

**SAN JUAN RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**

**Biology Committee Meeting**  
USFS Public Lands Center, Durango, Colorado

**Wednesday, May 7, 2008**  
**8 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

**MEETING SUMMARY**

**Members and Alternates:**

Paul Holden, Chair  
Bill Miller  
Ron Bliesner  
Jason Davis  
Mark McKinstry  
Chuck McAda  
Vince Lamarra  
Tom Nesler  
David Propst  
Tom Wesche  
Marikay Ramsey, Alternate  
Steve Whiteman, Alternate  
Marilyn Myers, Alternate  
Dale Ryden, Alternate  
Yvette Paroz, Alternate  
Steve Harris, Alternate

**Peer Reviewers**

Steve Ross  
Ron Ryel  
Mel Warren

**Program Management:**

David Campbell  
Sharon Whitmore

**Interested Parties:**

Bruce Whitehead  
Ernesto de la Hoz  
Michael Farrington  
Howard Brandenburg  
Steven Platania  
Howard Schaller  
Darek Elverud  
Viola Willetto  
Raymond Smith

**Representing:**

Jicarilla Apache Nation  
Southern Ute Indian Tribe  
Bureau of Indian Affairs  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 2  
Bureau of Reclamation  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 6  
Navajo Nation  
State of Colorado  
New Mexico Department of Game & Fish  
Water Development Interests  
Bureau of Land Management  
Southern Ute Indian Tribe  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 2  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 6  
New Mexico Department of Game & Fish  
Water Development Interests

University of New Mexico  
Utah State University  
USFS Southern Research Station

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Albuquerque  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Albuquerque

Southwestern Water Conservation District  
BIO-WEST  
American SW Ichthyological Researchers  
American SW Ichthyological Researchers  
American SW Ichthyological Researchers  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources  
Navajo Fish and Wildlife  
Bureau of Indian Affairs, NIIP

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Paul Holden, BC Chair, welcomed the group and introductions were made. No changes were made to agenda. The February 21-22, 2008, draft meeting summary was approved with a few minor changes.

**Action Item Log** - The group reviewed and updated the *Action Item Log*. All ongoing actions were moved to the beginning of the list and completed items removed to be retained in a *Completed Action Item List*. The *Action Item Log* is a living document and will be reviewed and updated regularly. Kevin Bestgen and Gary White's population estimate work was discussed. The completion date for the project is December 31. Vince LeMarra commented that the information could be used now and asked why it will take so long. Mark McKinstry said it took awhile to set up the contract but under the current timeline, the 2007 capture data can also be included. He emphasized the project is primarily an exploratory exercise to determine how, or if, the data can be used for population estimates and that they are currently only looking at the razorback sucker recapture data. He said they may find that current management activities should be modified to accommodate development of population estimates. LeMarra said the current experimental design does not provide this type of information. McKinstry said he will have Bestgen provide a verbal report at the fall BC meeting and will also resend the SOW.

Jason Davis indicated that draft production and stocking plans for both razorback sucker and Colorado pikeminnow will be submitted for BC review by July 31, 2008. The due dates were revised accordingly.

The waterfall inundation whitepaper action item was discussed. There was some confusion about what this was and if it was still needed. Ron Bliesner said it was originally related to the possibility of putting in a selective fish passage. The Program Office will review past meeting summaries to decide what is needed and report at the next meeting.

**Annual Meeting Overview/Summary** - The BC previewed the overview/summary developed by the Program Office. Whitmore explained that two purposes for the overview were included, 1) presenting major Program accomplishments from 2005-2008 and, 2) discussing major considerations for sufficient progress for 2008. The BC suggested a few minor changes and agreed that this type of summary was needed on a yearly basis and tasked the Program Office, in coordination with the BC, to update the information and provide a similar presentation at each annual meeting.

It was suggested that a press release with the summary information be provided after each annual meeting. Campbell said that the Program Office could develop a press release but that it would be best if a non-FWS representative moved it forward.

**VIE-Tagged Fish and Acclimation Experiments** – Davis provided a presentation summarizing Colorado pikeminnow acclimation activities in 2007. These activities were not an experiment but an implementation of recommendations provided by Golden et al. (2007). With the lack of a control group, determining the overall benefit of acclimation was difficult to ascertain. The BC agreed that intuitively, acclimation is a good idea but there are no data to support it; however, recapture data collected in 2008 may provide additional information regarding the success/failure of acclimation.

