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ADDRESS BY UNITED STATES COMMISSIONER OF RECLAMATION FLOYD E. DOMINY AT THE GROUND-BREAKING CEREMONY FOR BLUE MESA DAM ON THE GUNNISON RIVER IN COLORADO, JULY 7, 1962

We are living literally in an age of explosion. In remote corners of the earth great explosions are occurring as we test and perfect our nuclear arsenals for the defense of the free world. For the most part, they carry a potential of death and destruction that we all prayerfully hope will never be necessary.

On this spot today you and I celebrate an explosion of a very different kind. This groundbreaking blast is a symbol of hope and of man's creativeness for the betterment of the world we live in. It is a new step in the fulfillment of the heritage of America and the heritage of Colorado. We proclaim the beginning of the $70 million Curecanti Unit, an undertaking in which two dams and powerplants, Blue Mesa and Morrow Point, will be constructed here on the Gunnison River. In later prospect is the Crystal Dam.

Not since the start of construction on the Uncompahgre and Grand Valley Projects in 1904 and 1912 has a major Reclamation undertaking been launched in western Colorado. It is an event of far-reaching significance to you and to me that the Curecanti Unit gets under way today with the official commencement of construction on Blue Mesa Dam.

Construction brings expenditures on a large scale; attracts new people to the State of Colorado; causes the exciting sights and sounds of heavy construction; heralds prosperity. The immediate impact of construction of the Curecanti Unit will be beneficial to the economy of the west slope.

But we do much more here today than signal the start of construction. We instigate a period of economic expansion based on the end results of this project that will be felt not only in the west slope but will help the entire State. We forge a new link in the powerful chain of National economy.

Existing patterns will feel the impact of new water resource development--not only here on the Gunnison River but also throughout the States of the Upper Colorado River Basin. Change is the keynote of the future as the benefits evolve from the development and use of the waters of the Upper Colorado River on a large scale through the Colorado River Storage Project and Participating Projects.

Such changes must be viewed as opportunities for tomorrow--opportunities to be seized and exploited, because they lead to growth and progress, both of which
are hallmarks of the American way of life. The opportunities of tomorrow are the challenges of today. Bold vision and aggressive action are the order of the day if we are to accept the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities.

With the resounding echoes of this ground-breaking blast today, the Bureau of Reclamation in a team effort with private construction firms will raise the dams in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River. From Blue Mesa Dam upstream through this canyon before us and spreading on up through the broad valley farther than the eye can see from this vantage point, will be the waters of the Blue Mesa Reservoir—a 940,000 acre-foot lake. The lake surface will be more than 14 square miles in area and its winding shoreline will be many miles long.

Below the Blue Mesa Dam the waters of the Morrow Point Reservoir will fill 12 miles of the narrow Gunnison River Canyon down to the Morrow Point Dam, which we will start to build next year. The Crystal Reservoir later will extend downstream from Morrow Point Dam.

The Gunnison River, which has been a lifelong landmark to so many of you, will take on a new look. There will remain many long stretches of white water but it will feel the reins of man's control. The Curecanti Unit will take its place alongside the Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and Navajo Storage Units.

These four huge storage units will bring under control the Colorado River and its three major tributaries—the Green River, the San Juan River, and the Gunnison River. Together, they will be able to store a maximum of 34,500,000 acre-feet of water.

They will provide the carry-over storage that is essential to proceed with large scale use of water on the many participating projects which are under construction, now being planned, or considered to be potential projects for future development in the Upper Colorado River Basin States. Participating projects cannot become realities without the river regulation to be provided by the storage units. We must realize that it is on these participating projects that the direct benefits of water use are achieved.

Standing here in this lush high country, with the Gunnison at a high stage of runoff, it is easy to forget that the Upper Colorado River Basin is a land where rainfall and snowfall is erratic and unpredictable. The hard facts are, however, that precipitation is highly variable and unreliable from year to year.

If you have looked at the map in the back of the souvenir booklet, you will have noted some 40 or more participating projects that may some day be built in Colorado alone. Many small storage reservoirs will have to be built to serve these projects. Without the storage units, like this Curecanti Unit, we could not be sure that we could store water in these many participating project reservoirs every year.

The Colorado River Compact of 1922 guarantees certain minimum flows to be passed from the Upper Basin where the snows are concentrated to the Lower Colorado
River Basin States. The only way by which we can meet those guarantees to the Lower Basin, and still store the water needed by all the participating projects to be built in the Upper Basin, is to provide carryover storage in the great storage units on the major rivers in the Upper Basin.

