



COORDINATION COMMITTEE CONFERENCE CALL

August 3, 2015

Meeting Notes

Coordination Committee Members:

Tom Sinclair, Chair
Catherine Condon
Leland Begay
Darryl Vigil
Michael Howe
Dale Ryden
Tom Pitts
Stanley Pollack
Ted Kowalski
Brent Uilenberg
Kristin Green
Patrick McCarthy
Absent

Representing:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Reg. 2
Southern Ute Indian Tribe (SUIT)
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (UMUT)
Jicarilla Apache Nation
Bureau of Indian Affairs
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reg. 6
Water Development Interests
Navajo Nation (NN)
State of Colorado
Bureau of Reclamation
State of New Mexico
The Nature Conservancy
Bureau of Land Management

Program Management:

Sharon Whitmore, Program Coordinator
Scott Durst, Program Science Coordinator
Nathan Franssen, Program Biologist

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reg. 2
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reg. 2
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reg. 2

Other Interested Parties:

Beverly Heffernan – CC Alternate
Michelle Garrison – CC Alternate
Bill Miller – BC Chair
Mark McKinstry – BC Member

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
State of Colorado
SUIT
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Introductions/changes to agenda – Sinclair welcomed the group. An agenda item for nonnative fish control was added under the Annual Work Plan. Sinclair reiterated what was in a July 31, 2015 email from Regional Director Tuggle that appointed Sharon Whitmore as the Program Coordinator and Tom Sinclair as the CC Chairman. He also announced that Nate Franssen joined the Program Office starting on July 27. When Campbell was hired as the Program Coordinator, CC members were involved in the selection process and they want that process to be followed again. Sinclair said Tuggle has the authority to appoint a Program Coordinator from current Service staff and he doubts that his decision will change. Ryden said it is unusual for non-Service committee members to be involved in making Service staffing decisions. Pitts said that when Dave Campbell was hired, a three person selection committee was established that included representatives of the Service, Biology Committee, and Coordination Committee to review qualified candidates and make a recommendation to the Service. Kowalski gave an example of the Glen Canyon Dam coordinator position that was recently filled from within the USGS but it was advertised and program committee members were involved in the selection process. Ryden said there is no verbiage in the Program Document about this it and if it is to be a standard process, it may need to be codified in the Program Document. Whitmore said continuity within the Program will remain intact because the Service will be filling the Assistant Coordinator position and long-term Program staff will have the opportunity to pass along institutional knowledge to the new individual. When Whitmore retires, the Service will fill the

Program Coordinator position behind her. Sinclair said he and Whitmore will check into how input from the CC could be incorporated into the process for selecting Program Coordinator and Assistant Program Coordinator positions.

Approval of May 14, 2015 meeting notes – Whitmore said she received edits from Condon and they are included in the notes. In her edits, Condon asked if information about how the Program will operate after 2023 was provided to House subcommittee. McCarthy said it is important to do but no one was tasked with doing it. Pitts said a subgroup should be convened and a draft put out for consideration by both programs because a consensus will be needed. Pitts will talk to Chart and Whitmore and initiate getting it done. Condon moved to approve the May meeting notes; Uilenberg seconded; and the notes were approved.

2015 Long-Range Plan (LRP) – Whitmore reported she received CC comments from Uilenberg, Pitts, and TNC. Uilenberg's comments related to concerns about the number of potential entrainment/passage structures in the Animas that are identified in the LRP. Uilenberg said he discussed this in May and asked if expansion of range was needed for recovery. Whitmore said suitable habitat exists in the Animas and fish have been captured there. Providing passage over barriers within occupied habitat to allow for adequate movement and, potentially, range expansion, is a recovery factor in the species recovery plans. Pitts said he was not aware of any studies showing that suitable habitat exists in the Animas for either species. Even if it does, there has been no work done to show that expansion of habitat into the Animas is needed to achieve recovery goals for the endangered fish. Until this is demonstrated, there should be no expenditure of Recovery Program funds on the Animas. Miller said the model shows additional habitat is needed for early life stages to provide the area needed for a self-sustaining population of 400 Colorado Pikeminnow adults. The Animas could be important for Colorado Pikeminnow spawning. The model showed a need to open up areas like Lake Powell and the Animas to increase habitat. McKinstry said the BC is looking into stocking fish at several locations in the Animas and possibly using fish sampling conducted by SUIT to track fish movement to get at answering these questions. Durst was tasked with putting together a proposal for discussion at next BC meeting. Whitmore said the CC tasked the Program Office with providing them with the Service's perspective on why range expansion of listed fish populations into the Animas River is needed for recovery and still plans to do this.