The BC discussed whether or not a more structured study should be done. Bliesner cautioned about trial implementation without designed monitoring. A controlled study would be expensive. Other possible ways to acclimate fish were discussed (e.g., flows, food, predation, etc.). Jim Brooks pointed out that acclimation is for blood chemistry adjustment not conditioning. There was general agreement that acclimation will not harm the fish and there are rigorous studies that show it is beneficial. Holden asked if anyone was opposed to doing this. David Propst questioned the expenditure of money and time if there is no evidence to show it is beneficial. Dale Ryden said it is not a problem acclimating all Age-0 pikeminnow but doing this for larger fish could be problematic. There are numerous variables to

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consider including location and duration and long-term data would be needed. McKinstry asked if they could acclimate only half of the Age-1 pikeminnow as a management practice.

At the request of the BC, acclimation of Colorado pikeminnow will continue in 2008. Half of the Age-1 fish will be acclimated and released at the same location as non-acclimated fish. This design, with a control group, will provide comparative data for determining success/failure of acclimation efforts. All age-0 Colorado pikeminnow will be acclimated. Acclimation of razorback sucker will be similar to those efforts for Age-1 Colorado pikeminnow. To accommodate acclimation activities, Ryden and Davis will coordinate with PNM Weir and Dexter NFH. Davis will include acclimation provisions in the razorback sucker and Colorado pikeminnow draft production and stocking plans due on 31 July 2008.

**Remote Pit Tag Readers** – Howard Schaller, FWS, Portland FRO, gave a presentation titled, “Bull Trout: Basin-wide PIT Interrogation for Variable Fluvial Environments.” The project was implemented to improve evaluation of population trends, decrease need for potentially harmful recapture techniques, and cover a large area (metapopulations). They operate and maintain 8 strategically located PIT detection arrays consisting of 31 separate antennae. Each site is unique and set-up differently. He described the various PIT antenna designs and their unique installations and maintenance. He described the robust data they get including abundance and trend, population growth estimates, population connectivity, biological and physical passage and habitat connectivity. They use this information to estimate movement and for population estimates. For population estimates, they use the stationary data along with other recapture information.

Schaller said they use full duplex tags which McKinstry pointed out is what the SJRRIP has been using. He said they save considerable money by making their own antennae, ~\$200 versus \$15,000 to 24,000. He said transceivers cost ~\$9,000. Someone asked about reliability of the remote set-ups. He said electrical storms are not a problem for them but could be a problem in May/June in this area. He said the maximum river width they have spanned with antenna is 96 ft. requiring 12 eight-foot panels. Heavy detritus load could be a problem although Schaller’s group designed a collapsing antenna that can fold back temporarily springing back up after the obstruction passes. What application could this have for the San Juan River (SJR)? Campbell said recapture data could be passively collected 365 days a year without a lot of expense and manpower as opposed to a handful of trips/passes per year. Schaller said the decision to use this type of system would depend on the questions being asked and information sought.

McKinstry reported he will be working with Davis on a project to investigate a floating pit tag detection system starting this summer, independent of Program.

**Non-Native Fish Stocking Policy** –Chuck McAda reported he sent out draft procedures for stocking nonnative fish species in the Upper Colorado River Basin that could be used as a starting draft if the BC wants to pursue similar procedures for the SJR. In the Upper Basin, development and implementation of the procedures are through a Cooperation Agreement between the State game and fish agencies in UT, CO, and WY, and the FWS. For the SJR, he assumes Colorado and Utah would be okay with the language but would need discussion/input from NM, Navajo Nation, Southern Ute and Ute Mt. Ute tribes. He said there are two local reservoirs in NM that have been stocked with catfish. Morgan Lake is stocked with 6,000 8” largemouth bass by FWS and Navajo Nation every two years and has an escapement prevention device. He asked for guidance from the BC as to whether or not they want to proceed with developing procedures for the SJR. An example of the benefit of having procedures in the Upper Basin is when Colorado wants to stock largemouth bass in Nighthorse Reservoir; there is clear guidance that installation of an escapement prevention device is required.

Bill Miller said all reservoirs on the Southern Ute Reservation flow into Navajo Reservoir and they do not plan to stock anything into the Animas River. Concern was voiced that bait fish are not considered. Bliesner commented that if nonnative fish stocking is a threat to recovery then the threat needs to be removed. He said you cannot remove the threat without a policy and formalizing procedures would show removal of the threat. Holden voiced support for developing procedures for the SJR. Steve Ross thinks bait fish should be included. McAda suggested forming a workgroup to move this forward. Tom Nesler said the Upper Basin procedures are between the States and the FWS; the Upper Basin Recovery Program is not a partner. Procedures on the SJR would be more guidance than policy because nobody has authority to tell the Tribes what they can or cannot stock in their waters. McAda pointed out that the value of the procedures is in the agreement among the parties.

