

MINUTES
Taylor Local Users Group
March 12, 2024 at 9:30 a.m.
(held via Zoom Video/Teleconferencing)

TLUG Attendees:

TLUG Chair: Don Sabrowski

TLUG Representatives Present:

David Fisher (Property Owners)
Roark Kiklevich (Wade Fishing Interests)
Ernie Cockrell (Taylor Placer)
Ryan Birdsey (Flatwater Recreation Interests)
Mark Schumacher (Boating Interests)

Absent: Andy Spann (Irrigation Interests)

Others in attendance:

Dan Brauch, (Colorado Parks and Wildlife)
Peter Dunda (Taylor Canyon Homeowner)
David Gochis (Airborne Snow Observatories)
Erik Knight (U. S. Bureau of Reclamation)
Doug Forshagen (Crystal Creek Homeowner)
Elliott Manning (Eleven Angling)
Sonja Chavez (UGRWCD)
Cheryl Cwelich (UGRWCD)
Beverly Richards (UGRWCD)
Sue Uerling (UGRWCD)
Ari Yamaguchi (UGRWCD)

I. Introductions & Approval of Minutes:

Chairman Don Sabrowski called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. The minutes from the September 20, 2023 and September 27, 2023 TLUG meetings were presented for review. No changes were requested. Ernie Cockrell made a motion and Mark Schumacher seconded approval of the September 20th and September 27, 2023 Meeting Minutes. The motion carried.

II. CBRFC Water Supply Update and USBR Model Forecast

Erik Knight of the Bureau of Reclamation reported that the forecasted inflow volume for April through July 2024 is 91,000 acre-feet, which is 97 percent of average, at just 3,000-acre-feet below the average of 94,000 acre-feet. This puts the water year in the “average” category which requires a five-day flushing release of 445 cfs which is currently scheduled for the first week of

June. Erik noted that this week was selected as this is typically the time frame for peak inflows but that he can be flexible to meet the needs of Taylor water users. Eric reviewed the current operations plan. The reservoir is projected to reach a maximum fill content of 101,364 acre-feet of water and a year-end storage content of 72,600 acre-feet. He noted that the snowpack is currently at 99 percent of average for the whole basin and 110 percent of average for the Taylor Park basin. As of the end of February 2024, snowpack was pretty close to average, but Erik said there will be some catching up to do in March to reach the average.

Chair Don Sabrowski asked Erik for his assessment of how the TLUG representatives managed operations last fall and how things progressed through the winter. Erik said while there was greater than average snowpack and good runoff at the beginning of the summer, July and August ended up being very dry. In addition, the soil moisture levels were very low, which was why the adjustments had to be made at the end of the season last year. Erik said he was pleased that TLUG was able to keep releases at 100 cfs throughout the winter and still not draw down the reservoir too much while also meeting the needs of all the water users last summer. He feels this water year is starting off with pretty good content and that the end-of-year storage content is showing a little above the objective with 2600 acre-feet of excess storage at this time.

Ryan Birdsey asked Erik about the Proposed Operations Table and why the May 16-31st release jumps to 250 cfs and then up to 400 cfs and then back to 350 the last part of June and then back up to 400 cfs in early July. Erik replied that this was primarily due to the ramping up for the five-day required release presently scheduled for the first week in June and then ramping back up in July for the needs of the water users. Erik noted that it is very early in the season and the timing and amounts of the releases can be modified based on runoff and the representatives' recommendations.

