



**SJRRIP COORDINATION COMMITTEE**  
**August 15, 2016**

**Final Meeting Summary**

**Coordination Committee Members:**

Tom Sinclair, Chair  
Catherine Condon  
Leland Begay  
Darryl Vigil  
Dale Ryden  
Tom Pitts  
Stanley Pollack  
Michelle Garrison  
Brent Uilenberg  
Kristin Green  
Patrick McCarthy  
Absent  
Absent

**Representing:**

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

**Program Management:**

Sharon Whitmore, Program Coordinator	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reg. 2
Melissa Mata, Assistant Program Coordinator	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reg. 2
Scott Durst, Program Science Coordinator	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reg. 2
Nathan Franssen, Program Biologist	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reg. 2

**Other Interested Parties:**

Kathleen Callister – CC Alternate	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Jason John – CC Alternate	NN
Bill Miller – BC Chair	SUIT
Mark McKinstry – BC Member	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Susan Behery	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Carlee Brown	CWCB
Paul Montoya	City of Farmington

**Introductions/changes to agenda** – Sinclair welcomed the group. No agenda items were requested to be added to the agenda.

**Approval of May 12, 2016 CC Meeting Summary** – Whitmore stated no comments were received on the May 12, 2016 CC Meeting Summary. Sinclair asked if there were any comments or changes needed to the Meeting Summary that was emailed out to the group. McCarthy moved to approve; Garrison seconded; and the notes were approved.

**2017 AWP (SOWs; compiled BC comments; PO recommendations)** – Whitmore gave a brief review of the AWP process to date. The PO provided a May draft of the 2017 AWP to the BC for technical review and discussion at their May 10, 2016 meeting. The BC set a due date for committee

members and peer reviewers to provide written technical comments on the SOW's and priority ranking recommendations to the PO by June 15, 2016. The May draft of the 2017 AWP was also reviewed and discussed by the CC at their May 12, 2016 meeting. CC members were to coordinate with their respective BC members prior to the BC's deadline for commenting. Because verbal comments typically made by the BC during meetings are difficult to incorporate into development of the AWP, written comments were requested and the PO and BC were in agreement in the overall quality of comments received compared to past years.

Whitmore explained that the PO decided to try a blind review process after some BC members indicated they would like to remain anonymous. Additionally, the use of blind review is widespread and accepted practice due to its ability to reduce biases related to evaluating the merit of scientific work. Thirteen sets of comments were received from BC members and peer reviewers. Names or statements that would reveal the names of individual reviewers were redacted to maintain anonymity. Redactions did not change the content of comments on SOWs. The PO sent out a revised 2017 draft AWP to the BC on July 8, 2017 with the compiled blind comments. The BC discussed the blind review process during their July 18, 2016 call and determined blind reviews were acceptable but the process for conducting them needs to be refined. The BC indicated that comments remain blind but should be identified as coming from a BC member, peer reviewer, or other interested party (for example, BC1 or PR1). The BC will also work on refining the blind review process for potential future use. Whitmore said in the compiled comments provided to the CC prior to this meeting, BC members are identified with BC# and Peer Reviewers with PR#.

Pitts and Pollack questioned the need for a blind review of SOWs. Whitmore said blind review allows reviewers to comment without fear of reprisal and reduces biases in evaluating the merit of proposed work. The written comments received allowed readers of those reviews (in the PO) to assess the quality of the comments in developing a recommendation on inclusion of any given SOW in the AWP to forward to the CC. Whitmore asked Miller to comment on the blind review process and he restated the BC support for a refined blind peer review process as described in the previous paragraph. He stated there were requests from some BC members for anonymity either for fear of reprisal or other undisclosed reasons. The BC also requested that, in the future, these types of reviews be a double blind so comments remain anonymous to BC members and the PO's technical staff.

Pitts responded that BC members are to represent their agency or entity and should not be providing comments that are against the views of their respective agency or entity. Whitmore said the BC is set up in the Program Document as the technical arm of the Program stating that BC members are to bring a cooperative and objective analysis of the river's habitats and fish community to the Program. Pitts said a blind technical review of the SOW's should not happen again, in part, because the SOWs and annual work plan involve expenditure of public funds. He also stated that the review process of the SOWs should be approved by the CC. Whitmore responded there is no guidance in the Program Document that says how the PO can conduct technical reviews. This was the first time a blind review was tried and the outcome was productive although lessons were learned to improve the process. Pollock pointed out that the Program document states that the CC is responsible for establishing Program procedures. Condon also expressed her concerns regarding the blind reviews and that the process should be approved by the CC. Garrison stated she would vote against blind reviews but also wanted to hear from the BC about their recommendation on the proposed review process. McCarthy made the point that with a blind review, no one would know whether or not an individual that could financially benefit from a project was one of those commenters. Therefore, he suggested that BC members who have a conflict of interest or personal gain remove themselves from the review process

for those particular SOWs to reduce any biases. The CC unanimously approved a motion that review comments on Annual Work Plan SOW's should not be anonymous.