McAda will be the lead in developing draft stocking procedures for the SJR. To do this, he will form a subgroup that includes all governments/agencies associated with the SJRRIP. No date was set for completing a draft for BC review, but McAda will update the BC at its next meeting.

**Management Questions/Discussion** – Holden explained that several questions were posed at the last meeting that required BC decisions. A short synopsis of the discussion and decisions include:

- Acclimation of all stocked fish – discussed earlier; all pikeminnow will be acclimated except Age-1 controls and razorback sucker acclimation will be studied
- Specific sampling for adults in 2008, 2009 – expensive; do not want to do more shocking; can current methods be tweaked; too few fish; permanent pit tag readers could provide information about adults; decision was not to do this now
- Age classification of untagged captures – refer to Ryden's 2-26-08 email; standard method for determining age is needed; Ryden's pikeminnow growth curves will be used as a guide
- Standardization of habitat categories – fish people and habitat mappers use different categories/classification; Propst said differences are negligible; Yvette Paroz said it would be a worthwhile effort and not difficult; she will get together with habitat mappers to standardized habitat categories and will produce a description of nomenclature used
- Continuation of pikeminnow stocking goals past 2009 – extension of current stocking goals need to be based on solid information; revisit issue after Bestgen's report at next meeting
- Status of progress toward recovery - FWS says there is evidence of reproduction and more fish in the system; Program is making positive forward progress but not there yet; FWS believes there is sufficient progress toward recovery

**Navajo Dam Operations** – Ryan Christianson reported. He provided background on SJR hydrology and Navajo Reservoir operations, to-date. He said that most recent forecasts show that above the average inflows have been decreasing over the last couple months but that even under their minimum probable forecast, inflows will still be 109% of average. He said current conditions call for a full 5,000 cfs peak release. They are currently releasing 2,200 cfs and will continue with this release until they start ramping up for the peak. He said on May 9 they will increase to 3,000 cfs for a week then 4,000 cfs for another week then to 5,000 cfs for about 2 weeks. This release will require one mid-release inspection. He said they have noticed some damage on gates so want to keep a close eye on them. Campbell said that the current release schedule does not show 21 days at 5,000 cfs and that they were supposed to prioritize extending the peak over high base flows, i.e., 2,200 cfs. He questioned why they were still releasing 2,200 cfs as opposed to decreasing base flow releases to retain water for an extended peak when the last couple forecasts have shown that inflows were decreasing. The BC recommended shortening the ramp-up period to achieve a minimum of 21 days @ 5,000 cfs. Ryan Christianson indicated that this was possible. He said he will coordinate with his office and keep the SJRRIP informed.

**Funds Management Report** – McKinstry provided a presentation on the 2007 and 2008 budget for the SJRRIP. For 2007, there was \$2,275,000 from annual funds, \$129,079 from the FWS, \$33,000 deobligated from UNM, and \$2,437,079 in total funding for SJRRIP. There were 26 ongoing funded projects; 0 ongoing, unfunded projects; 1 completed project (backwater evaluation); 27 agreements (grants); and 23 contracts. He reported that administrative management costs (Reclamation) were \$131,487, 5.6% of total budget which is well within what Reclamation likes to see for administrative cost ratios. He said the budget was approved by August 15, 2006, and all modifications completed and mailed to contractors by January 15, 2006. For 2008, there was \$2,339,000 from annual funds (2.8% increase from 2007), \$165,154 from FWS, and \$2,504,154 in total funding. There are 23 ongoing funded projects; 1 ongoing/incomplete; unfunded projects (PNM O&M); 29 agreements (grants); and 21 contracts. Administrative management costs were \$146,500 or 6.2% of total funds. He provided '07 and '08 funding details for the various Program projects. His estimate for the 2009 budget is between \$2,386,000 and \$2,432,000. He said this year's budget was approved by August 1, 2007, and all modifications completed and mailed to contractors by December 15, 2007. He emphasized that if he gets all the final 2009 SOW's by August, he can again get the money out early like last year. He reported that the IDIQ contract should be done by July/August which will help expedite contracting for the Program.