Whitmore said TNC's comments on the LRP related primarily to including verbiage related to water use efficiency/reduced river diversions as a potential activity to improve flow conditions in the river. Pitts provided extensive comments and edits and she could not get them all addressed before the conference call. His general comments were that the LRP is overly large, difficult to follow, and cannot be used to determine progress toward recovery. Whitmore said the LRP was never designed to track progress toward recovery but is more a laundry list of all potential activities that could be implemented to benefit the species and it has value from that perspective. Because there is not enough money and manpower to implement every potential recovery action, the Program selects the highest priority projects each year and includes them in the AWP for funding. She said the recovery benchmarks that are to be developed in 2015 (LRP Task 5.2.2.5) are intended to lay out a more concise path to recovery that is tied to monitoring data and is consistent with the species recovery plans and goals, positive population criteria, sufficient progress assessments, LRP, and Program Document.

2016 Draft Annual Work Plan and Budget – Whitmore sent out a 2016 AWP update on July 29. The BC reviewed and discussed the second draft AWP during their July 8 conference call. Because the budget showed a deficit of \$108,889, the Program Office will use the BC's input and 2016 priorities to balance the budget and send it back to the BC prior to their conference call on August 26. Included in the AWP update were the changes the Program Office is considering to balance the budget. \$9,700 for population model runs could be cut by requiring that population model runs are made only during BC meetings.

Miller said that if the model needed reconfiguration to make runs, the additional funds would be required. Costs for two new projects, 1) determining daily growth rates of larval Razorback Sucker, and 2) San Juan River waterfall endangered fish monitoring and translocation, were moved to the other funding category because they could be funded with Four Corners Power Plant consultation money when it becomes available. Questions were asked about the additional funds from Four Corners Power Plant consultation and how the funds will be handled. The money will be held in a separate NFWF account and administered by the Program Office. For now, those funds will be in the AWP budget estimate in the Other Funding column and footnoted. The Program Office will continue to provide updates from Dave Campbell on the status of the Four Corners Power Plant funding. Other budget decreases include a \$10,000 decrease for the fish entrainment assessment because the total budget for the project came in less than estimated at ~\$100,000 instead of ~\$110,000 (\$50,000 was budgeted in 2015 and \$50,000 for 2016). Also, the peer reviewer budget can be decreased by \$10,000 by decreasing the number of meetings peer reviewers attend from three to two. These changes would result in a budget surplus of \$6,228.

The Program Office will submit a revised AWP to the BC prior to their August 26 conference call. The BC will review the revised AWP and submit pros and cons to the Program Office. Program Office will consider comments/recommendations from BC and submit a draft AWP, with all input received, to the CC for approval. The CC will need to meet in September to approve the 2016 AWP.

Review the role of peer reviewers as outlined in the Program Document – Condon said she questioned the need for the current number of peer reviewers a couple years back and still questions their role with respect to whom the peer reviewers work. Condon said she heard that after the May CC meeting, the Program Office was concerned when Condon and Pollack requested that the peer reviewers provide their opinions regarding non-native removal. Condon also heard that the Program Office told the BC during the July 8, 2015, BC call that the peer reviewers work for the Service and Reclamation. McKinstry said he and Durst tried to put more detail in the 2010 Peer Reviewer SOW to better define their role and to get them out of reviewing minutia but he ran into resistance. The Program Office will revisit the previously-developed draft SOW and see if it can be used as the starting point for developing future peer reviewer SOWs.

