

MINUTES

Taylor Local Users Group

April 6, 2023

TLUG Attendees:

TLUG Representatives Present:

Roark Kiklevich (Wade Fishing via Zoom)
Ernie Cockrell (Taylor Placer via Zoom)
Ryan Birdsey (Flatwater Recreation via Zoom)
Don Sabrowski (Chair)
Andy Spann (Agricultural via Zoom)
Mark Schumacher (Boating Interests via Zoom)

TLUG Representatives Absent:

Others in person:

Beverly Richards- UGRWCD
Sonja Chavez – UGRWCD
Bill Gallenbeck – Taylor Dam Outlet Operations
Dan Brauch – CPW
Sue Uerling – UGRWCD
John Bocchino – Riffle and Rise LLC

By Zoom:

Erik Knight – BOR
Dave Gochis – UCAR
Ed Werner – BOR
Steve Anders – USGS
Jay Whitacre – Irwin Guides
Jesse Kruthaupt (Trout Unlimited)
Steve Cook (Crystal Creek Homeowners)
Jeff Deems (ASO)
Dustin Brown (Scenic River Tours)
Rory Birdsey – Taylor Placer

I. Introductions & Approval of Minutes

Sonja Chavez noted that the District did not have any applicants before the January 2022 deadline to fill the property owners' seat on TLUG. The vacancy will be advertised again with a deadline for letters of interest due April 21, 2023. There have been two letters of interest received. Sonja said the Board of Directors will be selecting the Property Interests representative at the April 24, 2023 Board meeting.

- II. CBRFC Water Supply Update and USBR Model Forecast:** Erik Knight presented the April 1 CBRFC forecast. This forecast showed that the inflow for the time period of April – July is projected to be

120,000 acre-feet which is 138% of the 30-year average. This is about 3,000 acre-feet increase over the mid-March forecast provided two weeks prior.

According to the CBRFC forecast data, there will be an 8,000 acre-feet inflow during April. Erik indicates that the inflow is projected to rise above that figure due to faster runoff, but the bulk of the inflow volume will occur in June. The 120,000 acre-feet projected runoff puts Taylor Reservoir in the Wet Year category. The reservoir will reach a max fill of 104,197 acre-feet at an elevation of 9,329 feet, which will put the reservoir within 1 foot of spillway crest (9,330Ft). The end-of-year content is forecasted to be just over 75,000 acre-feet in October with a 445 cfs 10-day peak flow beginning the second week of June.

Based on the CBRFC forecast data, there is plenty of water for the Taylor reservoir to work with during April operations. The data shows there will be 30-days at 500 cfs outflows for the peak flow to manage the inflows during the month of June. The releases later in the season are well above 400 cfs and will make it through September at 300 cfs. These forecasted inflows are in the upper 10% of higher flows on historical record. Additionally, the snow water equivalent (SWE) is 124% of normal in Taylor (Park Cone) with no major dust on snow yet. The monthly accumulation for March has been well over average with 180% of average snow accumulation across the Upper Gunnison Basin.

Erik Knight mentioned that the projected runoff volume for the East River is up over 150% of average which will need to be considered. Erik believes depending on the runoff there could easily be an increase peak flow of 3,000 cfs or more on the East River. For this reason, Erik will be determining what impact the combined release outflows will look like downstream for the Gunnison River through town when Taylor and East rivers meet.

John Bocchino asked if there needed to be some early releases.

Erik Knight explains that we are still at winter release rate and the operations assume we will increase the release by up to 150 cfs by the end of this week. He thinks earlier releases might be a good idea in order to manage runoff and might avoid high flows coming from the East River later on. Erik states that this is a suggestion currently put into model now.

Don Sabrowski had two people contact him about ice dams, specifically above Harmels.

Bill Gallenbeck said that ice is not a major concern but recommends the group consider a 30 cfs increase today or 30 cfs increase tomorrow but doesn't want to do full increase to prevent breakage of ice flows. Erik Knight agreed and will add Bill's recommendation to the model to prevent any large ice breakage.

