

The Fish Tale

September 2026 Newsletter

Gunnison Gorge Anglers

Colorado Trout Unlimited
Fly Fishers International



President's Message

Dear Gunnison Gorge Anglers Members, Volunteers, and Friends,

This fall, my focus will be on Gunnison River conservation and the Cottonwood Days youth education event. The Bureau of Reclamation's decision to reduce flows through the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge below the 300 CFS decreed minimum flow has contributed to unhealthy river conditions and elevated water temperatures. In response, TU and GGA volunteers began monitoring water temperatures in and below the Gunnison Gorge. Temperatures were in the low to mid 70s, and fish mortalities have been observed. Colorado Parks and Wildlife has enacted a voluntary fishing closure on the Gunnison River, and most fishing guide businesses have discontinued service.

Late last month, GGA and TU sent a letter to the Bureau of Reclamation outlining our concerns and offering practical recommendations to meet agricultural water needs in the Uncompahgre River Valley while restoring the 300 CFS minimum flow through the Black Canyon. A copy of the letter is included in this newsletter. Over the next several months, GGA and TU staff plan to meet with BOR, water user groups, and NPS to work toward restoring Gunnison River flows through the Black Canyon and ensuring that this year's operation of Aspinall does not become a precedent for future flow management decisions on the Gunnison River.

For the past 25 years, GGA has been an active participant in Cottonwood Days, a youth education program sponsored annually by the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Colorado Canyons Association, and the Ute Indian Museum. Cottonwood Days is a five-day event where more than 300 Delta County and Olathe sixth-grade students learn to appreciate and recreate responsibly on public lands and rivers. GGA's portion of the event focuses on aquatic insects, river ecology, fly tying, and fly fishing. This year's event will take place September 28–October 2 at Pleasure Park on the Gunnison River. **We are looking for volunteers each day of the event , and no special skills are needed.** If you are interested in helping at this year's Cottonwood Days, even for only one or two days, please contact me.

Yours in conservation,

John Hamill, President
Gunnison Gorge Anglers
Hamilldsrt50@msn.com

Upcoming Events

- **Colorado Outdoors Block Party - September 10th, Tonight!** At Flex Park in Montrose. Bill and John will be teaching casting, and the rest of us will be there enjoying the party and talking up GGA.
- **Troutapalooza and International Fly Fishing Film Festival - September 23rd** at the Sheridan Opera House in Telluride. Tickets [here](#) . This is GGA's and the Valley Floor Project's main fundraising event.
- **Cottonwood Days - September 28th to October 2nd** at Gunnison Forks day use area (the BLM picnic area between Pleasure Park and the North Fork). Contact John at Hamilldsrt50@msn.com to volunteer.
- **GGA's "Summer" Bash - October 9th** at Baldrige Park in Montrose. Free event for GGA members, RSVP [here](#) .
- **All Member Meeting - November 12th** at Cobble Creek Country Club. There will be a conservation project presentation and annual chapter business. RSVP [here](#) .

- **Holiday Party - December 3rd** at Cobble Creek Country Club. Stay tuned for details.

Other News and Current Events

Get excited for Troutapalooza! We will see you at the Sheridan Opera House on September 23rd for the IF4 films and our annual fundraiser. [Tickets](#) include entry, a light dinner, and the International Fly Fishing Film Festival films. There will also be a bar, silent auction, and live auction with fly fishing gear, trips, and items from local businesses. Troutapalooza also supports the local Project Healing Waters chapter and the San Miguel Watershed Coalition.

The New Sheridan Hotel is offering a 20% discount for Troutapalooza attendees. Visit www.newsheridan.com and enter code "TOTU" for 20% off stays the nights of 9/22/26 and 9/23/26. Please call the hotel for questions or to extend your stay.

Thank you to all Lower Gunnison volunteers! You are river champions, citizen scientists, and hopefully built up some big fish karma. Claire will send you a follow up email with updates on the project.

If you are an outfitter interested in advocating for the Lower Gunnison and partnering your voice with GGA/CTU/TU, reach out to Claire at lcb96c@gmail.com.

Want to get involved with GGA? Let us know! Send us an email to gunnisongorgeanglersctu@gmail.com and let us know how you would like to be involved. This fall we plan to fill a few board positions, and we are always looking for volunteers at our youth education events. Teaching fly tying, casting, helping set up and break down events, and advocating for our rivers are just a few of the ways to support our local rivers.

Connect with Gunnison Gorge Anglers

Facebook: [Gunnison Gorge Anglers](#)

Instagram: [@gunnisongorgeanglers](#)

Website: <https://gunnisongorgeanglers.tu.org/>

Email: gunnisongorgeanglersctu@gmail.com

Newsletter Submissions: [Google form](#)

CTU Event Calendar: <https://coloradotu.org/events>

THANK YOU SPONSORS



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 8949 Pleasure Park Rd
 Hotchkiss, Colorado
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-Service Fly Shop serving the greater Montrose Community

Gunnison River, Uncompahgre River, Cimarron River

1325 Mayfly Dr. Montrose CO 81401 - www.montroseanglers.com
 970249-0408 - info@montroseanglers.com



RIGS Fly Shop
 1075 Sherman Street #101
 Ridgway, Colorado 81432
 Phone: 970-626-4460



Ed's Fly Shop
 432 E Main St
 Montrose, CO 81401
 970-372-2395



Abel Reels
 1101 Mayfly Dr
 Montrose, CO 81401
 970-249-0606



Telluride Angler
 121 W. Colorado Ave
 Telluride, CO 81435
 800-831-6230

Silver Basin
 Brewing
 147 N 1st St
 Montrose, CO
 81401
 970-249-8689



CB's Tavern
 334 Main St
 Delta, CO 81416
 970 399-3570



Ross Reels
 1101 Mayfly Dr
 Montrose, CO 81401
 970-249-0606



SIPS
 215 W Main St
 Cedaredge, CO 81413
 970-856-5077





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Here are some fun pictures from August. You can submit newsletter photos on the website or from the newsletter link!