These units are like huge rain barrels that can catch and hold the surplus flows in the years when heavy runoff is experienced. For example, the Gunnison River has been carrying very high flows this year. If Blue Mesa Dam and the other dams of the Curecanti Unit were now in operation, we could catch and store these heavy flows. Then, next year or the year after that, when we had below normal precipitation and runoff, we could make the releases at these Curecanti Unit dams, and at Flaming Gorge, and Navajo, and Glen Canyon, as necessary to meet the downstream rights under the 1922 compact. Then—even in those low years—we could store and use water in the many small participating project reservoirs.

Here is one reason why the Curecanti Unit dams are so important. The Bureau of Reclamation could not be looking ahead to building the participating projects you so badly need without the river storage and control provided by the four Colorado River Storage Units now under construction. This is why we are pushing construction of these storage units in this basinwide water resource development program.

There is another very important reason why these storage units had to be built just as soon as possible. This centers on the hydro powerplants to be built at each of the dams in this Curecanti Unit and at the Glen Canyon and Flaming Gorge Dams. It centers on the monetary returns from the sale of the Federal Reclamation power to be produced at these powerplants.

Again, as an example, look at the map in the souvenir booklet. There you can see many projects that have been long needed. The Paonia Project, over the hill to the north of here on the North Fork of this Gunnison River, is a good example.

Why have such urgently needed projects not been built long ago? Simply because the water users could not afford to repay all of the reimbursable costs involved. Nevertheless, they are worthy projects which will contribute to the economy of the community, the state and the nation. The only answer was some kind of financial assistance. That assistance will now be forthcoming from the revenues to be available from the sale of Federal Reclamation power produced at these storage unit dams. In the future, through the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund, the reimbursable costs of these long-needed and long-awaited participating projects can be repaid in full. Of course, the water users on these projects will repay to the maximum of their ability. On the average, they will repay something like 15 to 20 percent of the reimbursable costs. The balance will be repaid through the power revenues accruing to the Basin Fund. This points up the key role power production plays in a comprehensive water conservation program.

The major significance of the power revenues which will go into the Basin Fund as the years roll by deserves further explanation. We cannot go to the
Congress of the United States and expect authorization of a participating project unless we can assure the Congress that there will be money in the Basin Fund to make certain the repayment of reimbursable costs on schedule throughout the repayment period for that project. To a great extent, therefore, the amount and the rate of accumulation of power revenues to the Basin Fund govern our ability to undertake and pursue the construction of participating projects.

Until this spring, the Basin Fund was in jeopardy of being "shortchanged" by high transmission costs. The major question involved was really not who would build the new power lines necessary to carry Colorado River Storage power from the Federal Reclamation powerplants to the load centers. The all-important consideration was the COST which would be involved in transmitting storage project power and its resulting effect upon resource development in the region.

We knew, through careful analyses, what it would cost if the Federal Government were to build all the transmission lines needed. All other proposals were judged on the basis of whether they could meet or beat the cost and the initial proposals of the private utilities so far exceeded these costs as to make the project infeasible. However, after long negotiations, we worked out, and Secretary of the Interior Udall approved, a joint system of transmission lines--some Federal and some private company lines.

This arrangement results in increased return to the Basin Fund even when compared with what would be received if an all-Federal transmission system were built. At the same time, all parties involved are benefitted including the public or preference customers. We have recently completed interconnection, operating and transmission agreements with the Colorado Ute Rural Electric Cooperative and the Salt River Power district in Arizona which will make more efficient use of our power output and of their own facilities. At the same time, these agreements will add more than $100 million to the Basin Fund over the life of the contract.

By these mutually beneficial contracts with the public and private companies, we have been able to protect and enhance the Basin Fund so that construction of the participating projects can go ahead on schedule. Major and critical delays would have otherwise been necessary.

This year, the Congress has authorized construction of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project and the San Juan-Chama Project in New Mexico. In the coming years, other projects in the Upper Basin States will be authorized for construction as the planning reports are completed and their authorization can be justified and recommended.

Here in the State of Colorado, feasibility reports for several participating projects are completed or near completion. They are Bostwick Park, Fruitland Mesa, Animas-La Plata, and Dolores Projects. We can see here the start of a new phase of economic growth for the States of the Upper Colorado River Basin. We can see a new display of a commodity afforded by America in abundance unequalled elsewhere in the world. This commodity is--OPPORTUNITY. By what we begin today, new opportunities for economic enrichment and social stability are afforded.
We have reached this point only through our joint determination to develop to the utmost the resources at our disposal. Our job is not done; indeed it only begins.

Let us resolve that the explosion of this ground-breaking blast today, symbolic of a Nation at work, be followed by many others as we move forward with our program of resource development to serve the needs and expectations of mankind.

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