John Bocchino asked if there is enough room in June to increase flow without hitting flood stage or should flows be cut because it is too close to the dam crest. Erik Knight says if we need to increase flow at Taylor, we wouldn't want to do it in June. Again, Erik noted that this might be a reason to increase release flows earlier.

Steve Anders asked if we are going to change releases in the next several days from the Reservoir he would like to know because he has his techs out on Taylor River below the Reservoir and needs to make them aware. The best data comes from the most stable flows possible. Erik Knight assured Steve he would let him know he will do that. USGS would like to go a day or two after that and flows stabilize.

Ernie Cockrell asked Bill Gallenbeck if he was suggesting not going up to 150 this week but to delay that increase and just release at the rate of 125 or 130 cfs now? Bill Gallenbeck recommended the release of 62 to 63 cfs and then ratchet up to 150 cfs over the next couple of weeks.

Ryan Birdsey asked what the max outflow capacity is of the Taylor Reservoir? Erik Knight believes we got the max outflow capacity to be up to 1500 cfs.

Sonja Chavez noted that if releases could be at 1400-1500 cfs at peak during the Taylor Downriver Race as part of the Gunnison River Festival.

Bill Gallenbeck asked what is considered safe maximum channel flow through Taylor River. Erik Knight responded that he hasn't heard a number specifically for Taylor River itself.

Ernie Cockrell asked depending on what ice dams are doing should there be higher release flows in mid-April? Erik Knight replied that he felt it would be a good idea to advance the ramp up earlier than what is currently shown. The current model states releases will reach 200 cfs by April 19th, but if ice dams are clear, it would be possible to reach the 200 cfs releases by next week. The model is also showing releases of 150 cfs by May 1st but this may need to happen earlier depending on runoff over the next week.

Don Sabrowski asked Dan Brauch how such increases in flows might affect the rainbow trout in April. Dan Brauch replied it would be more helpful for spawning to increase releases closer to mid-April. Don Sabrowski agreed since he thinks temperatures will be warming up next week and believes the ice issues will correct naturally.

Erik Knight believed flows on East River are coming up next week along with warmer temperatures could clear out the ice dams earlier and then there should be no issues in increasing releases on the Taylor.

Bill Gallenbeck will keep an eye on the ice jams and let Erik know when they have cleared so a decision can be made about earlier releases.

- III. UCAR WRF Hydro Model Forecast:** Dave Gochis provided an update from the University of Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR). He said they are running the models now and that the recent ASO flight has provided some new data to be added to the models. Dave should have the ASO results by the end of the day. The SNOTEL sites demonstrate a good model performance with low bias. The model includes the Taylor River basin, East River basin and upper part of north Roaring Fork. At the Upper Taylor site, the background model analysis is about 5% high with Park Cone SNOTEL site about 6% high. There are four different SNOLITE stations that monitor snow. Cottonwood is currently at 86" depth, Italian Creek is at 91" depth and all sites are still at peak values so nothing much has started to come down yet.

The Taylor River Basin Snowpack is at 189,000 acre feet compared to ASO survey which was at 207,000 acre feet. The snowpack last year was at 119,000 acre feet on April 19th. The East River Snowpack is at 333,000 acre feet compared to ASO survey at 368,000 acre feet. The SNODAS survey is predicting even higher snowpack for the East River with an estimate of 453,000 acre feet. Therefore, Dave wants to see what the ASO data shows so they can add some constraints around these numbers.

Based on the Taylor River Basin Soil Saturation model, the background soil moisture is normal to dry since snowmelt has barely started but is expected to rise with a chance of some distortion. The volume numbers for the Taylor River Basin will arrive later today. Dave also mentioned that based on the inclusion of data from the ASO flights, they will be able to extract peak flow values and dates for Taylor and East River at Almont and he will share this with Erik and the group as soon as possible.

