



Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District

MEMORANDUM

TO: UGRWCD Board Members
FROM: Taylor Local Users Group (TLUG)
DATE: July 7, 2021
SUBJECT: Taylor Local Users Group Meeting Notes

A TLUG meeting was held on Wednesday, July 7, 2021 in person in the UGRWCD Conference Room and via Zoom video/teleconference. Attending the meeting were the following TLUG members:

Ryan Birdsey, representative for flat water recreation interests (via Zoom)
Ernie Cockrell, representative for Taylor Placer
Pete Dunda, representative for property owners
Roark Kiklevich, representative for wade fishing interests
Don Sabrowski, UGRWCD Board representative and TLUG Chair
Mark Schumacher, representative for whitewater recreation interests
Andy Spann, representative for irrigators (via Zoom)

Also present: Dan Brauch (CO Parks & Wildlife); Dustin Brown (Scenic River Tours) via Zoom; Raquel Flinker (Colorado River District) via Zoom; David Gochis (National Center for Atmospheric Research-NCAR) via Zoom; Erik Knight (BOR) via Zoom; Ches Russell (Scenic River Tours) via Zoom; Jason Ullman (DWR) via Zoom, Sonja Chavez, Beverly Richards, Jill Steele and Sue Uerling (all UGRWCD staff)

Chair Don Sabrowski called the meeting to order at 9 am. Don asked if there were any comments or changes to the June 9, 2021 Meeting Summary. None were raised.

David Gochis of the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) reported that NCAR's July 15th seasonal water supply forecasts for the Upper Gunnison basin Taylor River at Taylor Park is an accumulated median inflow of 35.8 kac-ft (April 1 through end Oct). When we take this forecast number and apply the 55% rule to the forecast for the entire Taylor Reservoir inflow, the model projection goes up to 65.1 kac-ft which is a big anomaly to what's been expected and what CBRFC projects.

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Dave is digging into why. It comes down to a couple of things: 1) We are getting more inflow from the Taylor River than what we expected (59%) and more than what we were anticipating from other inflow sources. Looking at the WRF Hydro forecast moving forward it estimates that another 7.9 kac-ft of inflow may still come in. Difficult to say whether we will actually get. If we look at historical actual inflows from the July to September period we see: 6 kac-ft in 2018; 35 kac-ft in 2019; and 10 kac-ft in 2020. So, the WRF Hydro model has been trending a bit higher these past two iterations and the forecasts are a little too dependent on Taylor River component and brings into question the 55% percent rule.

Ryan Birdsey asked if this higher inflow forecast can be attributed to the recent rainfall or to residual snowpack/snowmelt? David said there was a large diversity of snowpack between northern end and southern end of the basin. Most of what we are seeing is due to snowpack, but the recent rains have either added a little to inflow or made the runoff process more efficient by reducing evaporation that would typically occur. David noted that the forecast could be adjusted downward as they get real-time data.

David also reviewed the forecast for the East River at Almont and the Ohio Creek at Baldwin and they have both been trending downward.

Erik Knight of the Bureau of Reclamation provided an update on Taylor River Operations. Erik noted that the Colorado River Forecast Center dropped their forecast per the July 1st report by 1,000 acre feet which would result in a year-end total of 56,000 acre feet, which is about 57 percent of average. Erik noted that if releases remained at 200 cfs through the end of September, the forecast model would be reduced to show a year-end total of 52,300 acre feet. He indicated it would still be possible to get back up to the average year-end season storage target of 70,000 AF in 2022 assuming average precipitation and average runoff in 2022.

Raquel Flinker noted that at some meetings she has attended for the Colorado River District, it has been predicted that precipitation/snowpack will be below average for the next three years and asked Erik about his thoughts on this. Erik agreed that long-range forecasts can be highly uncertain, and he was only providing this as additional information. Erik noted that he can prepare a model with lower than average precipitation/snowpack if the group would like to see that for the next meeting.

Chair Don Sabrowski asked for discussion on flow requests. There were questions and discussion about how lower releases over a six-month period from August through winter would affect fisheries. Dan Brauch said that lower flows can result in warmer temperatures resulting in algal blooms and crowding from a higher concentration of fish in available habitat which can increase outbreaks of gill lice especially in August. Lowering flows in September would be preferred as there would be less impact to the fish since temperatures are usually dropping by then and conditions are improving.

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Dan was asked about releases from Spring Creek Reservoir, and he said he hasn't gotten an update recently, but that they are still targeting the end of the July to be at complete draw down so that construction can begin in August. Dan estimated that releases are currently at 40 to 50 cfs from Spring Creek Reservoir.

There was some discussion about the possibility of reducing flows the last week in August to hold back some water for fall/winter. Mark Schumacher noted that the rafting industry has obligations through the end of August and he and Dustin Brown discussed this and would like to see releases stay at least at 250 cfs through the end of August. There was also discussion about whether flows could be reduced now through the middle of July to also save some water for later. Andy Spann noted that for irrigators the preference would be to keep it at 300 cfs, but that he could compromise and go to 275.

Mark Schumacher made a motion to request releases as follows:

July 8-15: 275 cfs

July 16-Aug 31: 250 cfs

September 1-15: 150 cfs

Sept 16-30: 100 cfs

*Subject to change based upon conditions.

A roll call vote of the TLUG representatives was held and the motion passed unanimously. Erik Knight said that he would make the request to change the flow from 300 cfs to 275 cfs tomorrow (July 8).

UGRWCD Manager Sonja Chavez gave a final report on the Gunnison River Festival (GRF) and said Director Joellen Fonken did a great job of running the festival, especially given difficulties around planning due to COVID. Sonja said in the past the Taylor River races have averaged around 35 participants and this year there were 70 and that they enjoyed the BBQ following the races at the Gunnison Mountain Park Pavilion. Joellen said that they would probably pare down some of the educational offerings for next year and moving activities back to the Whitewater Park as people noted that they missed this component/location.

Under miscellaneous updates, Sonja noted the new gages at Texas and Willow Creeks are collecting data and will be run seasonally from April through October. Sonja has contacted Steve Anders from the USGS to see if he can provide a report on the gages at the next meeting.

Sonja also noted that she has talked to Mike Kohn of USGS NGWOS who said that they are considering installing a new gage on the Taylor River just above the confluence with Italian Creek. This gage will have to go through the permitting process with the Forest Service. The new gage will include ultrasonic probes as well as a camera that will be used to track particle transport.

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Chair Don Sabrowski asked if there were any citizens comments. There were none.

The next TLUG meeting will be in-person and is scheduled for August 6th at 9am.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:24 a.m.

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