III. Update from David Gochis, Airborne Snow Observatories (ASO)

Dave Gochis said he did not have anything major to report yet as ASO is currently working on catching up with their analysis and that he would have more details in the next week or so. He said the data he did have to date was pretty consistent with what Erik had reported. It was noted that David is now working for Airborne Snow Observatories and will continue to monitor and present reports on the hydrology in the basin as he did with NCAR. He said the District has helped provide funding, along with other sources, for two ASO flights in the Taylor with the first one being scheduled for April 1, 2024, weather permitting, which is typically peak snowpack. Dave said the SNODAS sites in the area are showing 123 percent of normal for snowpack in the Taylor Core and about 107 percent of normal near Monarch. He showed a comparison of SNODAS snowpack conditions between water year 2023 and 2024 to date for sites in the Taylor Park Basin as follows: Cottonwood Pass – 62 inches for 2024 and 58 inches in 2023; Italian Creek – 71 inches for 2024 and 84 inches for 2023; Mirror Lake/Tin Cup – 45 inches for 2024 and 43 inches for 2023; and Trail Creek – 51 inches for 2024 and 50 inches for 2023, so very comparable. Dave said there was a fairly significant dust on snow event recently which may end up depleting the snowpack more quickly than anticipated but that they will know more after the next ASO flight. Don Sabrowski thanked Erik for the data he presented and noted that it will be

very helpful to have Dave working for ASO. Dave indicated that it would help provide data more quickly to the TLUG group.

Ryan Birdsey reported that with several snow events recently there has been a lot of wind out of the south and he wondered if Dave felt that any of the snowpack data could be affected by these wind-loaded events.

Dave replied that the SNODAS sites could be impacted by the scouring winds and that the Trail Creek site has the most exposure to southerly winds which could certainly make it melt out faster. Dave noted that the first ASO flight will be very helpful in providing them with accurate data as they will be conducting observations on westward/southerly exposures that are most prone to wind scouring and faster melt out.

Sonja Chavez asked Dave if he had any updated soil moisture data and Dave reported that he would share some of the latest soil moisture data with the group when he got back to his office. He will try to provide a comparison from last year to this year.

IV. Update from Dan Brauch, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Chair Don Sabrowski asked Dan if he could give the group a “report card” on how he felt the releases went last water year and how conditions progressed through the winter. Dan replied that overall, he felt conditions were in really good shape and that the releases were good and was pleased that they remained stable throughout the winter. Dan said the rainbow trout will start spawning around May 1st and that the operations projections look good for the spawning.

Next, Dan reported on the outlet repairs at Spring Creek. He said the repairs had been completed and that 28 acre-feet is the maximum storage level for the reservoir in order to prevent any water going over the spillway. Dan said that in addition to the outlet tube, they had also installed two siphon tubes, so all of these can be operated during runoff to maintain the maximum storage level. Dan noted that the outlet tube was repaired right before winter set in and the two siphon tubes were set right outside of the water as they had concerns about them freezing. Therefore, they are being careful not to let the reservoir storage build too high during the winter. Dan said they are in “good shape” for the runoff season and will probably keep the reservoir storage a little below the maximum of 28 feet to protect the repaired equipment. Don Sabrowski asked Dan what the winter release rate was from Spring Creek Reservoir and Dan said he will check and provide that figure to the group.

V. Preliminary TLUG Draft Operational Release Recommendations

Don asked each of the TLUG Representatives for their overall thoughts about last year’s operations and for any recommendations for flows yet for this spring and summer. A summary of the comments follows:

Ernie Cockrell – He was pleased to hit the year-end storage objective even though the group had to react quickly at the end of the season, which was not optimal for decisions to be made. Ernie noted that he is pleased with the snowpack figures at this time but does have concerns about the wind scouring and low soil moisture content. He said that at this time, the overall release

schedule looks fine for spring and summer and that his preference will be to be more conservative on the front end if possible.

Mark Schumacher – He said he thinks the group should pat themselves on the back for how the year went and that he has no comments at this time on the proposed releases.

Roark Kiklevich – Roark said he is fine with the proposed releases as they stand now but that the group should be careful as conditions “can turn on us” very quickly. Therefore, he feels being cautious and more conservative if possible is prudent for the group.

Ryan Birdsey – Ryan said it is probably too early to tell how runoff will go but that he, too, believes it is a good idea to be more conservative early in order not to get behind the eight ball later. Ryan reported that winter storage levels at the reservoir have been good but that it has been interesting this season due to the wind events and slush build ups. He noted that this is partially due to the way the reservoir is set up.

David Fisher – Dave agreed that he’d like to see the releases be more conservative early on if possible as conditions can change quickly during the summer. He also wanted to be sure that the group was aware of the Drought Contingency Plan Stakeholders meeting on March 27th at the District offices from 9 to 11 a.m. Sonja offered to send the details about the meeting to the group and said it would be great to have many sectors represented at the meeting, including the TLUG group.

