



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

Summary Dated: September 19, 2012

CR/FY-11 UCRRIC
Mail Stop 65115

Memorandum

To: Implementation Committee
Management Committee, Consultants, and Interested Parties
Meeting Attendees

From: Director, Upper Colorado River Recovery Implementation Program

Subject: Final March 5, 2012, Recovery Implementation Committee Conference Call
Summary

Attached are the action and assignment summary and the general summary from the March 5, 2012, Implementation Committee conference call.

Attachment

- Summary -
Actions and Assignments
Recovery Implementation Committee Conference Call –March 5, 2012

ACTIONS:

1. Approved the September 19, 2011, conference call summary as written.
2. Delegated approval of the RIPRAP revisions and assessment to the Management Committee.
3. Confirmed the date of their next meeting on Wednesday, September 19, 2012 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in Denver near DIA.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Angela Kantola will finalize the revised September 19, 2011, conference call summary and have it posted to the Program's website. *Done*.
2. Program participants submitting comments on the Aspinall ROD or EIS will copy the Management and Implementation committees.

CONFERENCE CALL SUMMARY:

CONVENE: 9:00 a.m. CALL-IN NUMBER: 888-842-7194, passcode 209309#

1. Roll call, review/modify agenda – The agenda was modified as it appears below.
2. (Action Item) [Approve September 19 2011, meeting summary](#) – Angela Kantola said no comments have been received to date on this summary (posted to the fws-coloriver listserver on 9/20/11). The Committee had no comments. Angela will finalize the summary (*done*).
3. Aspinall EIS update – Steve McCall said the draft ROD was sent to cooperating agencies on February 3 and to the Management Committee on February 5. On February 23, Reclamation mailed the final EIS and filed it with EPA on February 27. Following the 30-day waiting period, Reclamation can finalize the ROD on March 28. If they receive comments on the final EIS, those can be addressed in the ROD. Reclamation's goal is to sign the ROD before spring runoff and operate Aspinall in accordance with the ROD this season. (If for some reason the ROD couldn't be completed, Reclamation would operate Aspinall similar to previous years, which is very close to the ROD). Leslie asked how Reclamation plans to address comments on the draft ROD and Steve said they will see if any appropriate changes need to be made and talk to the Region (and Washington if needed) about those. John Shields noted that the Platte River Power Authority submitted comments, most of which were directed at requesting more consistency between what's been proposed for this ROD and the 2006 FG ROD. John said that seems reasonable and Wyoming thinks those comments should be incorporated in the ROD (they will send Reclamation a letter to that effect). John asked if Program participants wanted to convene a call to discuss comments, but the group agreed there is not time. Leslie said she believes CREDA will have comments on the final EIS. LaVerne said Western will submit comments on the ROD

this week and they are still reviewing the EIS, so she doesn't yet know if they'll have comments on that. Leslie James sent the Platte River Power Authority's comments to Angela who forwarded them to the Management and Implementation committees. Becky Mitchell said Colorado also plans to submit comments. >Anyone submitting comments will copy the Management and Implementation committees.

4. DOI/Reclamation Scientific Integrity Policy – In September, the Program Director's office agreed to bring the scientific integrity policy back to the Committee for endorsement when Reclamation's version is finalized. Brent said this came up in the San Juan Program and he believes Reclamation was going to implement the DOI policy by directive and standard; >Brent and Dave will check on that and provide a draft or final to the Management and Implementation committees. Tom Pitts said he'd like the Implementation Committee to take a formal position (e.g., pass a resolution) that the Recovery Program operates in accordance with this policy.
5. Program Director's update – Tom Chart gave a brief overview of recent Program activities and issues.

Instream Flow

- Last year was very wet, especially on the Green River. We achieved all the spring peak and wet year targets and came close on the Colorado side, as well.
- This year has been off to a very slow start compared to 2011, but as of two days ago, all the basins in Colorado that contribute to the Colorado and Green were between 79-83% of average (San Juan / Dolores 86%; Wyoming / Upper Green 94%; Utah basins – Price, San Rafael, and Duchesne 63-70%).
- The Program has been working on a Larval Trigger Study Plan (LTSP, now in draft form) for timing Flaming Gorge releases. Data shows our releases to date haven't coincided with presence of larval razorback in the Green River. Thus, last year's spring flow request was based on that larval trigger (which generally happens after the Yampa peaks). The LTSP will serve as the basis for future flow request letters; both the LTSP and the draft letter will be coming to the Management Committee very shortly and the plan is to get them to Reclamation by the third week in March.
- Tom said he hopes to wrap up Price River position paper and have the next (year-round iteration of the White River flow recommendations out by September.
- The Coordinated Facility Operations (CFOPS) report for augmenting Colorado River spring peak flows should be completed by September. The 10,825 (Ruedi replacement water) final EA and FONSI are expected to go to Reclamation this month, then work will begin on contracts with implementation expected over the course of the next couple of years.

