



**SAN JUAN RIVER BASIN RECOVERY
IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (SJRIP)
COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING
3 August 2022
MEETING SUMMARY**

Coordination Committee (CC) Members:

Deb Hill (Alternate Chair)
Jenny Dumas (Alternate)
Crystal Tulley-Cordova
Steve Whiteman
Michelle Garrison
Colleen Cunningham (Alternate)
Joseph Trungale
Chris Kitcheyan (Alternate)
Lee Traynham (Alternate)
Dale Ryden
Absent
Peter Ortego (Alternate)
Tom Pitts

Representing

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

Program Office (PO):

Melissa Mata, Program Coordinator
Eliza Gilbert, Assistant Program Coordinator
Scott Durst, Science Coordinator
Raphaela Ware, Program Biologist

Representing

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Other Interested Parties:

Jake Mazzone, BC member
Lisa Yellow Eagle, CC alternate
Bill Miller, BC member
Harry Crockett, BC Chair
Kara Scheel
Emily Halvorsen
Adam Barkalow, BC alternate
Matthew Zeigler, BC member
Michelle Begay
Roland Becenti
Ed Warner
Kathleen Callister
Susan Behery
Valerie Hollberg
Benjamin Schleicher, BC member
Nate Caswell
Nathan Franssen

Representing:

Jicarilla Apache Nation
Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Southern Ute Indian Tribe
State of Colorado
State of Colorado
State of Colorado
State of New Mexico
State of New Mexico
U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Other Interested Parties:

Steven Davenport, BC member
Carrie Padgett, BC alternate
Tom Chart, BC member

Representing:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Water Development Interests
Water Development Interests

Introductions and changes to agenda – Hill

Hill called roll and confirmed a quorum. Garrison wanted to give a Post 2023 planning update and Cunningham had an announcement about the San Juan-Navajo Gallup Lateral Diversion. Hill added both topics to the end of the agenda.

June 30 meeting action item review and summary approval (vote) - Gilbert

1. The CC is in the process of voting to invite the NPS as a signatory participant – *ongoing but in the process of voting, keep as action item.*
2. The PO will route the draft Section 7 Principles to the Service’s Region 2 Director to recommend to the CC for approval – *Completed.*
3. Gilbert will send an email to the CC to request points of interest to be included in a SJRIP San Juan River geographic points of interest file (called a kmz file) – *Completed.*
4. The PO will distribute the Excel file Jones used to develop the Colorado Pikeminnow Recovery Plan Time and Estimate Costs – *Completed.*

Hill asked if there were any updates from the states of CO and NM about the first action item. Neither state had updates, but Cunningham asked when UT would join the Program. Mata said UT received verbal approval from the Governor’s office but they are still waiting for a formal letter and signature on the Cooperative Agreement.

Gilbert stated she did not receive comments on the summary of the last meeting so the version she emailed the group is the final draft. Trungale asked if the CC was approving the Action Item list or the meeting summary. Hill said both. Trungale had a question about how the Colorado Pikeminnow cost estimate was derived from Tildon Jones’ presentation at the last meeting as outlined in the summary. Apparently, the notes incorrectly portrayed how those values were derived. Gilbert will revise the notes to reflect the correct derivation of the cost estimate. Pitts motioned to approve the summary provided Gilbert fixes the notes to reflect the correction. Garrison noted several misspellings of Chris Keleher’s name; Gilbert fixed the misspellings during the meeting. Whiteman seconded Pitts’ motion. No one opposed and the summary was approved.

Warner asked if the Program needs notification about Traynham being the new CC representative for the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). Mata received the notification and Traynham is now on the CC roster.