Dan Brauch indicated that they will be sampling Taylor for gill lice on October 16, 17 and 23, 2024 and for this sampling, it will be important that releases be ramped down to the winter flow level by that time. Ernie Cockrell asked Dan if he would like help with the sampling and Dan replied that it would be helpful to have the cards and photographs again. Don Sabrowski offered that the Wilder could also help survey if needed. Dan said that they currently have a sampling site right above the Wilder stretch of the river but that they could probably use more sampling. Dan said he would be happy to chat more with Ernie and Don about the CPW’s sampling process. It was suggested that a meeting be scheduled with all of the parties.

V. Miscellaneous Matters

Sonja Chavez reported that she had received an email from Gunnison County Electric Association (Matt Feier) and he reported that there had been issues with manufactured equipment. They are still hoping to commence hydropower operations this summer.

Sonja asked the TLUG members to mark their calendars for Monday, June 24, 2024, for the 65th Anniversary Celebration for the District. There will be free food by 5B’s BBQ, TacoCart and Spency’s Ice Cream truck, free drinks from High Alpine Brewery and Buckel Family Colorado Winery, live music by Evelyn Roper and her band and other presentations and activities.

Sonja said that she is also working on establishing local partnerships to help support more ASO flights and she has gotten interest from several additional parties.

Sonja reported that the District will be collaborating with the USGS to conduct an Irrigation Return Flow Study in the East River Basin and that she hopes this summer they will have an idea of the scope and design of the project to give a presentation to the TLUG group and others.

Ryan Birdsey said that on February 27th Park Cone slid across the catch and release section and actually stopped flows in the river for a couple of hours. He wondered if this might have any effect on the fishery. Dan Brauch said that the fish would typically move to deeper pools during such an event and these pools would not be as affected by the flow being stopped for a period but that it is possible there was some direct kill. He said it will be interesting to see as things thaw out. Sonja asked Ryan if he had any photos from the event that he could share and Ryan agreed to email them to the District.

Sonja reported that she does plan to reach out to the Four Parties who have control over the Taylor Operations to see if they can't come to an agreement where decisions about release reduction recommendations from the TLUG group could be made without having to get Four Parties approval. She noted that when the objective of changing the releases is to achieve the year-end storage objective for the reservoir, she does not understand why each of the Four Parties need to agree to the recommendations provided that she has the full agreement of the TLUG. She said that last fall when the group was trying to ramp down more quickly due to the onset of dry conditions, it was frustrating not be able to get quick decisions when representatives of the Four Parties were out of town or unresponsive to her emails and calls.

Mark Schumacher noted that the boating community is very disappointed with the put-in at Shady Island and that several of the boaters have reached out to Gunnison County, but their concerns have fallen on deaf ears. Mark said that you have to jackknife your trailer to put in at the unloading area. He said if everyone could get their boats ready to unload in the parking area and then go down to the put-in, this would avoid congestion there but there is no pathway to walk back down to the put-in area. Don asked Sonja if she could help get a meeting scheduled with Gunnison County and the boating community. Sonja agreed to set up a meeting and asked Mark if he could provide names of private and commercial boaters and Mark agreed. He noted that in addition to the partial funding that the District had put in for Shady Island, the boaters were also paying five percent fees for boating that section.

VI. Citizen Comments

Chair Don Sabrowski asked for input from any citizens on the Zoom meeting throughout the meeting. At the end of the meeting, Taylor homeowner Pete Dunda asked if Spring Creek would be a viable fishery this summer as he has gotten many calls about this from people who live outside the area. Dan Brauch answered that they do restock Spring Creek every year with 10-inch rainbows and that they will be fully restocking the reservoir again this season. He said due to the repairs this past season, conditions might not be quite as good as in the past but that the fishery will be viable in Spring Creek Reservoir.

No other citizen comments were received.

VII. Next Meeting

The next TLUG meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 9, 2024 at 9:30 a.m.

The March 12, 2024 TLUG meeting was adjourned by Chairman Sabrowski at 10:42 a.m.