Habitat Restoration

- Related to the goal of the Larval Trigger Study Plan, we had a long period of floodplain connection in 2011 after razorback sucker larvae were present in the system. Researchers were able to detect that larvae got onto the floodplain and survived their first summer (the last time any over-summer survival was detected was 1996)!
- Reclamation continues to maintain floodplain connections at Jarvis floodplain; and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) will apply rotenone at the FWS Grand Junction Pipe Pond site before riverine connection is restored.

- Capital funding is scheduled for a screen at Tusher Wash diversion. Originally, something similar to the Grand Valley screens was planned, but an alternative approach may be better. The Program is preparing an RFP for a mortality study to determine how much effect the turbine runners are having on the fish. The Program also is looking into potential for an electric barrier at the mouth of the diversion (rather than a traditional screen).

Nonnative Fish Management

- The draft Basinwide Nonnative Invasive Species Strategy went to the Biology Committee at the end of August (responsive to a long-term Program need as well as specific recognition in the Service's Sufficient Progress review). This draft addresses prevention, eradication and swift control of problematic species. The Nonnative Fish Subcommittee reconvened in November to review and discuss edits to the draft strategy and agreed to: 1) have separate section for public relations/I&E drafted by the I&E Committee (the I&E committee discussed this on March 1 – many thanks to Randy Hampton [CPW] and others on the committee for taking the lead on this); 2) incorporate results/recommendations from final reports for projects 161 (SMB Synthesis) and C-18/19 (otolith microchemistry); and 3) incorporate pre- and post-reclamation (rotenone) guidance for public relations, O&M, and replacement sport fisheries for UCRB reservoirs containing invasive piscivores (i.e. northern pike, smallmouth bass, and walleye). Another very important piece called out in the draft is illicit introductions. The Program's coordinator hosted meeting with the States and Service fishery and law enforcement personnel on October 17, 2011 in GJ, CO to review and discuss the extent and implications of illegal fish stocking in the UCRB and to formulate proactive/consistent/strict/severe practices, policies, regulations and penalties to combat illegal fish movements within and among UCRB states to protect sport fisheries, native fishes, and prospects for endangered fish recovery. The States have the lead on the next step in these discussions. CPW has included some important messaging along these lines in their new Fishing Brochure.
- We received encouraging information from the field in 2011 indicating that ongoing nonnative fish removal efforts in the Yampa and Green rivers coupled with average / wetter hydrologies are helping to reduce adult populations of smallmouth bass. Unfortunately, in the most favorable reach for smallmouth bass (Little Yampa Canyon and Lilly Park) they persist. The Program recently gained a better understanding on numbers of smallmouth bass escaping from Elkhead Reservoir and is beginning to understand how that source could be fueling these high densities in these persistent reaches in the Yampa River mainstem closer to Elkhead Reservoir. This underscores how important it was to stop translocating smallmouth bass from the river to the reservoir (2011), but now the conversation has shifted to what we will do about the reservoir populations themselves.
- Unfortunately, both the Program's efforts to control northern pike in critical habitat and a buffer zone between Craig and Hayden coupled with Colorado Parks & Wildlife's efforts upstream in Catamount Lake and the upper river are not adequate to address this threat.
- We saw a couple of discouraging flare-ups in 2011: smallmouth bass in the White River and northern pike in the upper Colorado near the Rifle Creek confluence. The Program plans to ramp up a rapid response effort in 2012 on the White (requiring a public meeting) and on the Colorado River.

Propagation

- The Program had good production in 2011 at all facilities – kudos to all the State and Service folks on their great work.
- Tom Czaplá is working with an ad hoc group to incorporate new information on survival of stocked razorback as well as observations on bonytail program to revise our Integrated Stocking Plan with the intention of implementing new strategies with respect to our 2013 stocks of fish.
- Dave Schnoor, the new Project Leader for the Service hatcheries in the Program has brought a new set of eyes to our struggling bonytail reintroduction program.

Monitoring and Research

- Colorado pikeminnow: a report of Colorado River population estimates collected from 2008-2010 should be finalized in 2012. Population estimates are down in this most recent sampling, but not alarmingly so when all the acceptable population estimates dating back to 1992 are taken into account. On the Green River side, researchers initiated their third 3-year sampling rotation in 2011. YOY catches were way down throughout the Green River in 2011 (expected in light of the extremely high spring and summer flows). YOY catch rates on the Colorado (n=59) were closer to average.
- Humpback chub: Researchers wrapped up the second year of their most recent two-year sampling rotations in Desolation/Gray canyons with catch rates remaining low when the 20 annual data points are taken into consideration. In Westwater Canyon, researchers completed the first year of their most recent 2-year sampling rotation and the population estimate in 2011 suggests a relatively stable population since 1999, but a continued depressed population since the first estimate in 1998. They saw good numbers of juvenile-size chubs and the highest estimate of native roundtail chubs on record. Black Rocks Canyon sampling is on the same schedule as Westwater, but the 2011 data were not summarized as for the Westwater catch. However, roundtail chubs were 6-7 times as numerous as humpback chub and increased electrofishing resulted in good captures of juvenile-sized chubs.
- Tom Czaplá is working with geneticists to address the need for developing a humpback chub broodstock. Researchers will secure 200 young-of-year fish from the Black Rocks and Westwater canyons area into a hatchery in the fall of 2012 to start that process.
- Razorback sucker: spawning was discovered in the White River in 2011 and wild produced age-0 fish were captured in Green River floodplains in the fall of 2011!
- Bonytail : recaptures have increased with additional deployment of stationary PIT tag arrays.