Whitmore described the FY 2016-2017 budget comparison she provided. It compares only project costs from 2016 and 2017 that use base funds. She said, in general, individual projects cost did not vary considerably from last year. More significant differences are explained in the Notes column. The Budget Estimate spreadsheet is the same as in the past but two columns were added for Four Corners Power Plant (FCPP) funding. The FCPP funding is categorized similar to the Program's recovery elements so the funds that will be used by element are included in the *FCPP Funded Projects* and tallied for the Grand Total. The amount available per category is in the *FCPP Available Funding and Balance* column with the remaining balance per category. She pointed out the significance of those additional funds in helping the Program implement recovery actions. Whitmore went through the projects line by line with a quick overview of each. Whitmore indicated the TNC project, SJR Habitat Restoration Phase III will be funded with FCPP funds with additional funding from Navajo Nation. McCarthy said funding from Navajo Nation had not been acquired yet but they are in discussions and TNC is looking for other funding opportunities if this option does not work out. Pitts questioned why the capital projects are not numbered and suggested that they be numbered for future AWP's. Green agreed. In the future, numbers will be assigned to all placeholder projects in the Annual Work Plan and Coordination Committee members will be provided with an up-to-date summary as to their status. Pitts said he was under the impression that Fruitland Diversion project could not be funded unless other projects came off the list. Uilenberg said it will have to fit within the budget but he does not know what the budget will be yet. He anticipates the budget may be around \$4 million dollars which will be adequate to fund the Fruitland Diversion project.

Pitts initiated the discussion regarding the SJR Nonnative Species Monitoring and Control project. There have been several email correspondences between himself and David Campbell on the subject. Pitts said the CC and the PO made an agreement last year concerning the nonnative removal project. Nonnative removal would be funded for one year after which a nonnative removal workshop would be conducted to evaluate the results of the nonnative removal efforts. After the workshop, the CC would decide if the project should be funded for another year. Pitts asked if the Service will abide by this agreement. Whitmore reiterated that the PO is doing what was agreed upon and a nonnative fish removal workshop has been scheduled in conjunction with the December BC meeting. The nonnative fish removal project was included in the AWP as a placeholder because of contracting and other logistical reasons such as process of hiring staff is necessary now and not later. The outcome of the workshop will still be used to determine if the project will be continued. PO will strive to collect, analyze, and distribute FY2016 nonnative removal data to the BC by November 1, 2016.

Whitmore said the email David Campbell sent out was a reminder that the Service still considers nonnative removal to be an ESA compliance requirement. Condon stated that it was inappropriate for the Service to provide their input on nonnative removal efforts without the workshop being conducted and it was premature. Campbell is still on Program mailing lists and wanted to emphasize that there has been no new information since last year that would change the Service's determination that nonnative fish removal is needed for recovery. Condon said it appears that this is a process issue in regards to the response from the Service and PO. The Service needs to provide a process that differentiates between the PO and the Service. An additional question was raised on what the process would be for a project to be funded late in the AWP cycle if new information became available. The CC requested that the PO schedule a meeting at least one week after the nonnative removal workshop to continue this discussion. McCarthy added that irrespective of the process, the PO has to use adaptive management to evaluate all program activities so needs to be able to respond nimbly. We do not know the outcome of the

nonnative removal workshop. The workshop may indicate that our nonnative removal efforts are not working and may dictate how we do nonnative removal more effectively or not do it. Ryden said we can agree on a process and will have the workshop but what the Service says is out of our hands.

Whitmore reported on the *Pathway to conducting CPM and RBS population abundance estimates in the SJR* provided to the CC prior to the meeting. The PO, Service Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation Offices Region 2 and 6, and the UDWR developed a SOW for conducting population estimates for the endangered fish in the San Juan River. The Service thinks conducting population estimates at this time would be premature since the vast majority of fish are stocked and evidence for recruitment is lacking. The document proposes that the population estimate SOW not be implemented until after specific “triggers” are met based on Recovery Goal downlist and delist criteria and the results from the Program’s monitoring efforts. If any of the “triggers” are attained, it would necessitate including the population estimate SOW in the following year’s annual work plan. Because some BC members and peer reviewers have suggested population estimates would be useful for assessing carrying capacity and informing the augmentation program of the San Juan River, the PO generated abundance estimates for both fish from 2011-2015 using mark-recapture methodology based on the Program’s nonnative removal and adult monitoring data. These estimates can be used to assess temporal trends in population abundances. The document outlines a minimal level of recruitment that needs to occur to trigger population estimates. The “Pathways” document is being reviewed by the BC and peer reviewers.

