Schumacher, Dennis Steckel*, Ramon Reed
Delta County Commissioners Donna Ferganchick*, Jim Ventrello
Gunnison County Commissioners Marlene Zanetell*
Colorado Department of Agriculture Jim Miller
Colorado Division of Water Resources Wayne Schieldt
Colorado Division of Wildlife Daniel Brauch, Sherman Hebein*, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson
Colorado Water Conservation Board Randy Seaholm; Ray Alvarado*
Wyoming State Engineers Office John Shields
Congressman Scott McInnis Irene Green, Melissa Ippolito*
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Grady McNure
U.S. Bureau of Land Management Allan Belt, Dennis Murphy*, Roy Smith
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sue Moyer*, Terry Ireland, Chuck McAda*
Reed Harris, Henry Maddux, George Smith
U.S. National Park Service Bill Hansen*, Chuck Pettee, Sheridan Steele*, Mark Wondzell*
Myron Chase*; Ken Stahlnecker*
U.S. National Weather Service Eric Holloway, Mike Myers
U.S. National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Klaus Weickmann
U.S. Geological Survey Paul von Guerard*, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller
U.S. Western Area Power Administration Gary Burton; Margaret Matter
Jeff Ackerman, Kathy Crane, Ken Green*, Annette Falvo
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton*, Lorrie West*
Karen Fogelquist, John Ozga*, Russ Storbo*, LeAnn Towne
Bob Adams, Gary McDermott, Donald Phillips*, Richard Stodt
Arlo Allen, Paul Davidson*, Chris Karas

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
January 21, 1999

Participation: This meeting was held in Montrose at the BLM/NPS office. Attendees are noted on the distribution list.

Purpose of Meeting: The purpose of these 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 also used in Reclamation's development of an overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, including plans for Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and Navajo Units. Operation of the Aspinall Unit considers projected inflows to its reservoirs, flood control needs, existing water rights, minimum in stream 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 background data on projected inflows to the reservoirs; proposed operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable water supply forecasts; and snow course information.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. Field studies leading to flow recommendations to protect downstream endangered fish and to quantify a Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River National Monument have been completed. A 'Synthesis Report' that will include flow recommendations is now expected from the endangered fish Recovery Program in April 1999. 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.

August-December 1998 Operation: Actual runoff into Blue Mesa in 1998 was only 81 percent of normal. Between August and December, flows through the Gunnison Gorge were between 600 and 800 cfs, and the winter target elevation at Blue Mesa was reached as scheduled. Flows downstream from the Redlands Diversion remained above 300 cfs. Flows of 600 cfs were provided between September 29 and October 2 to help with the Colorado Division of Wildlife's annual fish survey.

Proposed January-August 1999 Operation: 1999 operations were discussed; these discussions were based on January 15 snowpack information and thus are very preliminary. The most probable inflow to the Aspinall Unit as of January 15 was 72%; 29% was minimum probable and 122% was maximum probable. Preliminary flow estimates for the Gunnison Gorge and Black Canyon Monument are 500 cfs February-May; 700-1000 cfs June-September; and 1,100 cfs October-December. Blue Mesa Reservoir is expected to fill. Under almost all conditions, the content of Blue Mesa is predicted to remain above 400,000 acre-feet at the end of December; meaning that flows above 300 cfs can be maintained downstream from Redlands Diversion Dam.

Discussion of Preliminary Operation Proposal: Reclamation's preliminary operation plan did not include a spring peak. Both the National Park Service (NPS) and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) would like to see a peak flow in May or June this year, with the FWS indicating that a portion of the 148,000 acre-feet of "endangered fish water" in Blue Mesa could be used for this purpose. A brief peak of 3,000 cfs through the Gunnison Gorge to coincide with North Fork peak flow was suggested. Development of a peak flow will be discussed in detail in the April operations meeting.

The question was asked why water wasn't saved between October and December 1998 for use in a peak this spring. The response was that water was needed to be released to reach the December 1998 target elevation in Blue Mesa to prevent upstream flooding from ice jams.

The Colorado River Water Conservation District suggested that, in addition to percent of normal, inflow predictions be presented in terms of the percentile the water year is predicted to be; i.e., inflow is

in upper 10% of years, lower 10%, etc. This would help coordinate with flow recommendations for endangered fish that often are related to this type of percentage.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife expressed concern that low August-October Blue Mesa Reservoir elevations would increase lake trout predation on kokanee salmon. Reducing flows in the Gunnison Gorge to 500 cfs late this winter should not harm brown trout reproduction significantly, but there would be concerns below 500 cfs.

In response to a question, it is believed that flows of 300 cfs would still be maintained downstream from the Redlands if Black Canyon flows dropped below 500 cfs this winter. The FWS would consider dropping flows below 300 cfs downstream from Redlands in the winter if it would facilitate a peak spring flow. From a biological standpoint, the 300 cfs flows are needed most in the summer/early fall.