Navajo Reservoir water year 2023 forecast – Behery

Behery stated that the 2023 water year (WY) forecast predicted a chance of shortage from the July model runs. She reiterated that the model uses the last 30 years of the basin’s hydrology but it seems to be much more arid recently, so the model often over estimates inflows into Navajo Reservoir. She is using the term “shortage” to mean a scenario where Navajo Reservoir does not have sufficient volume to maintain target base flows and fulfill obligational contracts, which occurs at a lake elevation of

5990 ft. Because there is no shortage sharing agreement in place, Reclamation is defaulting to Public Laws 111-11 and 87-483 that state all contracted water users will share the shortage equally and the Navajo Dam Record of Decision (ROD), which allows for reductions in the target base flows. Behery is currently having conversations with Navajo Nation, Jicarilla Apache Nation, the State of New Mexico, PO, and the Biology Committee (BC). Currently, the forecast is predicting a 92,000 af deficit but she thought this volume will likely decrease due to recent inflows and updated usage predictions from the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry (NAPI). Nonetheless, Behery noted that even with recent rains the shortage could still occur if even one month is dryer than average. Behery has been working with a small group from the BC to determine how base flows should be reduced if a shortage does occur. The inflow forecast for 2023 is 430,000 af, which is similar to observed inflows for 2020 and 2021. Pitts asked which contractors would be affected. Behery said Navajo Indian Irrigation Project, Jicarilla, and all of their subcontractors. Pitts asked if any municipalities or irrigation districts are subcontractors. Warner indicated that the Hammond Project contract was recently finalized so they would be affected if they use the contracted water, but no other irrigation projects should be shorted.

Mata stated the small subgroup of the BC has met twice with Behery to discuss potential changes to Endangered Species Act (ESA) section 7 compliant base flows if shortage does occur. She said this group started discussions using the same recommendations the BC made in 2003 when shortage was imminent. If those recommendations were applied in 2023, they would short 27% of the ESA base flows. However, the predicted shortage is currently only 19%, so those recommended base flows may be overkill from what may be needed. The BC subgroup is currently refining those recommendations before they are shared with the entire BC for their consideration. Cunningham asked if the BC was considering reducing base flows so that a spring peak release could occur in WY 2024. Mata replied that any savings due to reduced base flows would likely not be enough to ensure a spring peak release the following year. Cunningham followed up by asking if the BC will report their final recommendation to the CC. Mata stated Reclamation would like to have the final recommendations by the end of August and that the recommendations will be shared to the CC via email before then.

July 14 Biology Committee (BC) meeting summary – Crockett

Crockett reported the last BC meeting mainly focused on the 2023 Annual Work Plan (AWP), which will be discussed during the next agenda item. Other meeting topics included Navajo Dam operations during the forecasted 2023 WY after which 7 BC members volunteered to join the small BC subgroup to discuss options for changes to base flows if a shortage occurs. There was also an update from the Nonnative Fish BC subgroup which did not have much to report but they are continuing discussions via email and plan to meet again in September. Crockett noted that previous recommendations from this small group influenced new Scopes of Work (SOW) in the 2023 AWP through priorities they identified for continued nonnative fish management.

The BC also discussed the potential to construct an off-channel wetland near Bluff, UT that is being pursued by the willing private landowner, Reclamation, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). TNC investigated the potential for TNC to lead the project but determined TNC does not have the resources to do so at this time. McKinstry was going to assess if Reclamation could take the lead and TNC was going to look into water availability for the project. The BC was also introduced to the newly developed digital map of the San Juan River that highlighted several points of interest. The BC is currently reviewing the digital map and will provide suggested edits/additions to the PO. Other minor BC topics included changes to River Mile (RM) designations. Trungale stated he has been looking at the proposed wetland site near Bluff, UT as well as the Phase I, II, and III projects. He inquired if it