Nonnative fish control – The CC has been getting conflicting information about the need to continue doing nonnative fish control in the San Juan River. The Service has stated nonnative fish are identified as a threat in both species recovery plans and contends nonnative fish removal is needed. Some BC members have voiced opinions that it should not continue and from a preliminary literature review done by Steve Ross, he found no evidence to reject hypotheses that channel catfish posed no threat to the listed fish. This topic was also discussed during a meeting with Regional Director Tuggle on July 15. During that meeting, the CC indicated they needed more information on the issue before they could approve the 2016 AWP. Pitts and Whitmore put together a process to insure the CC gets adequate information before they have to approve the AWP. Ross agreed to complete his literature review with other peer reviewers and get it out by mid-August. On July 31, Whitmore provided the CC with the Service's scientific perspective on nonnative fish control and their recommendation for 2016. The Program Office was also tasked with providing a description of the Service's regulatory requirement for continuing nonnative removal activities to support recovery of listed fish.

BC conference call update – Miller reported that the main topics discussed during the July 8 BC conference call was the 2016 AWP, additional SOWs, the LRP, and water availability. Low flows early in the field season could have prevented crews from floating rafts to conduct sampling. The BC, through the Program Office, requested that Reclamation release enough water from Navajo Dam to insure adequate flows were in the river during sampling trips. It ended up not being a problem because of increased

precipitation in the basin. The most recent available water calculations show there should be enough water in the reservoir next spring for a full peak release.

Population model MOU between Southern Ute Tribe and Program – Sinclair reported the DOI Solicitor’s Office reviewed the MOU and suggested edits. They added some verbiage but did not remove anything. The edits are mostly standard Federal boilerplate additions so he does not see anything that will be a problem. He is working on setting up a meeting with Jacks and Whitmore to review and incorporate the edits. A revised MOU will be submitted to Tribe for further review. Condon said to send the revised MOU to her first.

Contracting issue update – McKinstry reported he asked Melanie Russell, Reclamation contracting, for a formal response about why the GSA process was used for the entrainment contract. Her reply was forwarded to the CC on June 5. In short, Reclamation was following federal acquisition rules; they emphasize small businesses; they prefer GSA vendors because they are pre-vetted; they will continue using this process for contracting. Condon said it does not line-up with what was decided in the Program. McKinstry said he and Uilenberg have very little control over contracting and he does not know what else he could ask them at this point. McKinstry will set up a meeting with Reclamation contracting officials and interested CC members to allow for further discussion on how the contracting rules limit the ability of Program participants to compete for contracts. He will send out a doodle poll in the near future to schedule an appropriate date for this meeting.

Entrainment sites assessment status – McKinstry reported the awarding of the entrainment contract took longer than anticipated due to several factors. The RFP was not released until later than expected because Reclamation’s Acquisitions Group had a large workload and this procurement was not a priority. The paperwork to start the contracting process was submitted by August of 2014. The original plan was to have it awarded in March, but it was not awarded until late June. Several proposals were submitted in response to the RFP and all were evaluated during the TPEC review (Technical Proposal Evaluation Committee). The TPEC was composed of government personnel from both Reclamation and Fish and Wildlife Service. Because of major discrepancies in proposed effort and pricing of the work, negotiations were held with all proposers to clarify the amount of work required and the specific deliverables so that all contractors could propose on equal footing. These negotiations delayed awarding by several weeks to allow for the negotiations and resubmittal of proposals. Once the proposals were resubmitted they were much more in-line with what the Program needed to meet the objectives and were closer together in pricing. Another TPEC was conducted to re-evaluate the proposals and a recommendation was submitted to the contracting officer. An award to ASIR and TNC was subsequently made on 2 July 2015. At this point, the contract is scheduled to be completed by June 2016 with a draft report due in February 2016 along with all other Program reports. However, because of the delays on the part of the government and the potential that some field work may not be completed this year, there is the possibility that the contract will need to be extended by a certain period. This will be dealt with if and when it is determined that a delay will occur. Total cost for the entrainment project is \$98,360.87. A BC workgroup will meet with TNC and ASIR on August 5 to determine specific metrics to include in the entrainment evaluation. The SOW for the entrainment project will be included in the 2016 AWP.

