

COLORADO WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

Department of Natural Resources

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Gunnison River Basin Drought Impact Fact Sheet

Water Division 4

Reservoir Storage

Most southern Grand Mesa reservoirs are at 20-25% of normal storage. Fruit growers Reservoir will not fill for the first time since 1977, and is likely to be nearly empty by the end of June. Aspinall Unit (Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, Crystal Reservoirs) is currently releasing from storage rather than filling; almost unheard of for this time of year. Irrigation reservoirs on San Miguel drainage (Gurley, Lilylands, Cone) will not fill. Taylor Park is at 62% of capacity and unlikely to store much more water.

Use of Storage

Reservoir storage will likely be used heavily during the early part of the growing season. Some will maximize the benefit by using "block delivery", where large releases are made periodically, followed by no releases for several days or weeks. We anticipate most of the smaller irrigation reservoirs will be drained by the end of the irrigation season, except for small amounts of livestock carryover. Municipal supplies are generally adequate to satisfy this year's demands, although some lawn watering restrictions could occur.

Streamflow

Flow levels are significantly below normal, as indicated by the Gunnison at Whitewater (Grand Junction) gage, which reads 32 % of normal.

Water Administration

The call status for the Gunnison Basin reflects the desperately dry conditions. Administrative calls began around the 1st of April. A Gunnison Tunnel call occurred on April 18th, the first time in nearly 50 years. Smaller tributaries typically have calling rights in the 1880's or 1890's. Surface Creek near Cedaredge is down to their number 5 priority on the stream. Additional calls are anticipated, with a Redlands Canal call at Grand Junction having the most impact. It would place the entire Gunnison Basin under administration. The Uncompahgre and San Miguel could be on call within a few days.

Comparison to Prior Years

In district 40 on the Grand Mesa, the perception is that this year the storage levels are lower, but the stream levels slightly higher. The Gunnison Basin snowpack in April was 5.4 inches this year, compared with 6.1 inches in 1977. An Upper Gunnison irrigator estimates he will only get one-quarter of his normal irrigation supply. As a result, many ranchers are considering selling their cattle now rather than attempting to feed or water them later this summer.



For more information about this or other water resource topics, please contact the CWCB at:

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