Ryden motioned to approve the 2017 Annual Work Plan with caveats; Uilenberg seconded; the CC approved the AWP with the following caveats:

- As previously agreed, the final decision on whether to proceed with nonnative removal (SOW #17) during FY 2017 will be made by the CC approximately one week after the December 1, 2016 nonnative removal assessment workshop.
- The decision on whether to proceed with integration of long-term monitoring data via UNM (SOW #23) will be made by the CC after the BC has reviewed the most recent SOW tasks. Approval will be sought via e-mail as soon as possible after the BC’s review.
- SOWs #17 & #23 will remain in the AWP as funding placeholders until a final decision is made by the CC.
- An approval process will be developed by which a new project can potentially be substituted for nonnative fish removal.
- A process for seeking an ESA compliance ruling from the Ecological Services will be developed in case the CC votes not to fund nonnative removal in FY2017.

**BC Update** – Miller reiterated that the BC reviewed the 2017 SOW’s. They also discussed the blind review process and expressed their comments to the PO. Comments consisted of identifying each reviewer as a BC member or peer reviewer, establishing a process for the blind reviews, and making it a double blind review process. He said the BC was reviewing the “Pathways” document (comments due October 31) and would be discussing it at their next meeting in November. As mentioned earlier, the nonnative workshop will be conducted on December 1, 2016 following the November 29-30 BC meeting.

**Population Model Memorandum of Understanding** – Condon reported she sent out a copy of the final MOU between SUIT and the Program prior to the meeting. The CC approved a version about a year ago but it was revised based on comments from the Service’s solicitor. It is her understanding that it has been approved by the solicitor and can be signed. The previous CC approval of the MOU stands.

**Update on 2016 peak flow operations/channel capacity limitations** – Durst summarized the 2016 Navajo Dam Peak Release Final Summary (July 26, 2016) emailed on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The spring peak release was from May 18 to July 12 with a 5-day ramp up and 12-day ramp down; however Reclamation was not able to achieve a target release of 5,000 cfs during the release because of flooding concerns. Behery described the few situations that made San Juan County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) ask that releases be decreased numerous times during the release period. Reclamation will be working closely with OEM and other agencies during the rest of the year to fix the problem spots and to education landowners and the public about the need to increase the channel capacity so a 5,000 cfs release will be possible. McCarthy asked if there was anything the TNC could do help. McCarthy and Ryden said we need to figure out a way to deal with the channel capacity issue so peak releases can be conducted as originally planned.

**Funding updates** – McKinstry said it looks like there will be a 1% CPI increase in the Program base funds but it is still just an estimate at this point. He and Whitmore are working together to incorporate the new FCPP funds into the mix. The larval fish monitoring contract expires in 2016 so he is working on getting a new one in place. Uilenberg said the 2017 request for capital funds was \$4,917,000. In 2016, \$4,351,000 was awarded. He said the Fruitland renovation project which will include fish entrainment protection will work within this budget.

**Authorizing legislation for base funding beyond FY 2019** – Pitts stated that authorizing legislation for the two UCR recovery programs' hydropower funding is set to expire in 2019. The nonfederal parties involved in the programs are in the process of requesting Congress to extend that funding to 2023. They hope to get it in this fall. The DOI's Report to Congress regarding the status and time to recovery of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker was developed on a short deadline so it can be used to support the legislation reauthorization. Pitts believes the Service from each respective Region has moved the Report to Congress to Headquarters but is unaware of its status today. Uilenberg mentioned an email dated August 15 saying there may have been some DOI Document Tracking System confusion on the Report to Congress. He said he would forward that email to Sinclair and the PO. Sinclair was tasked with contacting the Congressional and Legislative Affairs Specialist at the Service's Headquarters to determine the status of DOI's Report to Congress. Pitts emphasized the need for getting more positive information/press releases out about the Program.

[Note: Sinclair was able to get an update before these notes were completed. He found the Report was sent to the Ecological Services and Fish and Aquatic Conservation Programs for review two weeks ago. As of August 16, there had been no activity. At Sinclair's request, the Specialist sent a friendly reminder to both Programs on August 16 asking that they review the document ASAP.]

**Possible increase in capital funding** – Pitts said there needs to be an increase in capital funding to cover O&M of capital projects. Uilenberg stated the increase in capital funding has been approved and the recovery program should be in good position. There should be roughly \$10 million available in capital funds through 2023.

**Status of Animas Stocking Proposal** – Pitts asked for a status update with regards to the Animas Stocking Proposal. Durst stated Animas River stocking is on hold so additional internal discussions can occur and the Service Regional Directorate briefed. Condon asked when that may happen. Mata stated we plan to set a date soon after this CC conference call; however, an exact date is not known given that the PO will provide a list of potential dates and it will be dependent on the Regional Director's schedule. Condon asked that the CC be kept informed of when the briefing to the Regional Director may occur.

**Schedule next CC meeting(s)** - The PO will send out a doodle poll to setup a CC meeting approximately a week after the December 1, 2016 Nonnative Workshop, or slightly thereafter. The May 2017 BC, Annual Meeting, and CC meetings have been scheduled for **May 16, 17, and 18, 2017**, respectively, at Fort Lewis College in Durango.