

MINUTES
Taylor Local Users Group via Zoom
July 10th, 2024

TLUG Attendees:

TLUG Chair: Don Sabrowski

TLUG Representatives Present:

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

Other Attendees:

Erik Knight (Bureau of Reclamation)
David Gochis (Airborne Snow Observatory)
Doug Forshagen (Crystal Creek Homeowner's Association)
Dustin Brown (Scenic River Tours)
Dan Brauch (US Fish and Wildlife)
Bryan Moore (USGS)
Beverly Richards (UGRWCD)
Sonja Chavez (UGRWCD)
Alana Nichols (UGRWCD)

I. Introductions & Approval of Minutes:

Don Sabrowski opened the meeting by requesting Beverly Richards to conduct a roll call to document the attendees. Following the roll call, Don transitioned the meeting to Erik Knight for an update on the CBRFC forecast.

II. CBRFC Water Supply Update and USBR Model Forecast:

Erik Knight of the Bureau of Reclamation reported on the latest forecasted inflow volume for April through July. The July forecast indicates an increase in the overall April through July runoff volume, now 110,000 acre-feet which is an increase of 4,000 acre-feet from the mid-June forecast. This brings the total to 117% of the average. For July, the model is predicting 23,400 acre-feet, primarily due to the rainfall in June, which reached nearly 300% of average across the Gunnison Basin. It remains uncertain if the predicted 23,400 acre-feet for July will be met, as inflows are dropping rapidly and are highly weather-dependent.

The Taylor Park inflows graph shows past, present, and future inflows into Taylor Park Reservoir compared to historical distributions. The 1,400 cfs peak observed in early June was among the top 10% of inflows for that time. Additional peaks were observed mid-June and late June and were attributed to rain. The forecast predicts a steep drop-off in inflows for July. Overall, the reservoir experienced substantial runoff, but the rate of inflow decline as summer progresses remains to be seen.

The Taylor Park operations, with inflows depicted in blue, releases in green, and reservoir content in black. The reservoir filled to over 102,529 acre-feet, reaching an elevation of 9328.16 feet, within two feet of the spillway crest. The content is projected to remain above 70,000 acre-feet through the end of October.

Regarding future releases, the current release rate is 440 cfs, which is planned to decrease to 400 cfs on July 16th and hold for the remainder of the month. It will further decrease to 350 cfs on August 1st, maintain through August and the first half of September, then drop to 300 cfs on September 16th, and finally to 250 cfs on October 1st. Following this plan, based on current inflow forecasts, the end of October content is projected to be 71,500 acre-feet, providing a buffer above the 70,000 acre-feet target.

Erik Knight then asked if there were any questions regarding the presented information.

Mark Schumacher asked Erik about the decision made at the last meeting regarding the flow rates for the first 15 days of October. He mentioned that they had discussed reducing the flow from 250 cfs to 85 cfs, a drop of 165 cfs, and there was some concern about its impact on fish. He was unsure if they had consulted Dan Brauch on this matter.

Dan Brauch mentioned that he would recommend reaching the winter minimums by mid-October to set things up for the brown trout spawn. Dan stated that it would be acceptable to start tapering the flow down in the first half of October to around 150 cfs if desired but stressed the importance of reaching the winter minimum by mid-October.

Erik explained that the current operations plan proposed going to 250 cfs on October 1st and holding that flow for the first eight days. Then, the plan would ramp down to 85 cfs by October 15th. He noted that this plan was in line with the forecast model.

Dan Brauch agreed with the operations proposed by Erik Knight's forecast model.

III. ASO Flight and Data Report:

Dave Gochis of ASO Inc. presented the ASO/WRF Hydro assimilation forecast. The latest WRF Hydro forecast for the Taylor Reservoir inflow decreased slightly from 115 to 113 kac-ft. Dave mentioned that the CBRFC forecast had also been trending downward due to the dry spell, bringing the two forecasts into closer agreement.

Most of the changes in the forecast was attributed to a drop in the Taylor River (64 kac-ft) and a slight decrease in Willow Creek (17 kac-ft). However, Texas Creek (24 kac-ft) saw a minor increase of about 1,000 acre-feet since the last forecast, despite general flow reductions.

Dave explained that the observed flows, represented by a brown shaded area, had a strong ramp-up in June and were now at a critical point to see how quickly the accumulation curve would flatten. The Taylor Park forecast from the CBRFC indicated similar behaviors, though there was still some catching up to do compared to the latest CBRFC forecast.

