

WCG-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our April 22, 2003, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held in Grand Junction.

Highlights of the operation meeting include:

BSnow pack conditions are much better than in 2002, but are still below average, and drought concerns remain.

BProjected inflow to Blue Mesa as of April 15 was 500,000 acre feet or 72 percent of normal (March 1 was 520,000 acre-feet).

BBlue Mesa's live content on April 20 was around 300,000 acre-feet; this is considerably less than the live content one year ago. Thus, while inflow predictions are much higher than last year, storage is significantly less. Storage increased around 35,000 acre-feet through the winter.

BUnder the April 1st most probable forecast, Blue Mesa should reach around 580,000 acre-feet after the runoff; this is 30 feet below a full reservoir. Black Canyon flows should remain at 250 cfs in April and then increase to 300 cfs in early May and around 350 cfs before Memorial Day. July and August flows may be in the 600-700 cfs range with flows declining in the fall to around 400-500 cfs. This is preliminary information and will change if the forecast changes in response to snowmelt timing, or possibly if new arrangements are made to respond to senior water right calls downstream.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or the summaries of the meetings, please let us know. The next operation meeting will be held at the Elk Creek Visitor Center at Blue Mesa on August 21 1:00 p.m. If you have any questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure

bc: Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100 1820 South Rio Grande Avenue,
Montrose CO 81401 (w/encl)

John Bezdek, Office of Interior Solicitor, 1849 C St. NW, Mail Stop 6412,
Washington, D.C. 20240 (w/encl)

UC-400, UC-434, UC-438, UC-600, UC-700, UC-724, UC-725, (ea w/encl)

D-8510 (w/encl)

WCG-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, BUilenberg, SMcCall, JOzga, CStanton, EKnight,
MSteves, DCrabtree, JHock (ea w/ encl)

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage (ea w/encl)

WBR:SMcCall:rb:5/5/03:970 248-0638:Aspinall minutes april 22
Identical letter sent – see attached distribution list

Distribution List –April 22, 2003 Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Argonne National Laboratory..... John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
City of Grand Junction Terry Franklin *, Greg Trainor
Club 20..... Reeves Brown
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Daily Sentinel.....Erin McIntyre*, Gary Harmon, Dave Buchanan
Delta County Independent..... Bob Borchardt
Environmental Defense Fund..... Jim Martin
Gunnison Basin POWER..... Ralph (Butch) Clark, Ramon Reed
Gunnison Country Times..... Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel
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
Matt Owens Fly Company..... Matt Owens
Montrose Daily Press..... Caitlin Switzer
Trout Unlimited..... Pat Oglesby*, Melinda Kassen, Drew Peternell*, John Trammell*
Western Colorado Congress Fred Wetlaufer
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District Dave Kanzer*, Eric Kuhn, Bill Trampe, David Halford,
Ray Tenney
Colorado River Energy Distributors..... .Cliff
Barrett
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
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, Kathleen Curry*, Mark Schumacher,
Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel, Jim Slattery, Ken Spann
Delta County CommissionersJan McCracken, Wayne Wolf, Ted Hayden
Delta County.....Duane
Freeman
City of Delta..... Richard Sales, Wilma
Ervin
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*, 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 David Ludlan, Kelly Watson, Ann Martinez, Joy Peck
Senator Wayne Allard Beth Washburn, Derek Wagner
Senator Ben Nighthorse CampbellGeorge Rossman*
Army Corps of Engineers..... Ken Jacobson

Bureau of Land Management Allan Belt, Dennis Murphy, Jim Ferguson, Carl Bauer, Roy Smith, Rooster Barnhart*, Karen Tucker*, Will Crim*, Matt Salava*

Fish and Wildlife Service Rick Krueger, Al Pfister, Chuck McAda*, Patty Gelatt, Terry Ireland, George Smith

National Park Service Sheridan Steele, Myron Chase, Ken Stahlnecker, Mark Wondzell*, 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 Boulgar*

Land and Water Fund..... Bart Miller

Western Area Power Administration Shane Collins, Nancy Scheid, Clayton Palmer
Jeff Ackerman, Kathy Crane*, Ken Green, Annette Falvo, Ken Otto, Gary Burton; Margaret Matte

Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer, Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton*, John Ozga, Gary McDermott, Don Phillips*, Dick Girvan, David Steinmark, Ted Dunn, Dan Crabtree, Chris Cutler, Terry Stroh*, Arlo Allen, Jane Blair, Paul Davidson*, Tom Chart, Justyn Hock*, Erik Knight*

Interior Solicitors Office..... John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy

Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert

Xcel Energy..... Fred Eggleston*

Tri County WaterMike Berry, Kathleen Margetts*, Richard Margetts (Project 7)*

SelfGeorge Sheldon, Marlene Zanatell, Jim Cochran, Jim Hokit

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

April 22, 2003

Participation: This meeting was held at the Reclamation 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 an overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which includes 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 January-April 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 draft flow recommendations for endangered fish were also discussed. 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-April Operations: Reclamation in consultation with the CWCB, CDOW, FWS, and others decided to reduce Black Canyon flows below 300 cfs through this period to conserve storage in this severe drought. Approximately 35,000 acre-feet was stored over the winter due to the reduction. Reclamation's policy is to keep minimum flows of at least 300 cfs in the Black Canyon; however, there are provisions to lower this under severe drought conditions.

