



Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District

MEMORANDUM

TO: UGRWCD Board Members

FROM: Taylor Local Users Group (TLUG)

DATE: March 7, 2021

SUBJECT: Taylor Local Users Group Meeting Notes

A TLUG meeting was held on Monday, March 7, 2022 via Zoom video/teleconference. Attending the meeting were the following TLUG members:

Ryan Birdsey, representative for flat water recreation interests
 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 rafting/boating interests
 Andy Spann, representative for irrigation interests

Also present: Rory Birdsey (Taylor Park Marina); John Bocchino (Riffle and Rise LLC); Reece Carpenter (BOR); Ryan Christensen, (BOR); Steve Cook (Crystal Creek HOA), Doug Forshagen (Crystal Creek HOA); David Gochis (National Center for Atmospheric Research-NCAR); Erik Knight (BOR); Dirk Schumacher (Three Rivers Resort); Ed Warner (BOR); Jason White (Crested Butte Anglers) and Sonja Chavez, Cheryl Cwelich; Beverly Richards and Sue Uerling (all UGRWCD staff)

Chair Don Sabrowski called the meeting to order at 1 pm. Don asked if there were any comments or changes to the September 2, 2021 Meeting Summary. Ernie Cockrell noted that in the top paragraph on page 2, at the end of the sentence, it should read, “which is 300 acre-feet below the 60,000 acre-feet ‘minimum storage objective for the year.’” Also, on page 2 in the third paragraph in the 11th line, Ernie stated the sentence should also read “meet or exceed the 60,000 acre-feet ‘minimum storage objective’.”

Erik Knight of the Bureau of Reclamation provided an update on Taylor River Operations. Erik noted that the Colorado River Basin Forecast Center is now predicting 96,000-acre-feet maximum runoff during April through July 2022. This is up about 3,000 acre-feet from their last forecast and it does not include any consideration for the snowfall in the basin the first week in March, as their report was prepared March 1st. Erik noted that they are now using the most recent thirty years of historical inflows to come up with their “average inflow” for the model and thus, the forecast has been reduced to 94,000 acre-feet. Erik noted that this current report puts us in the “average year” category. Per the Stipulation Agreement, a minimum 5 day peak flow release is required and can be scheduled during the period May 1 through June 30th. Erik noted that the peak runoff is currently predicted to be in the first half of June 2022. Erik reviewed the tables showing predicted inflows, snowpack and releases and noted that if everything stays the same, Taylor Reservoir would be at 70,500 acre-feet by October 2022. Erik noted that there is still plenty of time for the forecast to change either direction. Erik asked if there were any questions.

Steve Cook (public) said these charts are really helpful for the group. Steve wondered if there was any interest by the group in upping flows sooner than April 1st to benefit the fishery. Erik Knight said that this would be a question for the group and could definitely be part of the discussion.

Ernie Cockrell asked why the projections are based on using the year-end minimum storage level of 70,000 acre-feet instead of setting the minimum storage objective to a higher level knowing that every year we start out with a lot of model error. Ernie suggested using a higher end of year storage objective of 73,000 acre-feet or higher early in the season to provide cushion. Ernie noted that we can continue to look at the forecast each month and change this as necessary but that this is the only opportunity to hold back water early in the season so that we aren’t scrambling to meet our year-end storage objective.

David Gochis of the National Center for Atmospheric Research said they have not yet released any forecasting reports but should be generating the first set in about two weeks. David noted that they will be using the readings from the new gauges at Texas Creek and Willow Creek once they are back online sometime around the first of April and once they can validate that the readings are accurate. Since we are only into our second year of using the new additional gages, we do not have much of a history of readings.

David Gochis and Erik Knight confirmed that they will coordinate on forecasting. Mark Schumacher asked if David would have reports for the group for the April meeting and David said he would.

Pete Dunda asked what the status was on the work being done on Spring Creek Reservoir. He had heard that CPW’s crew had had to stop work on it.

Sonja and Don indicated that the work was finished, and they would be filling this year. Pete also agreed with the recommendation to work to save water early by setting a temporary storage target above the minimum objective storage since it seems the TLUG group is always scrambling at the end of the water year.

General Manager Sonja Chavez and Chair Don Sabrowski both agreed that they heard that the work on the outlet pipe has now been completed and that CPW hopes to fill the reservoir yet this winter. Sonja noted that CPW's water rights are junior to downstream users. Sonja offered to contact Dan Brauch at the CPW to see if he could give a report at the April meeting.

