

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our April 26, 2007 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The meeting was held in Grand Junction. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

- January 1 runoff forecasts for 2007 were around 97 percent of average for both Blue Mesa inflow and the Gunnison River near Grand Junction, but have declined significantly since then. April – July forecasts on April 1 were 62 percent for Blue Mesa and 61 percent for the Gunnison River near Grand Junction.

- March inflow to Blue Mesa was the highest recorded in the 1975 – 2007 study period due to high March air temperatures in the basin.

- Blue Mesa will not fill under most probable conditions and at its maximum will be 10 feet below full. Black Canyon flows began declining in late January in response to declining snowpack. Peak releases through the Black Canyon are not predicted, although high inflow from the Cimarron Creek could create a need for a short duration increase in Crystal releases. Summer flows in the Black Canyon will be below average with projections of around 450 cfs in May and June and slightly higher later in the summer. Gains or losses in the forecast may in May and affect operation changes.

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 30 at 1 p.m. at the Elk Creek Visitors Center on Blue Mesa. If you have any questions, please call me at 970 248-0652.

Sincerely,

Dan Crabtree
Water Resources Group Chief

Distribution List –
April 26, 2007 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, Alan Wartes, Pat Daniel
Montrose Daily Press James Shea, Jason Monroe, Caitlin Switzer, Matt Hildner
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
Western Colorado Congress Randy See, Fred Wetlaufer
Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Ridgway Guide Service..... Tim Peterson
Self Curt Treichel, Lynn Johnson, George Sheldon, Bo Gates, Marlene
Zanatell, Jim Cochran, Jim Hokit
Colorado River Energy Distributors..... Leslie James*, Kent Holsinger
Colorado River Water Conservation District Dave Kanzer*, Don Meyer, Jim Pokrandt*, Eric
Kuhn, Bill Trampe, Ray Tenney
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 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,
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, Jim Brown*, 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*, Pat McDermott*, 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 SalazarRichard Baca

Senator Wayne AllardDerek 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, Ryan Mathis*

Fish and Wildlife Service..... Al Pfister, Chuck McAda, Patty Gelatt*, George Smith

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.....Brenda Alcorn*, 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, Steve Anders, Kirby Wynn*

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*, Coll Stanton*, Don Phillips*, Joe Austin*, David Steinmark, Grant Watson, Ted Dunn, Dan Crabtree*, Chris Cutler, Terry Stroh*, Jane Blair, Paul Davidson*, Justyn Hock, Erik Knight*, Nancy Coulam, Heather Patno, 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

University of Colorado..... Christina Alford*

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

April 26, 2007

Participation: This meeting was held 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, hydropower needs, 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 2007 operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs for 2007; and potential operation plans under probable maximum, most probable, and probable minimum runoff forecasts for 2007.

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 2003 Agreement to resolve the reserved right has been overturned.

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 - April 2007 Operations:

The December 31 icing target for Blue Mesa was met. Unit releases were around 1,500 cfs in January based on early forecasts and were reduced to 600 cfs by March in response to declining inflow forecasts. January 1 inflow forecast was 700,000 af or 97 percent of average but declined to 460,000 af by April 1 which is only 62 percent of average. Within the basin, runoff predictions range from around 48 percent in the Tomichi drainage to 78 percent in the Lake Fork drainage. March inflow was the highest recorded for the 1975-2007 period due to high March air temperatures.

2007 Operations:

Based on April 1 data, inflow of 460,000 is considered representative of a “moderately dry” year. Blue Mesa is not expected to fill this summer based April 1 and April 15 data and maximum elevation should be approximately 10 feet below full.

Black Canyon flows are projected to be in the 450 cfs range for May and June and increase slightly in July and the remainder of the summer. A spring peak is not predicted; however, in some years a rapid snowmelt in the Cimarron drainage can cause a short-term increase in Crystal releases and Black Canyon flows.

Input was requested from those in attendance concerning 2007 operations:

Because of high recreation use in the Gunnison Gorge in June, it was asked if flows could be increased slightly in that month and then reduced a corresponding amount in the July-August timeframe.

The Bureau of Land Management reported that recreation increases around June 1 and June is a heavy use month because of the stonefly hatch. A flow of 450 cfs creates technical problems for boating and an increase to 500-600 cfs reduces these problems.

