

Colorado River Storage Project Flaming Gorge Working Group Meeting Minutes April 15, 2025

Participation

This meeting was held Thursday, April 15, 2025, from 12:00 pm to 3:00 am MT, via Microsoft Teams virtual meeting. Attendees are listed on the last page.

Purpose of Meeting

The purpose of these working group meetings is to inform the public and other interested parties on Reclamation's current and future operational plans and to gather input from the public and interested parties regarding resources associated with the dam [Flaming Gorge].

Introductions – Alex Pivarnik (Bureau of Reclamation)

This is the second Flaming Gorge Working Group meeting this year. A draft Flaming Gorge Operations Plan was distributed before the meeting for review.

The Flaming Gorge Working Group meeting is an important step in developing the Flaming Gorge Operations Plan.

Current and Forecasted Hydrology – Brenda Alcorn (Colorado Basin River Forecast Center)

Brenda presented on the Water Year (WY) 2025 hydrologic conditions to date and forecasted conditions.

Brenda reviewed the previous fall's soil moisture conditions. The soil conditions can impact runoff efficiency in the following spring but are not as important as the amount of precipitation and the rate of runoff. Fall soil moisture conditions in both the Green and Yampa basins are below average. In the Green, conditions are worse than last year, but in the Yampa, they are similar to last year.

For precipitation, the Upper Green has fluctuated a lot, but is coming in around average for the WY. Precipitation in the Yampa has been more consistent, also resulting in near normal conditions at the beginning of April. However, April precipitation has been far below average.

Modeled Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) is also tracking below normal. Large storms contributed heavily to overall snowpack. Early melt seems to have started.

Brenda presented the water supply forecast evolution plot. The water supply forecast from raw model guidance is tracking to be below last year at Flaming Gorge, with the April 14 guidance of 695 thousand acre-feet (kaf) for April-July unregulated runoff.

The verification of the forecast shows that the error is reduced as we move into the April-July period. On March 1, the error is 26% at Flaming Gorge but reduces to 18% by May 1. There is a similar trend for forecasts on the Yampa, though those generally have less error than Flaming Gorge. The primary sources of forecast error are future weather (largest source of error) and model states.

The peak flow forecast is a long-lead forecast. The forecast is updated daily for sites with minimal upstream regulation. The current forecast shows a peak on the Green to be near to below normal and on the Yampa to be near normal. Ultimately, spring weather will play a large role in peak flow magnitude and timing. The long-lead forecasts are helpful, but more accurate information on flows can be found in the 10-day streamflow forecast.

The 10-day forecast shows an increase inflows, due to some early melt and some precipitation in the 7 day forecast. The 8-14 day forecast shows leaning above chances for precipitation, so we may continue to see a more active pattern through the end of the month.

Green River Research and Endangered Fish – Tildon Jones (Recovery)

Tildon started with a background on the listed fish, the threats to those species, the Recovery Program, and the native fish lifecycle in comparison to idealized flow and river temperatures.

The Recovery Program's request for this year (which is currently expected to be in the average below median or drier classification from the Recovery Program Flow Request) prioritized 1) the smallmouth bass (SMB) flow spike, 2) the Colorado Pike Minnow (CPM) base flow, and 3) the Larval Trigger Study Plan (LTSP).

SMB Flow Spike

There are three invasive fish species that Recovery focuses on, with SMB being one of the highest concerns. SMB have better success in average to drier years. The SMB flow spike request focuses on temperature and flow. The SMB flow spike consisted of 72 hours of Flaming Gorge release at power plant capacity.

CPM Base Flow

The CPM base flows are intended to improve survival and recruitment of young CPM by targeting flows at Jensen, based on hydrologic classification, through the end of September.

LTSP

The LTSP is intended to shift flows from the Yampa peak to being timed based on the presence of Razorback Sucker, with the intent to push larvae into wetlands

Questions

From Eric Carlson – Asked when would spring peak dates be solidified. Can't book trips if the river users don't know more solidified dates. Tildon's response: we have heard this concern in previous years and will try to give as much heads up as possible.

Eric Carlson – Commented on last year's 4 day notification is too short for the spring peak. Tildon: Due to the biological trigger, we can't commit to two weeks' notice.

Todd Brown – Commented that bass bump was done with the spring peak. Was that successful?
Tildon response: SMB is a separate release and is not during the spring peak and do not believe that that operation has occurred.

Cary Asper – Is there data to show the SMB success? Tildon: Collection of data explanation.
Yes, there is greatly reduced number of bass in the Green River during those years. Dr. Bestgen confirmed this statement and expounded on some of the details of the findings.