was comprehensively determined that this would be the best project for consideration. Crockett replied that this was more of an opportunistic project due to a willing and eager landowner to aid in conservation efforts. Moreover, the initial evaluation of the site looked promising but there has not been a rigorous comparison among other potential projects. Mata interjected by stating TNC produced a habitat site evaluation with pros and cons when they were undergoing site selection for Phase III. In that evaluation, the Bluff, UT site was listed as lower priority due to it being off channel, but after the BC's last habitat workshop, the idea of a wetland near Bluff was resurrected. She also mentioned that the Program might need to devote more funding to preliminary scoping, site evaluation and project engineering so the chances of success are maximized. The Bluff site does seem attractive due to the willingness of the landowner and the ease of access. Trungale reiterated that TNC is interested in helping anyway they can but wanted to make sure this was the site the Program wanted to focus on next. Mata stated Reclamation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are looking into what resources they may have to contribute to evaluation of the site. Pitts thought the biggest question was if the Bluff site was the best place to invest time and resources and asked if it would be similar to the wetlands constructed in the upper basin. Crockett stated it would undoubtedly be smaller and there are still questions whether it would be used to rear wild or hatchery larval fish. Pitts asked how many of these sites would we need to reach recovery and recalled he had similar questions prior to construction of the Phase III site. Crockett stated that question was difficult to answer but the site does have some attractive attributes like access and a willing private landowner. Ryden said that Steve Platania had produced a report in 1990, where he relates the documentation of wild Razorback Sucker in two off channel ponds near Bluff, Utah in 1976 very near this proposed site. Mata pointed out that we are just in the "idea phase" at this point but the Program is very interested in getting some on-the-ground conservation work completed soon. Pitts asked if rearing habitat for Razorback Sucker is limiting in the San Juan River. Mata replied "yes", we think rearing habitat may be limiting for Razorback Sucker. Pitts thought we should be looking into addressing the underlying problem before investing in individual facilities. Crockett responded that individual facilities would likely be needed to address the problem. Pitts was unsure how to proceed on the Bluff site and would like the issue programmatically addressed rather than focusing on opportunistic sites one at a time. He wanted to know what we needed, where, and what will it cost to support a recovered population. Crockett stated there was considerable investigation into selection of the Phase III site but the question of how many or how big they need to be is a difficult question that the BC will continue to discuss.

BC recommended fiscal year 2023 annual work plan (vote) – Crockett and Mata

Crockett stated Mata had sent a high-level summary of the AWP that the BC recommended for CC approval. All SOWs were reviewed by the BC for their technical merits and nearly all members provided comments. Most SOWs were then revised by Principal Investigators (PIs) and resubmitted to the PO. The BC reviewed the revised SOWs and their total budgets. All BC members except Zeigler voted to recommend the AWP in its current form. The AWP includes three new SOWs that originated from the Nonnative Fish BC subgroup. Crockett reminded the group that there has been a lot of questions about the effectiveness and need for nonnative fish removal, so the Program decided to take 3-5 year break from large-scale electrofishing removal to help direct funds to address those questions and to assess how the native fishes respond to ceasing removal efforts. One of these SOWs is stocking egg and larval Colorado Pikeminnow in addition to the 12,000 age-1 individuals that was previously planned, another new SOW is aimed at a literature review and data synthesis of Channel Catfish exploitation methods. In addition, the last new SOW is for identifying spatial and temporal spawning habits of Channel Catfish to potentially identify when and where removal may have the most impact on the population. Two other SOWs were withdrawn after their first review due to their lower priority