Jeff Deems noted that it's been great to have the extra SNOLITE data. He is also in the process of comparing 2019 and seeing substantial spatial differences in where the snowpack is this year.

Sonja commented to Jeff that in 2019, she recalled that the snowpack was at lower elevations, so the group was surprised by the high runoff. Jeff said they saw more snowpack down in the valleys in 2019.

Jeff shared his map of the East River and explained the colors designated on the map. He noted that the color blue represents a half a meter of water equivalent, while red is showing a half meter higher of water equivalent. The dark blue represents locations where avalanches occurred in 2019. This year there is more snow in these avalanche start zones because in 2019 by this time all the dark blue areas had slid to the valley bottom. The melt out timing is likely to be different this year depending on which portions of the watershed are contributing snowmelt at what time.

Sonja invited Jeff to present an updated report at the next meeting. Sonja asked Jeff to confirm that the basin has not yet seen the same Dust on Snow events, like the past two years..

Jeff noted that the latest data as of April 1st did not show any significant dust on snow events, but that on April 3rd there was a pretty strong dust event with high winds, so the red dust on the snowpack will be evident now. Jeff said that he hopes there will not be as much dust from deserts this year since last year there was large amounts of dust events coming from deserts. Jeff has spoken with the USGS based in Moab and they explain how holding dust in the ground depends more on vegetation rather than moisture in the soil since the topsoil will dry out immediately regardless of soil moisture. Therefore, Jeff said that it will be possible for the basin to get some substantial dust on snow events this year.

Beverly Richards reported that Jeff Derry will be starting dust surveys throughout their network this week.

IV. Flow Recommendation Discussion Summary:

Ernie Cockrell said it looks like we need to increase the releases after we resolve the ice issues. Based on the current model, he believes without an increase in releases, it could be cutting it pretty close right now. He recommended conditions be watched closely over the next several days and the group address flows again in a week or two once the ice is gone.

Roark Kiklevich said he was looking at the weather forecast through weekend and temperatures look like Gunnison and Almont are going to get warm (high 50's and low 60's), which he hopes will address concerns about icing. He is good with bumping up in mid-April.

Ryan Birdsey said he agrees with all of it. He recommends ramping up slowly in smaller increments due to concerns around timing inflows from the East River. He knows that river closures put extra stress on Taylor Reservoir for recreation, so he hopes there will not be a need for closures. Ryan also questioned if another meeting could be scheduled for a mid-month review. He noted it would be helpful to have all the data available from Dave Gochis, Erik Knight, Jeff Deems, and Jeff Derry a little in advance to be able to review it carefully. Ryan thinks it would be advisable to try to ramp it up at a consistent, moderate amount. He also mentioned that in the past, the Sheriff's department closed down the Gunnison River for recreation when the flows were dangerously high and that this put a lot more pressure on the Taylor Reservoir.

Mark Schumacher said that the flow regime looks fine to him. He noted that if the group needs to release water early he would just like to be sure Taylor Reservoir is filled so that there will be good flows through the whole summer into September for rafting. He's fine with the schedule.

Andy Spann agreed with Mark and said he'd like to see Taylor Reservoir kept as full as possible without spilling it and being conscious of flows on the East River as well, as this would help the irrigators later this summer as well.

Don Sabrowski suggested that Erik Knight and Bill Gallenbeck coordinate on when releases could happen in the next week or so with some input from Jeff Derry's dust on snow data as well.

Ernie Cockrell asked if it would be possible to have a meeting mid-month with updated data. Sonja responded yes.

Ryan Birdsey asked if there was an update available for the Blue Mesa Reservoir and downstream from Blue Mesa as well.

