



## *Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District*

### MINUTES

**TO:** UGRWCD Board Members & TLUG

**FROM:** Taylor Local Users Group (TLUG)

**DATE:** May 5, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Taylor Local Users Group Minutes (**FINAL Corrected and Approved by TLUG 6/7/22**)

A TLUG meeting was held on Thursday, May 5, 2022 in-person and 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 (via Zoom)  
 Don Sabrowski, UGRWCD Board representative and TLUG Chair  
 Mark Schumacher, representative for rafting/boating interests

Andy Spann, representative for irrigation interests, was absent.

Also present: Tara Allman (WCU Wilderness Pursuits); Jim Beasley (Wapiti Canyon Ranch); Rory N. Birdsey (Taylor Reservoir); John Bocchino (Rifle and Rise LLC); Dan Brauch (CO Parks and Wildlife); Dustin Brown (Scenic River Rafting); Reece Carpenter ((BOR); Ryan Christensen (BOR); Steve Cook (Crystal Creek HOA), Jeffrey Deems (Airborne Snow Observatories); Matt Feier (Taylor River Hydro LLC); Doug Forshagen (Crystal Creek HOA); Bill Gallenbeck (Taylor Dam Operator for UVWUA); David Gochis (University/National Center for Atmospheric Research-UCAR/NCAR); Erik Knight (BOR); Elliott Manning (Eleven Anglers); Ben Riedel (Wilder); Dirk Schumacher (Three Rivers Resort); Jay Whitacre (Irwin Guides) and Jason White (Crested Butte Anglers)

UGRWCD Staff: Sonja Chavez, Cheryl Cwelich; Beverly Richards, Jill Steele and Sue Uerling

Chair Don Sabrowski called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Don noted that there had been a request to change TLUG process for obtaining “Citizen Comments” at the beginning of the meeting. Chairman Sabrowski denied that request and reminded the public that if they had input on releases or other operations, they should contact their TLUG representative prior to the meetings, or they are welcome to contact him or General Manager Sonja Chavez. Chairman Sabrowski also asked for a roll call of all TLUG members and interested parties present either in person or on the Zoom teleconference. There were 31 people in attendance.

Chair Sabrowski asked if there were any changes or additions to the April 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting Summary. Ryan Birdsey noted that he wanted to provide further clarification for his family, stating he is the representative for flat water recreation interests and his younger brother, Rory J. Birdsey, is his alternate. He said his father, Rory Birdsey, also serves as the alternate representative for Taylor Placer. Ryan also noted that the April minutes had the incorrect name for Bill Gallenbeck (not Hollenbeck), the Taylor Dam operator for the UVWUA. Dan Brauch noted that CPW had mentioned that 125 cfs would provide much improved conditions for rainbow trout spawn and that this wasn’t captured in the minutes. A request was made to circulate the requested minutes.

David Gochis of the University/National Center for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) presented data from WRF Hydro. Dave detailed the various models and data simulation that they use and noted that when possible, they are using the actual Airborne Snow Observatory data from flights over the basin to make improvements to model. Some of the data also includes snow albedo which takes into account impacts to reflectance from dust on snow. Dave reported the snowpack figures with the ASO flights data for April 20<sup>th</sup> for the Taylor River Basin are:

- Taylor Park Basin Average Snowpack Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) upscaled to WRF Hydro using ASO: 112 kac-ft
- Taylor River Runoff Prediction WRF Hydro w/ASO: (April-July):
  - Taylor River inflow is 39.8 kac-ft
  - Total Taylor Reservoir Inflow: 72.3 kac-ft (This is quite a bit lower than CBRFC by about 20 percent. They are looking into this as this caught them off-guard. A potential reason is their model is showing that the Taylor basin is depleted in soil moisture. In October 2021 it was below 40 percent. Currently, their model shows significant portion of snowpack melt is going into wetting soils).

What can we learn from ASO flights and gap radar? David indicated that it would be the relationship between ASO snow data and correlations with what you can get at a specific Snotel sites. Gap radar will give a better estimate of

total input in a spatially distributed sense across the basin. ASO is not fully replaceable in terms of accuracy of predicting snowpack.

General Manager Chavez asked if there are more ASO flights scheduled for this spring and Jeffrey Deems of Airborne Snow Observatories confirmed that there is at least one more and potentially three more flights planned for this spring, depending on wind and weather. Lawrence Berkley funded 2 flights (tying into SAIL). CWCB funded two flights funded by state Water Plan grant (which came into play late in the season, so they may shift these funds to next season).