1. It's a good thing there is no aquarium in Montrose...
2. San Miguel brown
3. New shirts for Troutapalooza
4. Grip n grin on a slab brown
5. Have you seen GGA merch in the wild?



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Drew Peternell, Colorado State Director

August 26, 2026

Bart Deming, Acting Area Manager
Western Colorado Area Office
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
445 West Gunnison Avenue, Suite 221
Grand Junction, Colorado 81501

Delivered by email to: alimbach@usbr.gov

Dear Mr. Deming,

On behalf of Trout Unlimited, Colorado Trout Unlimited, and the local Gunnison Gorge Anglers chapter of Trout Unlimited (collectively, “TU”), I am writing to comment on the Bureau of Reclamation’s (“BOR”) operations of the Aspinall Unit. TU is the nation’s leading coldwater fisheries conservation organization. TU works to protect, reconnect, and restore America’s rivers and streams for the benefit of the fish populations that inhabit them. In Colorado, TU has a staff of over 30 and more than 20,000 members and supporters.

The Gunnison River is a top priority for TU. Along with its local chapter, the Gunnison Gorge Anglers, TU has decades of experience working to promote the health of the Gunnison River. TU is deeply invested in operations Aspinall Unit and their impacts on streamflows in the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area, as well as flows further downstream as required by a federal Record of Decision to protect endangered fish species. These comments are founded on TU’s experience and interest in the Gunnison River and are presented with the goals of fostering productive collaboration and improving river conditions for all users.

We understand that the extreme drought conditions of this water year and the rapid decline in storage in the Aspinall Unit influenced the Department of Interior’s decision to reduce reservoir releases from the Aspinall Unit this summer. Unfortunately, with reduced water releases from the Aspinall Unit, flows in the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge dropped to below 300 cubic feet per second (“cfs”), the minimum decreed flow for the Black Canyon National Park. The flow reductions in the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge have resulted in increased water temperatures, a voluntary fishing closure on the lower Gunnison River, and serious economic impacts to the outfitters and businesses that rely on the Gunnison River. We are confident that

Trout Unlimited: America’s Leading Coldwater Fisheries Conservation Organization

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simple common-sense solutions can be implemented that will protect storage in the Aspinall Unit, meet the native fish flow targets in the lower Gunnison River, provide adequate irrigation in the Uncompahgre Valley, avoid impacts to the outstanding fishery and natural resources in the Gunnison River immediately below the Aspinall Unit, and benefit those who enjoy the river

While flows in the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge are dangerously low, water diversions through the Gunnison Tunnel into the service area of the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association (“UVWUA”) have remained steady at over 1,000 cfs. This figure exceeds the historical average diversion rate by more than 100 cfs and is over 150 cfs higher than the rates recorded during previous drought years. Furthermore, flow rates measured at various discharge points in the Uncompahgre system, including the USGS gauge at Delta, Cummings Gulch, and Roubideau Creek, appear higher than in previous drought years, suggesting that more water is being brought into the Uncompahgre Valley than is necessary for irrigation purposes. Maintaining diversion rates into the Gunnison Tunnel that exceed demands will result in detrimental impact on the Gunnison River and the economy it supports, while depleting storage in the Aspinall Unit.

With respect to the latter, BOR and other water management entities in the Gunnison Basin have expressed concern regarding the rapid decline in stored water in Blue Mesa Reservoir and the risks associated with water levels falling below the power pool elevation. While TU shares the concern for protecting reservoir storage, we maintain that the large diversions through the Gunnison Tunnel—potentially allocated for hydroelectric generation within the UVWUA system—have significantly contributed to the decline in storage levels in recent years. Decreasing Gunnison Tunnel diversions to better match actual irrigation demands could conserve as much or more reservoir storage than reducing flows in the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge below 300 cfs.

We respectfully request BOR to a) increase streamflow within the Black Canyon and Gunnison Gorge to the decreed 300 cfs as soon as possible to alleviate further damage to the fishery; b) perform a thorough evaluation of the Lease of Power Privilege contracts held with the UVWUA, ensuring all terms are strictly upheld and that clear efficiency standards for water use are implemented; and c) conduct a comprehensive analysis of recent water years to better understand the drivers of storage depletion and to strengthen water security protocols for the future. In addition, we believe that changes need to be made to the accounting and management of stored water at the Aspinall Unit to prevent future economic and ecological impacts of low flows in the Gunnison River.

In conclusion, we acknowledge that the extraordinary drought conditions of the current water year present significant operational challenges. Nevertheless, the decision to reduce flows in the Gunnison River has exerted a toll on a vital and cherished natural resource. Modest operational adjustments could effectively prevent long-term degradation of the Gunnison River ecosystem and safeguard the interests of downstream commercial and recreational stakeholders.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these matters. We welcome the opportunity to meet with BOR staff and other stakeholders, including UVWUA, to discuss our concerns and recommendations in greater detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Drew Peternell", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Drew Peternell

cc: Tobin Roop, National Park Service
Rachel Sralla, Colorado Parks and Wildlife