Mark Schumacher said he thought it was premature to be changing any releases at this time since it is only March and suggested we wait until the April meeting. He said he would like the TLUG representatives to all take a closer at the Stipulation Agreement so that they can be fully informed before making any changes at the April meeting.

General Manager Sonja Chavez said she was not in favor of changing the "minimum storage objective" but she was in favor of trying to conserve water early in the season.

Ryan Birdsey said he needs to really "dive into the Stipulation Agreement" but that he feels it does give this group the ability to set a higher year-end storage objective, as well as the ability to change it going forward as the group sees fit. Ryan said this is why the group is meeting now and that he would like to see the group be more conservative up front so that there is not so much scrambling at the end of the season to try to meet the minimum. He said as a lifelong user of the canyon, he feels having more room to play with the releases at the end of the year will benefit a lot of users.

Andy Spann said he doesn't see the harm in setting the minimum storage objective at 73,000 acre-feet and trying to hit that target. He said the group can look at it again based on the April forecasts. He did note that in his observations soil moisture content is "horrible" and what he's seen is not normal for this time of year. Andy also noted that ever since he has been on TLUG, the forecasts have always shown higher runoff than what has actually occurred and has been off as much as 20 to 30 percent. Andy said the group can certainly try to be more conservative this early and that it is early enough that there is time to shift some of the releases if necessary. His goal is to have good water in July for crops and to use the earlier runoffs to fill the ditches.

Sonja agreed that the period during peak runoff is the best time to conserve releases and she suggested that the group could perhaps meet more frequently during the runoff period to determine recommendations at that time. Sonja said that if TLUG wants to set an early season storage planning number of

73,000 acre feet until the forecast stabilizes she is not opposed but if conditions require releases that take us below 73,000, she does not want members opposing releases as our minimum storage objective remains 70,000 acre feet.

Mark Schumacher noted that, in the past during higher water years, when the snowpack was 120 percent or higher, the group conserved water above the minimum storage objective based on actual conditions and then kept the winter releases at 100 cfs or more.

Andy Spann asked Erik Knight if he can plug in a minimum year-end storage objective of 73,000 acre feet and see what that does to the projected releases. Andy also said that if this level allows, he would rather see releases cut back in April, May and the beginning of June during peak runoff to save some from July, August and September Erik said he can run those calculations.

Erik Knight confirmed that the BOR can certainly set the plan not to make any changes to the current releases until the next meeting in early April.

David Gochis noted in chat that their data shows that soil moisture is at 30-40 percent of normal saturation for this time of year.

After much discussion, Chair Don Sabrowski asked the group if there was consensus to keep the current flows at 73 cfs until the April meeting date. There were no objections. Don asked Erik Knight to keep the current flows and asked if he can send out the new operational forecasts based on an early season minimum year-end storage planning number of 73,000 acre-feet which could be reviewed at our April meeting. Erik replied that he could do this.

General Manager Sonja Chavez announced that the 20th Anniversary of the Gunnison River Festival will be June 9-11, 2022, with the festival commencing on the Taylor River on Friday June 9th.

The next TLUG meeting was set for Thursday, April 7, 2022 at 2 PM.

Chair Don Sabrowski asked if any of the citizens attending had comments or questions. Steve Cook said he would like to see the group set the year-end target a little higher to allow for more flexibility at the end of the year.

Sonja Chavez noted that the District has received an email from Jason White of which she relayed to the group.

Sonja said she would also email the full Stipulation Agreement to all of the TLUG members.

Sonja asked if it was possible to figure out what the annual forecasting error has been from early March to June? Erik said it is typical to see some fairly

big adjustments in April, May and early June as conditions can either take a big turn for the worse or the better once the actual runoff occurs.

Sonja Chavez asked Erik Knight if he knew when the Four Parties meeting would be scheduled. Erik said it has typically been held the second or third week of May. Sonja noted that this would give the group time to digest the May forecast and meet before the Four Parties meeting to relay their recommendations.

John Bocchino (public) stated that he supports saving more water for the fall and winter flows.

Chair Don Sabrowski asked if it was possible to factor in the low soil water content issues into the forecasts and would this change the predictions? Erik noted that the current forecasts do include a soil moisture factor variable and that inflows have been adjusted down based on this.

General Manager Sonja Chavez noted that Aerial Snow Observatory (ASO) snow flights are being conducted in the East and Taylor River and that this will hopefully improve forecasting. She said that the Colorado Water Conservation Board has been approached with a grant requesting asking for funding support for more ASO flights across critical Colorado mountain basins and she's hoping this could lead into an annual Colorado program.

Chairman Don Sabrowski adjourned the March 7, 2022 TLUG meeting at 1:23 pm.