Under an agreement, Redlands did not operate their power plant this winter and therefore they did not place a call on the river. This has also facilitated storage at Blue Mesa and allowed some storage in other upstream reservoirs. It was reported that small reservoirs in the basin were able to store an

estimated 10,000 acre-feet.

April-August 2003 Operation: The April 1 inflow forecast (April-July runoff) to Blue Mesa is 510,000 af or 72 percent of average (average of last 30 years) under most probable conditions. Snow pack is around 80 percent and ranges from 95 percent to 60 percent at various Snotel sites in the basin. This inflow is considered to represent a “moderately dry year” and would be expected to be exceeded in 71 percent of the years. Under most probable conditions, Blue Mesa live content will reach approximately 580,000 af which is about 30 feet below full reservoir elevation. These numbers are preliminary and can change significantly before July.

Black Canyon flows are predicted to remain at 250 cfs through April, increase to 300 cfs in May, increase to 350 before Memorial Day, and then increase to 600-700 cfs in July and August. Fall flows around 400-500 cfs are predicted. These numbers may change in response to the timing of the runoff, endangered fish flow needs downstream from the Redlands Diversion, and potential water right calls.

The above numbers are calculated “without a Redlands call and with slightly above average Gunnison Tunnel demands”; if a call occurs or tunnel demands are greater, storage in Blue Mesa will be reduced and April-June Black Canyon flows increased.

Special Flow Requests: The Colorado Division of Wildlife will conduct electro fishing in the Ute Park Area between September 30 and October 3 and would like to see stable flows in the 300-600 cfs range. Western Area Power Administration previously requested that the tour boat not be launched until after Memorial Day. They would like Morrow Point kept at a low elevation to facilitate peaking from Blue Mesa in order to compensate for research (aerial photography) flows below Glen Canyon.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

NOAA – Brad Udall with the Western Water Assessment of NOAA described ongoing climate studies; hopes to gain practical information for uses such as reservoir inflow forecasting. He mentioned that the El Nino has largely dissipated. Long range forecasts call for above average temperatures with no clear predictions on precipitation. A conference on “Water, Climate, and Uncertainty” will be held June 11-13 at Colorado University. Contact is Doug Kenney at 303-492-1296 or Douglas.Kenney@Colorado.edu.

Congressional Representatives-Will listen to activities to keep updated on conditions in the basin.

Colorado Water Conservation Board- Reported that the water right filing for the Black Canyon will be discussed at the Board meeting in Meeker on May 19.

Division of Water Resources-No major river calls have occurred yet; may be calls later in the month.

Colorado Division of Wildlife-Stocked 3 million kokanee salmon into Blue Mesa in April. A new state record lake trout was caught in Blue Mesa this spring. In response to projected Black Canyon flows, CDOW urged that when flows do increase, we should try and not go back to a lower flow.

Storage in Blue Mesa will help the fishery in Blue Mesa and the recreational use; adequate flows downstream also help the fishery and associated recreation and economics. .

Colorado River Water Conservation District- Last winter's agreement allowed storage to occur in Blue Mesa and in other small reservoirs in the basin. There is an agreement to protect against calls through April. The District reminded the group that higher releases through the Black Canyon will reduce the possibilities of a downstream Redlands call.

Bureau of Land Management-Gunnison Gorge RMP/EIS is out for review; comment period ends in June. June is a high recreation use month in the Gunnison Gorge. Flows of 300 cfs are dangerous; a flow of 450 cfs would be much more desirable.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy District-Appreciates Uncompahgre Water Users decision to use storage early. Some of the Upper Gunnison ditches have opened. The District has purchased a small reservoir to use for augmentation; also working on using 1957 storage and canal rights. Working on temporary water sales for augmentation to protect users in 2003 from downstream calls.

Tri-County-Benefited from lower releases and no call this winter. Ridgway is 13,000 acre-feet short of filling at the present time but should fill during the runoff.

Fish and Wildlife Service – The revised flow recommendation report is undergoing a short internal review and then will go to the UCRIP Biology Committee. May be some disagreement with the revised recommendations; after the Biology Committee review, the report goes to the Management Committee. Fish ladder at Redlands will operate when there are flows of 100 cfs or more downstream from Redlands. If shortages predicted in Blue Mesa, will operate fish ladder and downstream migration corridor at lower flows.

Trout Unlimited – Will continue to follow the Black Canyon water right filings.

National Park Service – In response to questions, the NPS indicated that they believed the 300 cfs reserved water right would be subordinated to 1957. This stipulation has not been signed by Department of Justice yet. Boat ramps at Blue Mesa should be operable this year. Sheridan Steele will be leaving for a new assignment; a temporary superintendent will be on detail at Curecanti for the time being.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users – 960 cfs in tunnel at present time. Expects maybe 20% fallow lands this year and supplies reduced to 70% at times.

National Weather Service – Short term forecast is for some cool, wet weather for next 10-15 days.

Next Meeting: **The next operation meeting is scheduled for 1:00 p.m., Thursday, August 21 at the NPS Elk Creek Visitors Center on Blue Mesa.**