given limited resources. Three other ongoing SOWs were not funded which included 1) Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker augmentation from New Mexico Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation Office (NMFWCO) due to the PO finding other means to conduct that work, 2) the number of breeders (Nb) SOW from Southwestern Native Aquatic Resources Recovery Center (SNARRC), and 3) the SOW to assess effects of translocating Razorback Sucker above the waterfall through genetic assessment from SNARRC. Crockett made it clear that the tissues and data for the latter two SOWs would be collected but those would be analyzed at a future time. Mata said the PO was able to reach a balanced budget by asking PIs to look for savings, by finding budget mistakes, and working with the Four Corners Power Plant (FCPP) NFWF fund to find work that they could fund. Crockett stated that Zeigler thought SOWs New-1 and New-2 had redundancies but these concerns came up during the meeting and not during the technical review. Zeigler thought the timeframe for when he raised his concerns was irrelevant, nonetheless, a vote to recommend the AWP was motioned and all BC members voted 'yea' with Zeigler voting "nay". Zeigler said he had issues with redundancy after the SOWs were revised as well as the budgets that were supplied for these SOWs. Cunningham stated she remembered the BC having discussions about PIs being directed to keep budgets flat or if they could be adjusted due to increases in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as well as how much the BC should factor costs into their recommendations. Crockett pointed out that those discussions are on the agenda today. Ryden said he is willing to vote to move forward with the 2023 AWP but that USFWS Region 6 feels on-the-ground management of Channel Catfish is important. Ryden mentioned he was concerned that the Program was willing to spend \$400,000 on research that does not remove a single Channel Catfish but spending \$500,000 to remove 10s of thousands of Channel Catfish was deemed too expensive. Crockett responded that the break in the status quo of nonnative removal was not to save money but rather to find ways to increase the efficiency of Channel Catfish control efforts. Ryden replied that USFWS Region 6 believes it is important to get back in the field and do hands on nonnative fish removal activities as soon as possible. Mata stated the Nonnative Fish small group is working to identify management goals for nonnative removal and increase the effectiveness of nonnative fish management.

Pitts raised questions about the new SOW that is supposed to stock egg and larval Colorado Pikeminnow. He noted the SOW proposes to assess effectiveness through genetic analyses of collected age-0 and age-1 individuals but there was no mention of where that funding would come from. Durst stated those analyses would be paid for from other SOWs like Nb. Pitts asked how long the egg and larval stocking would occur and Mata responded "three years". Pitts continued by asking if the ultimate goal is to generate more adult Colorado Pikeminnow in the river. Crockett responded yes, but the immediate objective is to assess if this strategy could increase numbers of all life stages in the river and therefore increase the cost effectiveness of our stocking program. Ryden mentioned the Program had stocked larval and small age-0 Colorado Pikeminnow (approx. $832,000 \leq$ all 55 mm TL) in the mid- to late 1990s (1996-2000, as summarized on page 2 of Ryden 2004: Augmentation of Colorado Pikeminnow in the San Juan River: 2002-2003) but many of those fish (>87%) were stocked above Cudei diversion, which diverted a large majority of the river flow at that time. Entrainment rates among stocked, early life stage Colorado Pikeminnow were documented as being high very soon after stocking (as documented by Melissa Trammell 2000: Abundance of age-0 native fish species and nursery habitat quality and availability in the San Juan River New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah) and monitoring was not designed to evaluate the long-term success of these stocking events, which this SOW does with larval and small-bodied fish monitoring SOWs. Miller said those larval stockings in the 90s were a follow-up study to assess transport time studies on how long fish retained in the system, but this study is aimed at keeping fish in the system. Pitts asked how the Program was addressing habitat limitations for age-0 and larval fish? Crockett noted the primary management action is the flow

recommendations but other projects like habitat Phases I,II,III, manual addition of woody debris and physically maintaining flow secondary channels have all been aimed at addressing habitat limitations. Gilbert added we are also working to increase passage at the waterfall and other barriers to increase availability of habitats for this life-stage. Pitts wanted confirmation that monitoring is in place to assess this SOW's success. Gilbert responded that both the larval fish monitoring and the small-bodied fish monitoring SOWs would be used to assess the SOW's success. Whiteman motion to approve the AWP, Ortego seconded, no one was opposed. The AWP was approved.