Erik Knight explained that based on the latest forecast, Blue Mesa should expect 850,000 acre feet of runoff into the reservoir, putting Blue Mesa at 134% of average. This would put Blue Mesa into the "moderately wet" category requiring a 10-day release at peak flow of duration in 14,000+ cfs at lower Gunnison at Whitewater. The reservoir is estimated to be filled to 80% full this year with a calendar year-end elevation of 7,490 acre feet. Erik said this will return the reservoir to a normal operating level going into 2024. Erik said flows will be in excess of 7,000 cfs going through the Black Canyon for about a week with extended flows at 8,000 cfs downstream of Gunnison Tunnel. Erik predicts there will certainly be flows of over 6,000 cfs starting in the second half of May, and perhaps could be as late as the first week of June, depending on how fast runoff occurs. Erik noted that there is no spillway available to make higher releases and the model might be undershooting in the long run to meet Aspinall augmentation requirements.

Erik reported that North Fork basin has the largest snowpack in the area. The USGS will be adjusting flows at Blue Mesa to coordinate with peak flows and may need to cut back releases from Blue Mesa if there are flooding issues in Delta. The USGS will also consider the low elevation areas and address any concerns about flows in relation to highway bridges. He noted that the water treatment

in Delta may also be affected by high water and flows would be adjusted accordingly. Erik noted that the North Fork is a hotspot that will be monitored closely this year. Erik also noted that at Surface Creek there will be a lot of flow coming down the southside of Grand Mesa that the USGS has no control over.

Dan Brauch reported that for the CPW's salmon release, they will be waiting for Blue Mesa Reservoir to be ready before deciding on release date. Dan noted that they are also planning on doing some releases in the Taylor River in conjunction with a fishery diet study currently being conducted by Western Colorado University. Sonja Chavez noted that it would be important to keep the study's coordinator at Western, Derrek Houston, apprised of flows and conditions for the safety of students and CPW staff on the river. Dan concluded by saying that there has not been much snowmelt to date to provide for any storage at Spring Creek reservoir yet.

Miscellaneous Updates: UGRWCD would like to get a statewide program going for ASO flights. The BOR has put out a new WaterSmart grant to measure snowpack. UGRWCD is considering going forward with this. David Gochis noted that he was really pleased to learn this and that he would be happy to provide anything needed in support of this grant.

V. Citizen Comments:

John Bocchino asked if it would be better to go to 200 sooner, so is that the plan if ice dams are not a problem after Monday or Tuesday.

Erik Knight reported they will ramp up to 150 cfs and then up to 200 cfs. The model currently shows 200 cfs on April 19, but Erik noted that hopefully releases can be ramped up to 200 cfs this next week.

Andy Spann mentioned that irrigators usually start irrigating in early May but he believes with the ample runoff this year, irrigators probably won't be pulling off enough water from the river to really affect flows.

Sonja Chavez noted that releases and flow information will be shared with TLUG members, stakeholders and on UGRWCD's social media platforms.

Dan Brauch noted that salmon releases are a long way from being ready at Blue Mesa, since it still locked up with ice. The release date is likely to occur a little later than normal depending on the weather and he will let everyone know when the release date is scheduled.

Erik Knight reported that the model projects the first half of May releases will be at 250 cfs for first 10 days and then go to 300 cfs, but Erik said this may have to happen earlier.

Dan said it would be nice not to ramp up in the first half of May for the rainbow trout spawn but instead ramp it up even earlier for the benefit of the spawn. He noted that hopefully the rainbows will have finished spawning by the end of May. Dan noted that if flows were to be at 250 cfs or higher by early May, this could affect the spawning. He felt that as of May 10th, going to 300 cfs would be okay for the rainbow trout.

Mark Schumacher noted that hopefully the flows would not get so high boaters could not get under the bridges. Sonja noted that she still has the data Mark previously provided about the maximum flows could be for boaters to still get under the bridges and she would provide that to the group.

Mark apologized that he missed the first part of the meeting due to internet issues and asked Sonja if the representative for “property interest” must be property owners. Sonja replied that this representative MUST be a property owner but is not required to live directly on the Taylor or Gunnison River but could live nearby and should be knowledgeable about river issues.

Next meeting set for April 19th at 12:00 p.m. and May 5 at 12:30 p.m. (hybrid meetings).

Meeting adjourned at 10:48 PM.