Butch Clark asked the background for the Blue Mesa winter target elevation--it is generally agreed that a higher elevation target could help in operation flexibility. The target was developed to reduce upstream ice jams/floods around Gunnison. Reclamation agreed to provide more information on the background in the future. Gunnison County stated that upstream flooding is a concern as is bridge damage and human safety.

The Colorado Water Conservation Board suggested that Reclamation and FWS coordinate spring peak discussions before the April meeting. The FWS will furnish ideas on the spring peak to Reclamation in time to discuss at the April meeting.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife asked to be kept informed of April releases from Crystal Dam--stable flows then would help them in collection of rainbow trout in that reach. On April 16, a release of about 300 cfs from Taylor Park would help with the kokanee release from the Roaring Judy Hatchery--Reclamation will check on this as the snowpack forecast becomes more certain. The Division requested a flow of 600 cfs in the Gunnison Gorge from noon on September 28 until late on October 1 for the 1999 trout census.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

Colorado Division of Wildlife - Results of the fall 1998 fishery survey in the Gunnison Gorge show brown trout are doing well. Rainbow trout recruitment remains nil; only 2 older age classes of rainbow remain, thus the rainbow fishery will largely end in 2000. Brown trout recruitment remains adequate. There was a successful hatch of rainbow trout in the spring of 1998 but subsequent losses to whirling disease were almost total. Spring peaks may have some benefit in reducing the habitat of the tubifex worms, which are an intermediate host of the whirling disease organisms. In terms of water temperature, some initial thoughts are that long periods of 300 cfs flows could increase water temperatures and whirling disease organism concentrations in the water.

National Park Service - NPS has no special flow requests this year. Public meetings on the reserved right were held in December; a summary of comments will be sent out in February. NPS will continue to meet with any group to discuss the reserved right proposals (contact Mark Wondzell-970-249-1915). Operation of the tour boat on Morrow Point will be coordinated with Western Area Power Administration.

Fish and Wildlife Service - The FWS is continuing to work on the synthesis report, which will compile various research reports related to the Gunnison River and will include preliminary flow recommendations for endangered fish. In general, recommendations will call for spring peaks and minimum flows below the Redlands. Redlands flows will be very important in the June-August period but there may be more flexibility at other times of the year. In high water years, there will be a lot of flexibility, duration of the peak may be emphasized in these years rather than the height of the peak. Uncompahgre Valley Water Users asked if the 148,000 acre-feet was the correct number for

endangered fish storage. Reclamation answered that it was the correct number unless the analysis is reopened. In dry years, this number would share shortages as any water user would.

Bureau of Reclamation - The schedule for the voluntary EIS on endangered fish operations will be delayed due to the delay in the synthesis report. A major overhaul of Crystal power facilities is scheduled for 2001.

Colorado Water Conservation Board - The Board is tracking the reserved right discussions and will discuss in their January 27-28 meetings.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - The District pointed out that reserved right water and endangered fish water should be coordinated, but there will be differences in accounting and water right administration. NPS water cannot be protected downstream from the Monument. The District is tracking the reserved right issue and the synthesis report. Also, the District is working on the Upper Gunnison subordination agreement.

Sierra Club/High Country Citizens - Part of the "endangered fish water" in Blue Mesa is a result of the Dolores Project Section 7 consultation. Is this water protected down to Moab? There was some discussion on this question-one thought was that it was not protected until the Dolores confluence with the Colorado River. These organizations are working to coordinate environmental groups' response to the reserved water right proposal.

Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District - The District is reviewing the reserved water right proposal and will submit comments to the NPS. They filed some changes on their conditional water rights--contact the District for additional information.

Delta County - The county met with NPS and Reclamation to discuss the reserved water right proposal. Flooding is a concern in Delta County.

Western Area Power Administration - Western requested that the NPS keep them informed on the schedule for ending this year's use of the tour boat on Morrow Point.

Gunnison POWER - This group continued to urge distribution of information on Gunnison River water issues. Water quality is becoming a more important consideration.

Gunnison County - Gunnison County Commissioner requested additional time to review the implications of the reserved right proposal. They are cautiously optimistic and want to continue to assure protection of the 60,000 acre-feet subordination.

Redlands Water and Power - There is no special O& M scheduled this year.

Bureau of Land Management - In general, spring peaks would help BLM-managed resources in the Gunnison Gorge.

U.S. Geologic Survey - The survey has started a water quality study funded by Reclamation to determine potential effects of operation changes on water quality. Existing data will be reviewed, in stream standards tabulated, and relationships between flow and concentrations of water quality constituents determined. They will work with local governments that have discharge permits. An initial report is scheduled for March 1999.

Next Meeting - Scheduled for 12:30 on Thursday, **April 15**, at Reclamation's office in Grand Junction.