

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

TLUG Attendees:

TLUG Chair: Don Sabrowski

TLUG Representatives Present:

Ryan Birdsey (Flatwater Recreation Interests)
Ernie Cockrell (Taylor Placer)
Roark Kiklevich (Wade Fishing Interests)
Mark Schumacher (Boating Interests)
Andy Spann (Agricultural Irrigation Interests)

Others in attendance:

Dan Brauch, (Colorado Parks and Wildlife)
Steve Cook (Crystal Creek Homeowners Association)
Peter Dunda (Taylor Canyon Homeowner)
David Gochis (Airborne Snow Observatories)
Erik Knight (U. S. Bureau of Reclamation)
Sasha Legere (Irwin Guides)
Jay Whitacre (Irwin Guides)
Sonja Chavez (UGRWCD)
Alana Nichols (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 March 12, 2024 TLUG meeting were presented for review. Mark Schumacher asked that in the discussion about Shady Island, mention should be made that “Don asked Sonja to help with facilitating this meeting 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.” Mark Schumacher made a motion and Ernie Cockrell seconded approval of the March 12, 2024 Meeting Minutes as amended. 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 now 97,000 acre-feet, which is 103 percent of average and is an increase of 6,000 acre-feet from the last report. This puts the water year in the “average” category and Erik noted that the category is not likely to change to either wet or dry. This category requires a five-day flushing release of 445 cfs which is currently scheduled for the first week of June. Erik noted that even with the flushing release, the end of year content for the reservoir will be 70,000 acre-feet.

The reservoir is projected to reach a maximum fill content of 103,161 acre-feet of water and a year-end storage content of 72,340 acre-feet. The max fill amount is just 1.5 feet below the spillway crest, and this may need to be reevaluated if the content goes a bit higher. He noted that the snowpack is currently at 118 percent of average for the Taylor Park basin. Snow accumulation for April in the basin was 127 percent of average. No major snowmelt has occurred to date but there is a change in weather patterns forecasted for the second part of the month.

Dave Gochis asked if the CBRFC blends in any shorter term deterministic meteorological forecast with their ESP historical climate forcing or is it pure historical climate forcing. Erik said that the ESP model uses just historical climate but that the forecast operators will look at the weather forecast five days out and take this into consideration when releases the official inflow forecast.

Ernie Cockrell said the rapid ramp up in the operations plan is good to see as it will provide a good flushing flows. On the other end of the graph, when the ramp down begins, we may want to do this a bit slower rather than drawing the river down that much in a short period of time. Erik noted that the proposed ramp down follows the ramping guidelines in the stipulation, but if changes need to be made, we can certainly discuss this as a group.

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

Dave Gochis said the data for the ASO/WRF Hydro assimilation shows that the median forecast for flows into Taylor Reservoir from the Taylor River and its tributaries are 114 kaf. The Taylor River carries the bulk of those flows at 64 kaf and Texas and Willow Creeks coming in a bit behind that amount. He said based on the ASO survey, the estimated snowpack in the Taylor Reservoir contributing area was 155 kaf. The estimate relayed via email was for 171 kaf but he wanted to clarify that this amount included Lottis Creek which is located below the reservoir and therefore does not contribute inflow to the reservoir. These amounts are a bit lower than last year as the 2023 ASO assimilation from April 2, 2023 was estimated at 197 kaf. As Erik Knight stated, the snow melt has not actually started yet this year but that could change in the near future. The SnoLite stations that are monitoring higher up in the watershed are still sitting at their seasonal peak for snow depth: Tin Cup – 55 inches, Cottonwood Pass – 75 inches, Trail Creek – 54 inches, and Italian Creek – 82 inches.

Dave provided a soil moisture trace for this year which shows soil moisture saturation at 43 percent which is a bit lower than last year at this time where the model showed soil moisture saturation at about 50%. Soils are bit dryer this year, but the difference may be bit exaggerated due to the need to recalibrate the model. They are also measuring snow temperatures this year as part of the WRF-Hydro assimilation. This information is tracked over the course of the year and indicates the readiness for the snow to start melting, which could occur very soon. Dave noted that much of the snow in the middle and lower areas has already melted out, but this has been in the form of evapotranspiration and has not resulted in runoff.

Don Sabrowski asked Dave if the earlier dust events would have any impact on the snowmelt. Dave noted that the event that occurred on April 3 showed up on a number of stations in the Roaring Fork and Uncompahgre basins but there is no information about this area. Most of the dust from that event is likely covered up with additional snow but once it reemerges there could be added acceleration in the runoff.

IV. Preliminary TLUG Draft Operational Release Recommendations

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

Ernie Cockrell – He did not have any additional recommendations other than those provided above.

Mark Schumacher – He said he agrees with the Ernie’s concerns for ramping down water at the end of the water year. He is not making any suggestions on dropping those end of year flows at this time. He is happy to see the 2,000 extra acre-feet of storage. Mark also reminded the group not to forget that Dan Brauch requests stable flows by October 16th. Mark suggested perhaps shifting some of the flows from the end of September to the end of August when water temperatures are higher. This could result in a reduction to 250 cfs at the end of September and would make the ramp down to 85 cfs less drastic.

Roark Kiklevich – Roark said he agrees with Ernie and Mark about the end of year ramp down.

Ryan Birdsey – Ryan said he has no comments about the end of season content. The group can discuss changes later if necessary.

Andy Spann – Andy said he was happy with the forecast but wanted to suggest being a bit more conservative in the ramping up in May, maybe to 230 rather than 259, knowing where we usually end up at that time and due to the soil saturation. He also agrees with Mark Schumacher’s suggestion for the ramp down.

V. Miscellaneous Matters

Sonja Chavez reported that she has been speaking with the other Four Parties about concerns about the process related to meeting end of year storage content. She has discussed with the River District and the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users the need to have contact information for

USBR staff and UVWUA staff for speedy end-of-year adjustments. Steve Pope indicated that when the dam tender is away, other staff is available. She will be facilitating a meeting to further discuss the issues.

Sonja said the USBR 2024 Snow Measurement Grant has been released and they have modified the proposal to support existing ASO snow measurement programs. The District will be resubmitting an application in conjunction with the North Fork for the support of joint management operations for the federal Aspinall Unit and Paonia Reservoirs. She received an email from Gunnison County Electric Association (Matt Feier) and he reported that there had been issues with manufactured equipment but they are still hoping to commence hydropower operations this summer.

Mark Schumacher asked about information on extension to the 1975 Storage Exchange Agreement. Sonja said that the Four Parties have met, the changes to the agreement are with BOR for their review and they are meeting again in the near future and will continue discussions.

Dan Brauch said the level on Spring Creek Reservoir is currently 4 feet below the outlet and the siphon tubes, which is the level they wanted. He also said they will be releasing 3.1 million Kokanee from the fish hatchery this Thursday, April 11, 2024, at 7:00 pm. Flows will be at about the minimum of what they typically like to see but he's hoping that with the warm-up in weather we'll have a bit more flow. Everyone was encouraged to attend.

VI. Citizen Comments

Chair Don Sabrowski asked for input from any citizens on the Zoom meeting throughout the meeting and no citizen comments were received.

VII. Next Meeting

The next TLUG meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 8, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.

The April 9, 2024 TLUG meeting was adjourned by Chairman Sabrowski at 10:07 a.m.