BC concerns with scope of work review process and budget inclusion – Crockett and Mata

Crockett reported that some members of the BC continued to think it is inefficient to review proposed SOWs without budgets as outlined in the Program Document. Currently, the BC reviews proposed SOWs without budgets and provides technical comments. After the initial review, BC members are then allowed to view the total budgets for each SOW. The biggest concern by some BC members is that it is difficult to assess the efficiency of some SOWs without some understanding of the effort that is planned for specific tasks. Pitts asked if BC members were suggesting that if the BC could review the full budgets the first round that it would expedite and simplify the process. Crockett responded that some on the BC would think so and he agreed, but if this remained the CC's position, other correlates of effort like number of hours to complete the tasks could be used as a surrogate. Miller thought amount of effort would be more important to him than dollars as rates among organizations would vary greatly. Pitts said he would be comfortable with BC seeing budgets if it helps, the upper basin does something similar, and the PO oversees the entire process so he would be fine with including work hours and budgets in the initial review. Ryden stated that in previous years the BC did see budgets but that was problematic because some members wanted to start red lining costs in some budgets. Therefore, SOW costs were removed from the review process by the CC. He said the BC in the upper basin sees budgets and didn't think it was a problem for them. Chart stated that Pitts summarized his position and had discussed the issue with McKinstry, who was also a strong proponent of the BC reviewing budgets. Garrison thought it made sense at a minimum to include effort in submitted SOWs but wanted to make sure the BC was only making technical recommendations. Mata stated that if the CC wanted to allow BC members to see budgets during the technical review process next year, the Program Document will need to be revised to reflect that. Ryden was not opposed to the BC seeing budgets as long as their review remains technical. Gilbert said she would draft an addendum to the Program Document to allow budgets to be provided to the BC during their technical review. Gilbert will share the draft addendum with the CC for their review and approval. No one voiced opposition.

Principal investigator scope of work budget equity – Crockett and Mata

Mata stated several SOWs increased in cost over last year. For example, SOW #7 had increases in costs but they were conducting additional work, however, FCPP was paying for most of that SOW so it didn't matter much to the overall budget. Some BC members, including McKinstry and Zeigler, were under the impression that no SOW should be increasing costs due to the overall budget of the Program remaining flat. However, Mata was unable to find any mention of that direction in previous meeting notes. Miller concurred, but he did recall some period of time when PIs were asked to keep budgets flat during years of Congressional budget sequestration and that directive could have stood without further notification. Mata remembered having across the board cuts to all SOWs as well as having PIs provide justifications when their budgets increased substantially. Chart said that one other consideration is that some SOWs are difficult to reduce the workload when costs increase like

hatchery production. Zeigler said New Mexico was working under the assumption that budgets were not to increase and just wanted clarity. Mata stated the PO will make sure everyone knows the guidance during next year's AWP development.

Revised SJRIP Endangered Species Act Section 7 Principles (vote) – Gilbert

Gilbert said the document with the revised comments received the Regional Director's approval. Whiteman motioned to approve the document, Trungale seconded. No one opposed, the Section 7 principles were approved.

Announcement on Navajo Gallup San Juan Lateral – Cunningham

Durst said there is a new Environmental Assessment (EA) with a revision for the northern portion of the Navajo Gallup San Juan lateral that is open for comment until 15 August. Cunningham provided a link to the EA in the chat. A revised Biological Assessment was received by the New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office and they are currently working on the Biological Opinion.

Post 2023 update – Garrison

Garrison said the States and Wayne Pullan are working to reschedule a meeting now that Wayne Pullan is back from sick leave. Additionally, during the DC briefings, one congressional staffer recommended an economic review of the recovery programs be conducted so that they would have materials during the reauthorization process to demonstrate the Programs' economic benefits. Garrison is in the process of developing a SOW to conduct this work and plans to have the CC review it before proceeding. Garrison proposed funding the analysis with Section 7 water user fees from the NFWF fund to pay for the SOW. She will send the proposed SOW to the CC for review soon.

Wrap up and next meetings

BC Meeting December 6-8
Researchers meeting 31 Jan – 1 Feb – Location is likely Moab
BC Feb meeting TBD
Next CC meeting

ACTIONS ITEMS FROM 3 August 2022 COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING

1. The CC is in the process of voting to invite the NPS as a signatory participant.
2. BC base flow recommendation under shortage conditions will be shared to CC.
3. PO will develop an addendum to Program Document that allows BC members to review budgets during the AWP Process.
4. Garrison will share draft SOW for Recovery Program economic review to CC.