



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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#### INTERIOR DEPARTMENT ASKS COLORADO TO ADVISE ON CURECANTI DEVELOPMENT

The official views of the State of Colorado on the development of the Curecanti Unit of the Colorado River Storage Project have been invited by Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton.

In a letter to Governor Stephen McNichols of Colorado, Secretary Seaton said:

"The possible uses of the natural resources comprising certain sections of the Gunnison River seem to be incompatible. A determination must be made as to whether, on the one hand, the area should be developed for hydroelectric power, flood control, irrigation, and other purposes, or, on the other hand, should be dedicated primarily to continuation of the big-stream trout fishery and the big-game winter habitat. Consequently, before reaching a final decision, we would appreciate receiving the State's official views and recommendations on how best to utilize the area."

The proposed development of the Bureau of Reclamation calls for a two-dam plan (with provision for a possible three-dam development, if such a plan proves feasible following additional study) in west-central Colorado on the Gunnison River, near Gunnison.

The two dams at Blue Mesa and Morrow Point would have a total reservoir capacity of about 1,030,000 acre-feet and an installed interconnected powerplant capacity of about 100,000 kilowatts. An additional dam, being considered downstream at the Crystal site, might add storage and power capacity.

A report by the National Park Service indicates the reservoirs would provide extensive recreational benefits, part of which would be within the adjacent Gunnison National Forest. The Forest Service, in an analysis, also indicates that there would be a big increase in recreational use of the area.

A report by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, however, points out that the upper Gunnison Basin is an area of land and water which is unusually well suited for fish and wildlife. The report of the Bureau does not present a program for mitigation of the potential losses, and points out that there is no known feasible means of replacing the fishery values in kind and quality nor of significantly mitigating the damages to the fish and wildlife resources if the unit is constructed.

Secretary Seaton's letter to Governor McNichols is attached.

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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington 25, D. C.

MAR 20 1959

Air Mail

Dear Governor McNichols:

We enclose for your consideration as Governor of the State of Colorado, copies of reports prepared by the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, the National Park Service, and other cooperating agencies on the provisionally authorized Curecanti Storage Unit of the Colorado River Storage Project in Colorado. These reports are subject to minor revisions for technical accuracy and editorial improvement which can be made prior to further processing of the final overall departmental report.

This supplemental report was prepared pursuant to the provision in the authorizing act of April 11, 1956, requiring of the Secretary, before construction of the Curecanti Storage Unit is undertaken, a certification to the Congress and the President that the benefits of the unit will exceed its costs. The State of Colorado has been desirous of having this report completed as soon as practicable. Its completion at this time was facilitated through the contribution of \$35,000 by the State toward the costs of investigations in fiscal year 1958.

As a result of the further engineering and economic investigations of the Curecanti Unit as required by said act of April 11, 1956, and based solely on the tangible cost and benefit values available, the two-dam plan (Blue Mesa and Morrow Point) presented in the report for development of the water storage and hydroelectric power generating potentialities and other purposes in the Gunnison River in Colorado is economically justified. Of the number of plans considered by the Bureau of Reclamation, the most favorable has been found to be either the two-dam plan including developments at the Blue Mesa and Morrow Point sites or a three-dam plan including developments at those two sites and also at the Crystal site. Each of these features includes a dam, reservoir, and powerplant. The two developments at Blue Mesa and Morrow Point would have a total reservoir capacity of about 1,030,000 acre-feet and an installed interconnected powerplant capacity of about 100,000 kilowatts.

Additional feasibility investigations, however, are still under way on the more inaccessible downstream Crystal site. A reconnaissance appraisal indicates that the Crystal feature, through its own power production capabilities and its effect in increasing power values at the next upstream Morrow Point feature (with an increased power installation), would at least not detract from and might improve the economy of the Curecanti Unit over that which would be provided by only the Blue Mesa and Morrow Point features as presented in the report. Should detailed studies of the Crystal feature support the tentative conclusion just indicated, it will be included as a segment of the Curecanti Unit by supplemental report. Should detailed studies show the Crystal development to be unfavorable for any reason, however, the Blue Mesa and Morrow Point features together would comprise the most favorable plan for the unit.