**LRP Review Process** – Holden reported a BC subgroup had met with Rich Valdez in Logan in early April to provide him with input on the draft LRP and they had a follow-up conference call to finish up. A draft for review was sent to all the Program committees on April 18. Individual members are to provide comments to the Program Office by May 16. He asked if anyone had any general comments they wanted to discuss as a group. Propst said the current draft does not include the native fish community approach they fought to get included. Holden agreed and said the current draft includes a recovery goal approach upfront but that a native fish community focus is still included in the activities. The group agreed that the LRP needs to include native fish community approach verbiage in the front of document as well as in the details. The group also agreed that the priorities should be removed from the tables in the draft and that those priorities and responsible parties should be set during the annual review/AWP process. Comments are due to the Program Office by May 16.

**Flow Recommendation Revision Process** – Bliesner sent Version 2 of the Draft Flow Recommendations to the BC on May 3. He received comments from Propst, Miller, Tom Wesche, and Ross and attempted to incorporate most comments. He said some of Wesche's are policy-related and he thinks they should be discussed in committee prior to incorporation. At the request of FWS, he included language on addressing climate change and included a discussion of the depletions time-line. In the past, baseline plus some extra water for development was assumed and then they looked at what was possible in terms of flow. Because some of these depletions are not going to occur for years, he believes actual near-term flows as well as those in the future should be examined. He said two different approaches could be taken, analyzing just the mid-range flows or looking at everything. Considering we now have a lot more information on fish and detailed reaches, he recommends the latter. Campbell said the CC directed the BC to do the latter, i.e., evaluate everything in '09 and '10 in conjunction with an integration report. Bliesner emphasized the importance GPS points in analyzing the new data and thinks they should be taken on all projects.

The use of mechanical means to augment flows for maintaining/augmenting habitat was discussed. The group recognizes it may not be possible to accomplish the Program's habitat goals with flow alone. Flows need to go out-of-bank and be of longer duration to remove established vegetation. The two-year timeline for the flow recommendation revision may make it difficult to get this evaluated for incorporation into the final recommendations.

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In the *Schedule and Review* section, the verbiage “allow input from stakeholders and committee members” was discussed. It was pointed out that the “stakeholders” are represented within the committees and any input will be obtained from them. The verbiage will be removed.

Costs and how to fund the revision was discussed. The cost was estimated to be ~100 to ~200K at first but after further discussion; the estimate was increased to \$400,000 for both years. Estimating costs for the first part of the effort is difficult because it will involve many people. Brooks asked if a general cost estimate could be provided for the CC’s meeting on Friday. The Program Office recommends that it stay within the Program and goes to a contractor. Wesche voiced concern about not having an external person involved. Campbell said that even though there would be one primary contractor, there may have multiple subcontractors.

After a few edits by Bliesner, the draft with steps, timeframe, and budget will be presented to the CC at their meeting on Friday.

**Program Coordinator’s Report/FY2009 Work Plan/Priority Projects** – Campbell presented his first shot at a budget for FY2009 which included a comparison to FY2008 budget. He said it has been reorganized into Recovery Elements. He explained he had included a rough estimate of \$330,000 for FY2009 for the flow recommendation/integration report but after the earlier discussion, that may be high for the first year of the two-year study. He also noted the NAPI pond management total will probably need adjusting after Davis gets together with the Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife and FWS, Region 2, to re-work. He explained there were no workshops held in FY2008 so the \$30,000 budgeted will not be used. If it is not part of another project, it cannot be carried over into FY2009 and will be lost. His plans are to have it transferred into the Program Office budget for carry-over into FY2009 and then reduce the FY2009 Program Office budget accordingly which will free up \$30,000 for FY2009. He also noted Reclamation has indicated the hydrology model O&M budget will increase considerably so he added \$40,000 to their FY2008 budget total for FY2009.

Bliesner said the detailed reach study was to be a 5-year project with the fish component. Campbell said the CC limited it to 2 years. Bliesner said habitat mapping will be completed by June so will only need about \$5,000 in FY2009 to complete. He said the end product of the long-term habitat monitoring and fish relationship project was to be recommendations for future management. The group recognized that having a workshop in FY2009 to evaluate the current monitoring efforts and determine what is needed regarding fish and habitat monitoring would be timely. Bliesner provided budget recommendations for the habitat/geomorphology monitoring project in FY2009. He said shut-off the modeling piece of the detailed reach study and continue with long-term geomorphology/cross section surveys (\$40K), another year of data collection for habitat-fish relationship piece (\$150K), temperature monitoring (\$12K), and videography (\$16K) and move all of it to the monitoring element.

The need for a non-native vegetation removal study for the flow recommendations revision was discussed. The first year of this study would be getting everything ready such as permitting, NEPA/ESA, etc. McKinstry said he plans to put in for outside funding for implementation of this type of work but the source of funding will not cover planning. The group included \$60,000 in the FY2009 budget for this study.