Matt Feier of the Gunnison County Electric Association (GCEA) gave a presentation on the Taylor River Hydro LLC Operating agreement and project update. Matt noted that the thirty percent engineering designs have been approved by all parties to the hydropower agreement and they are moving to sixty percent design phase. They are hopeful the project can be 100 percent complete by November 2023. He reported that the GCEA will not have any water rights under the agreement and that the plant will operate solely as a “run of the river” facility, utilizing only the releases made in accordance with the decrees. GCEA will have no claim whatsoever for rates of flow or timing of releases for hydroelectric generation or any other purpose. Construction is set for May-November 2023. Matt reported that they are shooting for an annual production total of 3,812,733 kwh per year, which would provide electricity for 450 homes in the county annually. He said the hydropower plant will cost \$2.97 million to construct and include a 10-year payback with 50% Water SMART Grant Funding or a 20-year payback with no grant funding. Matt said it is likely the Colorado Water Conservation Board will provide low interest rate loan financing for potentially up to 50% of the project cost. For operations, GCEA will purchase the power from Taylor River Hydropower LLC, a separate company developed specifically for the project. Taylor River Hydropower LLC and UVWUA will split profits. Matt was asked if there would be any effects on river temperatures or oxidation levels and if the dam will require any additional lines or outlets. Matt replied that there should be no changes to current temperatures or oxidation levels and that the project will use the existing outlet and lines. Matt noted that the Bureau of Reclamation is a party to the agreement and also involved in doing the 30, 60 and 90 percent reviews of the engineering, so they are aware of all plans. Matt offered that one of the engineers for the project could come to a later meeting to update TLUG on progress and that perhaps there could be a site visit arranged.

Erik Knight from the Bureau of Reclamation presented the May 1 forecast from the Colorado River Basin Forecast Center:

- Inflows into Taylor (April – July): predicting average 89,880-acre-feet (96% of thirty-year average)
- Max reservoir fill content predicted to fill to 9,323.18

Erik said that even if the basin was to get no more snowfall for the rest of the season, we would still finish the year at 91% of average, so it doesn't drop the average much. Erik said that while December 2021 snowfall was great – more than double of average – all of January through May 2022 had below normal snowfall accumulation. He also noted that melt-off has been relatively quick so far this season.

Mark Schumacher asked, per the releases noted on Erik's table, if the flushing release of 445 was planned for the first week in June. Erik replied that, yes, this was the current plan but that the actual timing could be moved if needed as long as it is completed before the end of June. Historical peak has been the 10-12<sup>th</sup> of June. Mark said that the first week of June should probably work okay as when it is pushed to the second week in June it makes it difficult to get under some of the bridges depending on flows from the East River. Erik asked Mark if he had the data of the maximum heights for flows to still be able to get under the bridges. Mark said he had given a spreadsheet to Sonja that was prepared for the Sheriff's office, as they are the ones who will make the call to shut down the river when flows are too high to go under the bridges safely. He noted that it is different for each of the bridges and the different types of boats. Sonja offered that this spreadsheet will be shared with Erik and the BOR. Erik noted that if everyone was okay with them having some flexibility, they can watch the daily flow forecast for the East River and time the flushing release accordingly to try to prevent having to shut down the rafting/boating during high flows. Sonja also pointed out to Erik that the Gunnison River Festival Taylor Down River Raft Race is tentatively planned for Friday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, so if they can avoid doing the 445 cfs flushing flow at that time, it would be beneficial for the festival.

Chairman Sabrowski asked Dan Brauch (CPW) if he had any updates on the fishery and Dan reported that the kokanee release had gone well. He said their goal is to get the kokanee downstream to the reservoir as quickly as possible. He really appreciated the cooperation he got from the irrigators in helping facilitate the release. Dan also provided follow-up on the question from the April meeting regarding the specific target they prefer for rainbow trout spawning. He said that the rainbow trout typically begin spawning in mid-April and that their preferred target is 125-250 cfs with a water temperature of 46 degrees. Dan felt this went well in April this year.

Dan was asked about their plans to refill Spring Creek Reservoir and if there would be any effect on downstream flows. Dan said they will attempt to store water as they can in Spring Creek and will coordinate and maintain flows to meet the needs of the senior water rights downstream to avoid any negative impact. He noted that the CPW would be having a meeting later this afternoon to talk more about storage and release plans and that he will provide that info to the TLUG.

Chairman Sabrowski said they would open discussion among the TLUG members for release recommendations and go around the room. He started with Ernie Cockrell.

Ernie said he has recommendations but wanted to take a few minutes to look at things from a historical perspective. He said what he and others would like to accomplish within the bounds of the stipulation is to protect the biology and habitat of the river. From Ernie's perspective, when it comes to the biological health of the river, he noted that there is a difference of opinion among some of the TLUG representatives, including the UGRWCD, with respect to where the October 31<sup>st</sup> storage objective should be. He noted that the stipulation specifies that the storage can be made to meet or exceed the October 31<sup>st</sup> objective with the understanding that from May through October each year, there may be the need to periodically adjust this storage level based on actual conditions. He noted that in the stipulation, the language was specifically amended to say "meet or exceed" the October 31<sup>st</sup> storage level and that this is discretionary to the TLUG representatives as they note the ever-changing data affecting the storage. Based on this historical perspective and his interpretation of the Stipulation language, Ernie recommended that the October 31 end of year storage goal should be 72,143 and that this would result in a 91 cfs winter flow rate.