A recent satellite image of the Taylor River Basin showed minimal snow remaining, primarily in the Italian Creek area and a few drifts on the divide areas. The accumulated flow curve for the east at Almont remained steep, and the CBRFC forecast for that area had increased. The WRF Hydro model forecast for the east also increased slightly over the last forecast cycle.

Dave emphasized the annual time series for Taylor River, Taylor Park, Texas Creek, and Willow Creek to compare current flows with those from the previous year. The flows were similar to last year's at this time, and the key question was how quickly the flow would stabilize or decrease further. Soil moisture data from stations at Cottonwood Pass, Tin Cup, and Trail Creek were examined and the data showed that Cottonwood Pass had slightly lower moisture levels compared to last year, while Tin Cup, Mirror Lake, and Trail Creek were wetter.

Dave noted that there was still some wetness in the basin, which could help sustain flows in tributary areas. The flow forecasts had converged over the last few cycles, and the team was closely monitoring remaining basin conditions and the forecasted duration of the current hot spell.

Don asked Dave if he was comfortable with the projected releases from the reservoir, considering the current drop-off in flows and the overall situation.

Dave said that while the operation of multi-criteria reservoir management was not his area of expertise, he believed the adjustments made over the last few meetings, as laid out by Erik, were aligned with the forecast trends. He noted the sustained high seasonal flows and the recent minor top-offs, but also emphasized the current significant dry spell and the potential for monsoon rains to mitigate evapotranspiration. Dave stressed the importance of monitoring residual basin wetness to predict how quickly flows might decline, expressing hope that the decline would not be too rapid. Overall, he felt that Erik's plan made sense given the forecast and criteria.

IV. Preliminary TLUG Draft Operational Release Recommendations:

Ernie mentioned that current releases were about 150-160 cfs more than the inflows from Taylor River, Willow Creek, and Texas Creek, suggesting that it might be beneficial to reduce releases to conserve water. He recommended reducing releases from the current 430-440 cfs level to 375 cfs through the end of the month to provide a cushion and again expressed concern about the rapid drop-off to 85 cfs in mid-October.

Erik agreed that the timing of reducing flows could be adjusted as needed.

Mark noted the importance of water for agriculture and recreational activities, suggesting that adjustments could be made in August if necessary.

Andy agreed, emphasizing the need to maintain higher flows through July for agricultural purposes and suggested flexibility in flow reductions in August and September.

Ryan proposed a gradual reduction in flows, starting in early September, to conserve water while maintaining buffer levels. Ernie reiterated the importance of conserving water now and suggested that reducing releases to 375 cfs would provide more flexibility later.

Erik ran a model showing that reducing releases to 375 cfs would increase the end-of-October content to around 73,000 acre-feet, providing an additional 1,500 acre-feet.

Mark and Andy reiterated the need to maintain higher flows through July for agricultural and recreational purposes especially because it is a good water year, and adjustments can be made in August and September.

Mark made a motion to drop releases to 400 cfs immediately and maintain this level through July, with a reconsideration of Taylor Park operations in August. Roark seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Sonja mentioned the need to present the motion to the Four Parties at a meeting on July 30th. Erik agreed to send out the revised plan, noting that the only change was to reduce flows to 400 cfs five days earlier.

V. Miscellaneous Matters

Sonja updated TLUG on her recent conversations with Western Water Weather and Intelligence, specifically with Vern Tharp. She mentioned that they had previously sent a letter expressing their disappointment with the slow progress of installing the weather radar station in the Gunnison community. Sonja recently communicated with the group again, emphasizing that if the installation was not completed in July, they would seek other options. Vern Tharp responded, informing her that the trailer was currently at Advanced Radar Company and that the radar was scheduled to arrive on July 19th. Sonja is hopeful that the installation will be completed soon, enhancing local forecasting capabilities.

Dan provided an update on upcoming fish sampling activities. He requested that flows be reduced to 75 cfs on October 23rd for tailwater sampling, explaining that previous attempts at 90 cfs were challenging, but 75 cfs was manageable. He assured that this temporary reduction should not adversely affect any eggs in the gravel. After the sampling, the flows could be returned to the minimum levels. Dan also mentioned sampling activities on the Gunnison from October 5th through the 8th. The sampling will cover two and a half miles from Almont down to North Bridge near Garlic Mike's and down to the bottom of the state wildlife area. He plans to share more details with everyone, including fly shops, to inform them about the sampling. Additionally, Dan noted plans to sample two other sites: Taylor at Almont and just above Harmel's on October 16th and 17th, which he believes can be coordinated with the scheduled releases.

VI. Adjournment

The next TLUG meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 8th, at 10:00 a.m.

The July 10th, 2024 TLUG meeting was adjourned by Chairman Sabrowski at 10:58 a.m.

