

THE CASE FOR CURECANTI RESERVOIR

Foreword

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the wisdom of building a large reservoir on Gunnison river below Gunnison, which will store for long periods of years all the water of the river that Gunnison County does not use. So far you have heard only the side of the problem, here in Gunnison, of those who do not want the reservoir built. There is another side, with many weighty arguments why building this reservoir will really benefit Gunnison County. We want you to hear and weigh the arguments both for and against before you make up your minds. Once you decide you will probably be bound by that decision from this time on.

Colorado River Storage Project

In order properly to lay the ground work for understanding the Colorado River Storage Project we must go back to the time when people from the seven Colorado Basin states were writing the 1922 Compact. Those people did not know too much about Colorado river. The river was not measured in nearly so many places as it is today, and in some places where it was very essential to know what the river flowed, there were no measurements at all. One of these was the place which the Commission chose to divide the flow of the river between the Upper and Lower Basins, at Lee Ferry, near the Arizona line. No measurements had ever been taken anywhere near there, in spite of which fact the Commission chose that point to divide the river.

They decided to divide somewhat less than the total quantity of water they believed the river flowed between the Upper and Lower Basins, after months spent in trying to divide the water to each single state. It was very evident That California and Arizona, at least, could not agree upon a proper division of water to each of them, so the whole question of division by states was waived for division between the two principal basins into which the river naturally divides itself. This division point, at Lee Ferry is 28 miles below the Utah-Arizona line. Above this point over 90 percent of the flow originates, and not too far below Lee Ferry, Colorado river becomes a losing stream, that is, the further it flows the less water there is in it, because of stream losses.

The great canons of Colorado river are generally below Lee Ferry, although it flows in pretty considerable canons for many miles above. The tributaries that enter it above Lee Ferry are many of them large and most have a constant flow, while those that enter below are small and often dry. Lee Ferry is probably the proper place to make such a division, and since it was chosen, we are bound by that fact.

As has been said, there were no measurements of the river anywhere near Lee Ferry. The nearest place below was at Topock, Arizona, 470 miles below. The nearest place above, was on San Juan river 135 miles upstream from Lee Ferry. Colorado and Green rivers were measured many miles further upstream. None of these places had then, a very long record of runoff so the guess the Commission made was liable to be considerably in error. It was in fact, wrong by just about 32 percent. They estimated from the short records they had that the flow at Lee Ferry would average, before any use above, 20,000,000 acre-feet a year. When an estimate was made in 1946, upon the basis of much more information, including a

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the Colorado River Storage Project the people of the Upper Basin including you people on Gunnison river, are only taking out an insurance policy on your supply of water. If part of this water is stored in Curecanti reservoir everybody above that reservoir can continue to use his water as he always has. If Curecanti is not built another reservoir will have to be built to take its place in the scheme, somewhere downstream where the evaporation is greater, and you with all the other people in the Upper Basin will lose the difference in evaporation which might be a good many thousands of acre-feet a year. But this is not the only gain from building Curecanti.

Another Danger — Uncompahgre Project

Some of you can remember what happened in 1934, when the rivers generally only flowed about one-third of their average. The Uncompahgre Project at Montrose claimed it had priorities old enough to shut a lot of you people down. You believed them and after a meeting here, both parties went over to Denver, and in the State Engineer's office came to an agreement. This was that you would use water in your customary manner until July 15th, on your meadow hay and then turn it down for use on the Uncompahgre Project for the rest of the summer. When you did turn this water down the river, without using it, the river rose in a few hours from 400 second-feet to 850 second-feet, but within a week had fallen again to about 400 second-feet. This led to the building of Taylor Park reservoir. You needed this water at least a month longer than you had it, and might not then have produced an average crop of hay. This can still happen, even with Taylor Park reservoir, since in a year like 1934 it would not fill, and you might very well be called upon for some of the late summer flow, which you would need for you own crops. However, if Curecanti reservoir is built this cannot happen as the water the Uncompahgre Project needs will be stored in that reservoir below all your uses and that Project will never bother you again.

Modern Road — Now

These are two ways in which Curecanti reservoir will be of positive benefit to all Gunnison County, so perhaps we should talk a little more about it. The dam which will make the reservoir will probably be of concrete, about 475 feet above present river level, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles below Sapinero. Probably the highway to Montrose will cross the dam and in that case will be moved above high water line along the north side of the reservoir, which of course, will be done at the expense of the Storage Project. The present highway is being slowly rebuilt to the necessary standard for present traffic, but by this means a new highway of a type equal to the best of the present highway will all be built at once. This is a small gain, perhaps, but it is badly needed right now.

Stream Fishing vs. Lake Fishing

Built to the height stated above the dam will impound water in a lake that will reach to a point about one mile below Gunnison. It will fill the canon of Lake Fork and the valley of Sapinero creek for several miles and extend up the smaller creeks for greater or less distances and will afford reservoir fishing for many more people than can at present use the river. There will be just as much opportunity to build camps and resorts along it, and maybe more.

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Summary

This has been a pretty long explanation, to come on top of all the bad things some of your own people have told you Curecanti would do to you. Suppose we make a list of the benefits this reservoir will actually bring you:

- 1) It will take care of your debts to the Lower Basin, in the worst conditions ever known in the past.
- 2) It will remove the fear that the Uncompahgre Project can ever exercise its priority against you.
- 3) You will get a new and modern highway as far as the dam all in one lump, while the Highway Dept., could only build it piecemeal.
- 4) You will get electricity in quantities as great as all the demand you can develop.
- 5) You can have, if you want it, twice as many acres of new land as will be lost in Curecanti reservoir.
- 6) It will ^{probably} definitely prevent the Arkansas diversion.
- 7) The Storage Project should help pay for the more expensive of the new projects, if you want them.
- 8) Other advantages can be worked out, which may be a real help to Gunnison County.

The Problem

What will you lose for all these advantages? About 30 miles of Gunnison river will be converted into a lake instead of a stream. As was said in discussing the Arkansas diversion the only way to hold onto your water is to make use of it, before the other fellow can. When you start out to make use of water the first thing you find is that it involves change — things cannot stay as they were. You expect us engineers to furnish you projects that will make your country grow, make it a better place to live, but if you tell us that nothing can be changed we cannot furnish you with projects because growth itself involves change.