“Duck Curve” and Energy Demands – Derek Fryer (WAPA)

Presented on the “duck curve” and how the customer demands throughout the day is changing due to renewable energy contributions to the system. Demands have curved in the CRSP system to resemble a “duck” or early and late demand but very little demand in the middle of the day.

Load growth projected to increase 20.4% in the next decade. Due to this concern, WAPA wanted to start discussing load pattern changes with various stakeholders.

Likely seeing changes come to fruition at Flaming Gorge soon but don’t have timelines currently.

Questions

None

Flaming Gorge Reservoir Operations – Amanda Becker (Bureau of Reclamation)

Amanda Becker reviewed Flaming Gorge operations, starting with a background of the project.

Official April forecast is in Average, below median but the raw ESP is in Mod Dry.

In the Draft Flaming Gorge Operations Plan, the Dry year may attempt a spring release and SMB flow spike. Summer flows for CPM may not be able to be met due to a tight water budget and low contributions from the Yampa.

The forecast currently indicates a Moderately Dry classification. This would target Muth et al. spring peak and SMB flow spike. Summer flows for CPM would start at the lower range and move up to the higher range after 2-3 weeks. Autumn flows would use the lower end of the baseflow range. Winter flows would be at the higher end of the range.

In Average Below Median would likely be minimum spring peak releases. The SMB flow spike would be included. The plan would target the low end of CPM range. Autumn flows would use the lower end of the baseflow range. Winter flows would be at the higher end of the range.

In Moderately Wet, the Recovery Request does not include the SMB spike flow. Spring Flows are intended to be timed to match and extend peak flows but may extend to encompass larval drift. Flows would decrease for the fall and increase for the winter.

In Wet, flood control operations for spring release. CPM flows in the summer are targeted. Autumn flows would use the lower end of the baseflow range. Winter flows would be at the higher end of the range.

Questions

Tim Gaylord (Holiday River Expeditions) requested higher water at the 1,000 cfs minimums for rafting. Amanda Becker answered in presentation.

Eric Carlson: How are average daily releases scheduled as hourly pattern and what do the middle of the days look like for this summer – Amanda deferred to WAPA

Courtney Harris WAPA response: WAPA looking at the patterns and will likely need to schedule for the day.

John Walrath questions: Can an elevation visualization be generated for the pool elevation? Alex Pivarnik response pointed toward the 24 MS.

Chris Brown goes back to a DROA comment – DROA agreement is to take certain actions for certain conditions. Monitoring condition met but there is no DROA plan for 2025. The water year is shaping up to be somewhat like 2021 when emergency actions did take place but we are keeping an eye on it.

Questions/Comments

No new questions during open discussion period.

Next Meeting

August 2025 Date and Time TBD

Attendees

Becki Bryant, Reclamation
Cheyenne Reid, USU Extension
Cary Asper, flyfisher
David Graf, Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Recovery Program
Brian Hines, Reclamation
Kevin Bestgen, Colorado State University
Jason Griswold, Chief Ranger, Dinosaur National Monument.
Derek Fryer, WAPA
Kathy Callister, Reclamation
Jeff Cowley WY SEO
Mike Callahan Reclamation
Eric Carlson Western Rivers Flyfisher Guides GM
Brett Heath, Forest Service
Brody Douglas FGR guide
Suman Chitrakar, WYSEO
Ryan Jones, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food

John Walrath, Regional Fisheries Biologist, Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Chris Eaton- Trout Creek Flies
Woody Bair - Flaming Gorge Resort - GROGA member
Brenda Alcorn - CBRFC
Jordon Detlor UDWR
Julie Stahli, Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program
Erik Knight - Reclamation
Nathaniel Todea, UCB Reclamation
Ryan Rowland, USGS Utah WSC.
Christina Noftsker, New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission
Pivarnik, Alexander J, Reclamation
Becker, Amanda H, Reclamation
Nicole Lavoie (OARS) (Unverified)
Cheyenne Reid
Wilson (Unverified)
Andrews, Jaron R

Mower, Clifton (Shane)
Grantz, Katrina A
Jones, Tildon, Recovery
Bryan Seppie, Green River Wyoming
Gibney, Nicole (Nicki)
Tim Gaylord - river user
Bryan Engelbert (Unverified)
Kassie (Unverified)

Wild, Ron (PacifiCorp)
Danny Rasmussen
Harris, Courtney WAPA
Lucerne Valley Marina (Unverified)
Mead, Jaydon B
Kemp, Erik W Reclamation
Todd Brown – Trout Creek Flies