



**Statement for Gunnison Basin POWER — June 16, 1994**

**For: Public meeting organized by the Bureau of Reclamation**

**Subject: Management agreement for delivery of water from the Aspinall Unit past the Redlands Diversion Dam on the Gunnison River.**

**This present meeting appears to be a continuation of meetings held in 1992. They were organized by the Bureau of Reclamation and other agencies on the topic of future Aspinall Unit operations to meet requirements of the Black Canyon National Monument and endangered fish. A major concern then and now is whether serving those requirements would result in downstream water calls passing through the Aspinall Unit to water users in the Upper Gunnison Basin. Since Blue Mesa Reservoir began operating in 1965, neither the Aspinall Unit nor downstream rights have imposed calls on water users in our Upper Gunnison Basin.**

**POWER's comments and information provided at various meetings two years ago remain relevant to tonight's meeting and POWER requests that this material be included by reference in the records of this meeting.**

**Several points made two years ago deserve highlighting. They are based on research by POWER members and particularly the work done by Marsha Julio in the newspaper archives.**

- 1. Design of the Curecanti Project (later renamed the Aspinall Unit) included an assumed subordination for 60,000 acre-feet of depletions upstream of the project. No charge was to be made to beneficiaries of the subordination. Its purpose, explained in the Bureau's 1964 Reconnaissance Report, was to assure an opportunity for present and future water use and development within the Upper Basin without impairment by senior downstream calls.**
- 2. In 1959 local support for the Curecanti Project was sought by Justice Felix Sparks, then Director of the Colorado Water Conservation Board. He told the Gunnison Community that after Curecanti was built no Gunnison Area decrees would ever be curtailed in the future because of calls from senior downstream rights. That was a major selling point for the proposed project.**
- 3. What happened? A contract establishing the subordination appears to have been prepared and approved by the Bureau. It was never executed by all the parties. However, since 1965, operation of the Aspinall Unit has indeed protected water users in our Upper Basin from downstream calls, as was promised.**
- 4. Now it seems our community might lose both the 60,000 acre-foot subordination and historic call protection. One obligation or undertaking of the Curecanti Project was for the Bureau to provide mitigation for the fishery inundated by reservoirs with 26 miles of publicly accessible high quality stream fishery. That obligation remains only partially fulfilled. Historic operations of the Aspinall Unit during the past almost 30 years have successfully fulfilled the two obligations of subordination and call protection made to the Gunnison Community. Now it is possible that these two obligations may go unfulfilled.**

5. Meeting the requirements of endangered fish species and the Black Canyon would not appear to make necessary major changes in historic operations of the Aspinall Unit. Nor would meeting these requirements appear to produce changes in the level of Blue Mesa Reservoir beyond what has been historically experienced. Both points can be shown by study of very specific analysis of future Aspinall operations made by the Department of Energy. Several months ago the DOE released two draft environmental impact statements related to its long term plans for marketing hydroelectric power generated at the Aspinall Unit and several other Bureau of Reclamation projects.

6. Examination of projected future operations of the Aspinall Unit indicates that over the course of a year, more than enough water is present to meet needs of the Uncompahgre Water Users Association for flows through the Gunnison Tunnel, the Redlands Diversion, and the appropriate conditions for the Black Canyon and endangered fish. In some months there is more than enough flow. In others there is a need to "top up" flows presumably from the Aspinall Unit to meet endangered species requirements. It is a question of careful attention to timing. The Black Canyon and endangered fish requirements are adjusted to fit water conditions - dry year requirements in dry years, moderate in moderate, and wet in wet.

7. Re-affirmation of past intent and historic operational practice for the Aspinall Unit is needed for our basin's future. In effect this would simply continue at no cost, for historically none was anticipated or ever imposed, the protection to all water users in the Upper Gunnison Basin from any downstream calls or calls from the Aspinall unit. It is incumbent upon the federal government through the Bureau to honor past commitments that it made in good faith to a community which has relied upon them.

8. Currently, the annual depletion from all water use within the Upper Gunnison Basin is estimated to be about 52,500 acre-feet. We believe a reasonable limit in the re-affirmation of operational practice for the Aspinall Unit is protection to inbasin users of up to a total of 60,000 acre-feet of depletion. Within this limit, past practice can continue and serve the recognized needs of the endangered fish and the Black Canyon. It also is possible to meet projected future hydroelectric power production targets.

9. With an assured supply of very high quality water to be managed from the Aspinall Unit, the Bureau has the opportunity to address issues of salinity control and hydroelectric power production far downstream on the Colorado River in a cost effective way. In our Upper Gunnison Basin we would be assured of the simple commitment to continued fulfillment of obligations - again cost effectively and in a manner that allows some reasonable growth of water use in our basin's future.