After the budget was re-worked by the group, it showed the Program would be ~\$70,000 in the red. Campbell said he had not yet added any increases to fy2008 project costs and said that could increase costs by another \$50,000. Campbell asked about priorities and where costs could be cut. Someone asked about salary saving from the vacant Program biologist position. Campbell said the savings were minimal. Someone mentioned decreasing model O&M. Campbell said that was not an option because

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maintaining the model was mandatory, it is not inexpensive, and he believes Reclamation will provide an accurate budget of their costs. Pit tags and NAPI pond management could be decreased. Campbell pointed out that everyone has been including a 5% COLA per year but the Program budget has only been increasing by ~2-4%. He said FWS priorities are NNF removal, stocking, and monitoring. The group decided the new study, *Mechanical Enhancement to Flow*, was a low priority. Someone said all monitoring should continue until the current monitoring program is evaluated. Propst said that due to some logistical issues, the larval monitoring programs are expected to increase by about ~\$20,000-25,000. He said this is not due to increased effort but because it was under-funded last year. McKinstry mentioned he expects the cyprinid key to be fully funded through other means. Bliesner mentioned the group may want to discuss the Fish-Habitat Relationship Survey and its \$150,000 budget. He said information from this effort could be linked to the small-bodied fish monitoring data. He reiterated the need for GPS points.

The FY2009 Draft Scopes of Work are due 30 May 2008. Campbell asked that people be realistic in their budgets because the budget is tight and the SOW's will be scrutinized.

**Next Meetings:**

- Conference Call - July 28, 9-12 (approve 2009 AWP; possibly do it as a web conference)
- BC meeting – Nov. 5; 1 to 5 p.m. and Nov. 6; 8 a.m. to noon; Farmington

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<b>BIOLOGY COMMITTEE ACTION ITEM LOG (Updated May 7, 2008)</b>					
<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Meeting/ Origination Date</b>	<b>Responsible Party(s)</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Revised Date</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>
Provide RBS/CPM stocking/capture/recapture data		P.I.'s to the Program Office	Annually before Jan. 1		
Provide Preliminary Draft Report Presentations		Project Leads (authors)	Annually at Feb. meeting		
Provide Draft Final Reports		Project Leads (authors) to Program Office	Annually by end of March		
Provide Final Reports		Project leads (authors) to Program Office	Annually by end of June		
Annual Data Delivery		BC to Program Office	Annually by June 30		
T&E Species Data		BC to Program Office	Annually by Dec. 31		
Compile T&E data and Program progress into summary to address overall Program recovery goals/objectives for presentation at annual meeting		Program Office/BC	Annually by Annual Meeting in April/May		
Distribute Data Consolidation Report		Program Office to BC	Annually by Jan. 31		
Coordinate CPM stocking closely with Reclamation to avoid negative impact due to high flows/releases in 2008		Project Leads	Annually		
Provide LRP Draft	05/08/07	SWCA to Program Office, BC, CC	07/09/07	4/15/08	
Comment on Draft LRP	06/25/07	BC to Program Office	07/23/07	5/16/08	
Provide Final LRP	07/23/07	SWCA to Program Office	08/06/07	5/23/08	
Develop razorback sucker production and stocking plan for NAPI ponds	06/25/07	Davis lead	09/15/07	7/31/08	

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<b>BIOLOGY COMMITTEE ACTION ITEM LOG (Updated May 7, 2008)</b>					
<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Meeting/ Origination Date</b>	<b>Responsible Party(s)</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Revised Date</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>
Waterfall Inundation Whitepaper – review past meeting summaries, determine what is needed, and provide report at the next meeting.	05/18/07	Program Office	12/07/07	11/5/08	
Distribute Standard format for recording fish capture data	2/20-21/08	Program Office	5/15/08		
Pursue NNF Stocking Procedures for SJR Basin	2/20-21/08	McAda lead	11/5/08		
Provide verbal report on Bestgen’s population estimate work at fall meeting. Re-send scope of work to BC.	2/20-21/08	McKinstry	11/5/08		
Develop Colorado pikeminnow production and stocking Plan	5-7-08	Davis lead	7/31/08		
Complete IDIQ contract and award	5-7-08	McKinstry	11-08		
2009 Scopes of Work to Program Office	5-7-08	Project Leads	5/30/08		
Develop proposal for new study - Mechanical Augmentation of Flow Effectiveness	5-7-08	Program Office	11/5/08		