In addition to developing the water storage and hydro-electric power generating potentialities in this region of the Gunnison, the Curecanti Unit would regulate streamflows and provide downstream flood control and irrigation benefits. A report prepared by the field office of the National Park Service indicates that the reservoirs would also provide extensive recreation benefits, part of which would be within the adjacent Gunnison National Forest. That report is presently under review by the Washington office and may be subject to revision. An analysis by the Forest Service also indicates, on the basis of past experience with similar Reclamation developments such as Taylor Park Reservoir, which is also in the Gunnison National Forest, that there will be a large increase in recreation use during and after construction of this unit.

The Report of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife points out:

(1) That the upper Gunnison Basin is an area of land and water which is unusually well suited for fish and wildlife. The Gunnison River is famous across the Nation as one of the country's outstanding trout streams. Sportsmen travel long distances to test their skill in the renowned Gunnison. The resources of this river are instrumental in meeting the needs of Coloradans and a host of nonresident trout fishermen for the sporting challenge of a "big-stream" fishery. Deer and elk hunters, too, come not only from Colorado but from other states as well to pursue their sport. The importance of the deer range in Gunnison County, already evident in the high preference given it by resident and nonresident hunters alike, is expected to increase with each passing year. The Bureau

of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife believes that development of water and other resources in this basin must be consistent with the conservation and development of fish and wildlife resources.

(2) Although the outstanding fish and wildlife values of this basin cannot be expressed adequately in monetary terms, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has estimated on the basis of recent surveys of sportsmen using the area and on the basis of expected future use that expenditures by sportsmen in connection with their fishing and hunting activities in the area will average about \$1,250,000 annually over the next 50 years. Construction of the Curecanti Unit is expected to result in a reduction of about \$750,000 annually in the business generated by these fishing and hunting activities. Although this represents a significant monetary loss, that Bureau does not consider this as a true indication of the splendid public assets for outdoor recreation which will be lost if this nationally significant fish and wildlife area is destroyed or seriously damaged.

(3) There is no known feasible means of replacing the fishery values in kind and quality nor of significantly mitigating the damages to the fish and wildlife resources if the unit is constructed. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife believes that preservation of the unique fishery of the Gunnison River is in the national interest. That Bureau concludes, therefore, that the Curecanti Unit should not be constructed.

The possible uses of the natural resources comprising certain sections of the Gunnison River seem to be incompatible. A determination must be made as to whether, on the one hand, the area should be developed for hydroelectric power, flood control, irrigation, and other purposes, or, on the other hand, should be dedicated primarily to continuation of the big-stream trout fishery and the big-game winter habitat. Consequently, before reaching a final decision, we would appreciate receiving the State's official views and recommendations on how best to utilize the area. The State's views, including those of the Colorado Game and Fish Department, would be particularly helpful on the question of whether or not the intangible fish and wildlife aspects are sufficient to outweigh the tangible benefits and thereby result in a finding that the total benefits do not exceed the costs.

In regard to possible alternatives for Curecanti Unit, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has stated:

"Since 1949, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has consistently pointed out the adverse effects of the Curecanti unit and preceding proposals upon the fish and wildlife resources of the Upper Gunnison Basin. As an alternative offering smaller losses and greater possibilities for the creation of new resources and allied business opportunities, this Bureau suggests the Juniper Reservoir site on the Yampa River as a possible substitute. DeBeque Dam on the Colorado River and Whitewater Dam on the Gunnison River are also advanced as alternate development possibilities with the idea that, in comparison with the Curecanti development, the resultant damages to fish and wildlife resources would be far less and the opportunities for mitigation of losses or possible enhancement far greater. The same is true for the alternate development of high altitude reservoir sites such as might be located on East River; Cochetopa, Ohio, or Tomichi Creeks, or the Lake Fork of the Gunnison. In all the foregoing possibilities, the best results would require an early consideration of fish and wildlife requirements during the planning of project design and operations."

As you know, there is considerable demand for the report on the Curecanti Unit, both from within and without the State. Consequently, copies of the report, without a final conclusion, are being made available to those with a legitimate interest.

As soon as the views of the State have been received and considered, a final conclusion can be reached and the report forwarded to the Congress and to the President.

Sincerely yours,

(Sgd) Fred A. Seaton  
Secretary of the Interior

Hon. Stephen L. R. McNichols  
Governor of Colorado  
Denver, Colorado

Enclosures