Steve Glazer with High Country Citizens expressed frustration with higher flows last winter – could water have been saved in reservoir to produce the higher spring flows for native fish.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife requested flows around 700 cfs October 2 – 5 for the annual trout inventory in the Gunnison Gorge. The timing was moved back to October in response to requests from Western Area Power. No one at the meeting expressed concerns with the request, and Reclamation requested agencies to bring up any concerns in the near future so that the Division can complete planning for the inventory.

Other Reservoirs:

Crawford, Fruitgrowers, Paonia, Silver Jack, and Ridgway are full or expected to fill this year.

Taylor Park is at 80,000 af now, including 30,000 af of 2nd fill water and is expected to fill to 93,000 af, approximately 10-15,000 af short of full. Lake Powell inflow forecast is 53 percent of average and will be around 94 feet short of filling, which is 4 feet lower than last years' high elevation.

Colorado River Forecast Center Presentation/NOAA: Brenda Alcorn gave a presentation on the Gunnison Basin. Precipitation in the basin in October 2006 was 220 percent of normal, normal in November, and then began declining. Air temperatures were warmer than normal with March temperatures 6 – 8 degrees F above normal; and this resulted in March streamflows near or at record levels. Andrea Ray reported that tropical Pacific Ocean conditions were neutral. For the basin May-July forecast calls for warmer than average temperatures and below normal precipitation. Trends in climate warming were presented with predictions of warming over the next century. Further information can be found at <http://wwa.colorado.edu/>.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

National Park Service – Morrow Point tour boat will begin operations Memorial weekend.

Reclamation – Joe Austin is replacing retiring Dick Girvan in Montrose power office. Will do concrete repair in Morrow Point stilling basin this year and will contact Division of Wildlife concerning fish salvage. There have been problems with oil contamination in transformers throughout the industry and Crystal power plant may have to be off-line while the problem is addressed. Bypass tubes will be used for releases during this time.

Colorado Division of Wildlife – Continues to work on whirling disease resistant rainbow trout stocks. 2007 may be the first year that resistant strains spawn. Stressed importance of ramping flows during trout emergence period, such as June for the rainbows. Rainbow spawning this spring downstream from Crystal went well. 2.8 million kokanee were released from Roaring Judy Hatchery; these fish travel overnight to Blue Mesa Reservoir. Taylor River was sampled in the fall of 2006 and data showed good numbers and size of trout. One purpose of this sampling was to see any effect of winter releases which have been in the 50 – 75 cfs range the last 6 winters.

Colorado Water Conservation Board – Board meeting will be May 22-23 in Montrose.

Colorado River Water Conservation District – Dave Kanzer reported that on June 18th there will be a Round Table meeting for west slope basins in Montrose from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Pavilion. See www.ColoradoRiverDistrict.org for additional information.

Fish and Wildlife Service – 2007 activities for the Gunnison River include sampling for adult endangered fish, sampling for larval fish, and operating the Redlands fish ladder. Since initial operations began, the fish ladder has been used by 81 pikeminnow, 20 razorback suckers, 1 bonytail, and 80,000 native fish.

Bureau of Land Management: New boat ramp completed between North Fork confluence and Austin.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users: Tunnel is now at 700 cfs; plan to use Ridgway/Uncompahgre River water first before using Taylor storage.

Upper Gunnison Water Conservation District: Gunnison River Roundtable has received a proposal to study sediment in Paonia Reservoir.

Redlands Water and Power: Kevin Jones is new manager. Hope to have river flows in 750 – 850 cfs range so a call is not needed.

Western Resource Advocates: Concerned with high winter releases and effect on water availability for spring flows. Would like to discuss this more, including winter targets, at the August meeting.

Colorado State Engineer: Reservoir storage good, especially on Grand Mesa. Still the low runoff projections are a concern.

City of Delta: While not a concern this year, please keep Delta flooding issues in mind when planning operations.

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 and existing resource information is being compiled. The court decision to overturn the 2003 Black Canyon agreement causes problems with modeling operations and alternatives. 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, August 30th at the Elk Creek Visitors Center on Blue Mesa Reservoir.