2016 annual base funding update – McKinstry reported that FY2016 could be in another government shutdown/continuing resolution cycle. This is why he would like the 2016 AWP completed and approved as soon as possible. Any delays could cause problems especially for the contracts that have no buffer to withstand funding delays.

Capital projects update – Uilenberg reported they are dealing with ongoing capital projects at PNM fish passage and at Hogback Fish Weir. There are still a few kinks to work out with the automated trash

removal system at the fish passage but the racks are in place and working. There have been delays at the fish weir getting an O&M contract in place and the pumps that interfere with the PIT tag readers are still in place. They are working through the issues but it is frustrating. From tests already done, the fish weir looks promising for preventing entrainment of adults. Pitts asked about larval fish. Uilenberg said nothing keeps larval fish out. McKinstry said they have done some studies using larval fish and buoyant beads and the initial results looks good. Kevin Bestgen, CSU, said he thought the weir design might be effective even on larvae. Uilenberg said if the weir is effective at keeping most fish out it will be so much better than expensive screens that are problematic and can only operate part of the time.

Uilenberg reported they are close to making a final decision to place the Navajo-Gallup Project San Juan River lateral intake in the pool formed by the Hogback Fish Weir wall. The BO for the fish weir specifies zero take of adult endangered fish so if the pool is used for Navajo-Gallup, they will need to consult. How best to do this procedurally is yet to be determined.

Pitts asked about the status of the 2016 appropriations process. Uilenberg said the Energy and Water request for appropriations is intact.

Status of Colorado Pikeminnow recovery plan – Whitmore reported the Program Office coordinated with Tom Chart and Tom Czapla on a SOW for developing a population viability model (PVA) for the Colorado Pikeminnow. The last correspondence she saw was that the SOW was being reviewed by the UCR Recovery Program committees. Ryden reported the UCR Program was able to select Phil Miller of Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (IUCN/SSC) who did the San Juan River PVA without going through a RFP process. Phil Miller informed them he would not be available to start work until the first of the year. A decision was made to wait until Miller is available because it would take longer to put out an RFP to find someone else to do the work.

Discussion of Annual Hydrology Meeting Webinar – Pitts said the Program needs to identify what the required uses for the hydrology model will be. Whitmore said objectives were identified several years ago when the CC's hydrology subgroup was formed to assist with model development. Brian Westfall said he will meet with Todd Vandegrift, Ryan Christianson, and Susan Behery to discuss the hydrology model and comments made during the annual meeting. The group agreed that it was important to have good documentation and technical transfer of information to insure others will be familiar with the model and able to use it. Uilenberg said flow statistics in the model are irrelevant now because they are based on snowpack that is no longer the biggest driver. Spring rains have more impact on hydrology now. He would rather see a shift toward real time operations instead of model based outcomes. Miller said the model is a tool that can be used for running scenarios but the flow recommendations need to be flexible. McCarthy says the San Juan River is not the only river basin out there struggling with changing hydrology and we should investigate what can be learned from other river managers. Ryden said the UCR Program's process has some issues but there is not a better process available. McCarthy said we need to look to experts and possibly get away from overly complex models. Pitts asked about TNC's specialized expertise in river hydrology. McCarthy said TNC does have a lot of expertise in the area of environmental flows and experience working with federal, state and local partners in numerous basins to manage flows to meet their water commitments and support ecosystem functions. He will check with the TNC subject matter experts and report back to the CC. The CC will solicit BC input as to future uses of the hydrology model. The CC will explore the utility of other models that might more accurately predict future hydrological conditions.

Schedule next CC meeting(s) – Whitmore will send out a Doodle poll to schedule an in-person meeting (10 a.m. - 3 p.m.) in Durango some time during the weeks of Sept.14-18 or 21-25 to review/approve the 2016 including the Program's nonnative removal program.