Pete Dunda wants to set current goal to exceed the 70,000 acre feet so that we have some room to adjust flows and not miss target.

Sonja Chavez interjected that the meeting had already run its two-hour scheduled course and that the group needs to get some specific biweekly release recommendations to the BOR. She noted that everyone agrees that we need to be as conservative as possible and that because of the extremely dry soil conditions, it is likely that adjustments to the flow will need to be made down the road, but that at this time she would like to come to a consensus with flow recommendations for Erik.

Ernie supports Erik's recommendation to increase the speed at which we normally ramp up to five-day peak flow.

Ryan Birdsey said that he is concerned about the reservoir elevation level saying that right now, the concrete boat ramp at Taylor Marina is unusable. They need approximately 9,313 feet and he'll study the elevations more this summer in order to provide improved annual input regarding marina launching. He said they are fortunate that they can shore launch boats from other areas around the reservoir but is concerned with congestion on Taylor due to low reservoir elevations in Blue Mesa which will increase number of users at Taylor. He'd like to keep the Taylor elevation a little higher. There was some discussion about shaving two percent off of all current flow recommendations for the seven-month period as this would achieve the 72,000

acre feet target. Erik later noted that this approach would not work within the model spreadsheet which is based on a 15-day average but the group was able to modify/slightly reduce recommended releases and play with the day on which release changes are made within the bi-weekly periods.

Mark Schumacher noted that he has always appreciated and respected Ernie's water right and noted that since he was on the UGRWCD Board during the negotiations for the Amended Stipulation, he was heavily involved in the outcome of the Amended Stipulation and that it became an almost full-time job for him during this period. He noted that he greatly appreciates Ernie's water rights as it helps all in the group. Mark stated that he does disagree, however, with Ernie's assessment that the October 31<sup>st</sup> storage goal should be 72,000 acre-feet. He noted that this cuts the flows in early August to a minimum he needs to operate his business during the peak of the rafting season. He recommends taking 50 cfs from the last half of the September and move them up to the first two weeks of August which results in flows of 300 cfs, which is what his water users need. Mark also noted that Erik Knight notes that with an end of October storage level of 70,000 acre feet with an average winter, the reservoir will fill for the next water year. Mark said this also results in our using our water right to its fullest extent.

Roark noted that he hopes to never see flows drop below 75 cfs for the winter flow. He supports shooting for higher end of year target at 72,000 acre-feet with the reality that if hydrology deteriorates it may be a moot point anyway and we are back at minimum of 70,000 acre-feet.

Mark also asked Dan Brauch if last year when TLUG recommended that releases be dropped to 100 cfs at the beginning of October and later to 85 cfs, if that worked out okay for the fishery. Dan said that this worked fine last year. Mark recommended that if conditions worsen through the next few months that perhaps the representatives could look at decreasing some of the October flows accordingly. Ernie said he thinks it is dangerous to start looking at cutting flows in September and October as during these months the river is more prone to algae growth and fish get concentrated at low flows. He cautioned against getting flow rates too low during this period.

The TLUG members eventually came to the following consensus for their recommendation to the UGRWCD Board (NOTE: the final numbers were verified between Sonja and Erik via telephone on 5/11/22):

May 1-15: 140  
 May 16-31: 250 cfs  
 June 1-15: 350 cfs (June 1 go to 350 cfs. June 2-6 at 445 cfs. June 7 drop to 400, June 8 to 350 cfs)  
 June 16-30: 350 cfs  
 July 1-15: 350 cfs

July 16-31: 325 cfs (includes change to 300 cfs on July 24)  
August 1- 15: 300 cfs  
August 16-31: 250 cfs  
September 1-15: 250  
September 16-30: 200 cfs  
October 1-15: 100 cfs (Start ramping down by 25 cfs on Oct 1 so that on  
October 4 we are at 100 cfs)  
October 16-31: 91 cfs (\*End of Oct content 72,600 AF)

**\*Chavez (UGRWCD) clarification on meaning of asterisk and summary of TLUG understanding with regard to identified end of October storage proposed above:** This is a temporary early season end of year October storage content *planning number* proposed by TLUG which allows the group a little room to make likely possible future adjustments (i.e., decreases) to releases due to anticipated deteriorating hydrology throughout the summer due to on-going drought and helps ensure that they do not exceed the minimum end of year storage objective of 70,000 AF in an average dry year. The winter flow release identified above is also based on the 72,600 AF planning number and the group understands that the final winter flow release will be adjusted downward if hydrology/inflow deteriorates (consistent with the amended stipulation).

TLUG group was in consensus agreement.

Chairman Sabrowski asked for any Citizen comments and none were brought forth.

The next meeting was set for Thursday, June 7 at 9:30 AM. Chairman Sabrowski adjourned the meeting at 12:46 PM.