Information and Education

- Debbie Felker is nearing the finish line with the most recent version of the *Program Highlights*.
- The Program is preparing the annual nonnative fish management messages, and, as mentioned, assisting with drafting the basinwide nonnative fish strategy. I&E will obviously assist with the public meeting in Rangely in April.
- The annual newsletter was completed in November.
- Several popular articles were published on the big flows in 2011 and the White River razorback sucker spawning.

6. Recovery Goals and 5-Year Status Reviews; Program role in Recovery Goals revision – The five-year status review documents for the humpback chub and the Colorado Pikeminnow can be viewed on the Recovery Program’s website at: <http://www.coloradoriverrecovery.org/documents-publications/foundational-documents/recovery-goals.html>. Tom Chart said we’re nearing completion of the bonytail and razorback 5-year reviews. Tom Czapla and Rich Valdez and Tom Chart have worked with Bob Muth and Kevin Bestgen focusing on revising the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker recovery goals into recovery plans. Dan Luecke asked how the revised recovery goals will be incorporated into the recovery plans. Tom said the structure and content will be very similar to the 2002 recovery goals documents, but we need to include timelines to recovery and estimated costs. John Shields mentioned the Glen Canyon Dam biological opinion requirement for work to be funded at Dexter regarding the humpback chub MVP. Tom Chart said Region 2 has told them they expect to have that work in draft this summer, so he thinks we can incorporate the results in the revised recovery plan. Dan asked if there’s a schedule for completion; Tom Chart said we first have to wrap up the status reviews. Next, the Service is trying to figure out the best process for working with Program partners on review of the recovery plans. Tom Czapla said he thinks we’ll have a draft to discuss on the Colorado pikeminnow by this summer. Dan Luecke reiterated the environmental groups’ offer to discuss the draft with the authors and said they’ve refined their comments/questions and are ready to have that meeting. Tom Chart said they would like to meet with the environmental groups as well as any partners who want to discuss the recovery plans. With regard to the Dan’s question as the differing and puzzling picture of the various humpback chub populations, Tom Chart said this will be discussed in the recovery plans. Deso/Gray has the added pressure of smallmouth bass not seen in Black Rocks/Westwater. The Program has contracted with Gary White to look at Black Rocks and Westwater together to better understand this population. Clearly, there’s a suite of circumstances unique to each of the humpback chub populations. In response to a question from Clayton Palmer regarding using the Recovery Program as a forum to discuss the draft recovery plans, Chart acknowledged Western’s request to reinstate the recovery teams. Steve Guertin said the Service is still considering this and hopes to reach a decision in the next week or two.
7. Legislation and budget-related updates
 - a. Updates on Program legislation and post-2011 base funding – Tom Pitts said the non-Federal Program participants are still working on legislation to extend annual funding for all purposes (rather than just O&M and monitoring, which PL 106-392 specified after 2011 [primarily as a checkpoint]). They responded to questions from the Water and Power Subcommittee in September and to additional questions in January, but are not making much headway in the House at this point. A bill was marked up in the Senate, but they’re waiting on the House. Washington water user representatives offered two proposals: 1) have high-level State representatives visit with Rep. McClintock in Washington about this; and 2) have a meeting of 3-4 water users and CREDA with Rep. McClintock (possibly April 18). Hopefully, this will provide Rep. McClintock what he needs to give staff the nod to move forward on this legislation. They haven’t yet dealt with House’s “cutgo” legislative protocol (requires finding an offset if you propose legislation that would affect the treasury). So far, the Committee

hasn't passed any legislation authorizing any new funding, so our programs will need the Subcommittee's help with this. Pat Tyrrell said he spoke with Rep. Lummis last Friday in Cheyenne and mentioned the need for the restoration of the base funding (emphasizing that this is not new money, just a continuation). Pat asked that she contact Mr. McClintock - she sensed that Rep. McClintock would be reasonable on this. Pat said he thought it was a positive meeting. They discussed budgets at length as sequestration is starting to make some automatic cuts (on a calendar year basis) due to the Super Committee's failure. Tom Pitts said water users have contacted Colorado's representative and asked him to contact Rep. McClintock, as well. Tom said Reclamation was able to find funding for 2012 to make up the ~40% shortfall in the annual funds. Brent Uilenberg reviewed Reclamation's "backstopping" of the 2012 funding shortfall and the Committee discussed 2013.

- b. Washington, D.C., briefing trip – John Shields updated the Committee on the upcoming March 14-20 Washington, D.C. briefings and reviewed the meeting schedule. The final *Program Highlights 2011-2012* briefing document for the Upper Colorado and San Juan programs will soon be available at <http://www.coloradoriverrecovery.org/general-information/general-publications/program-highlights.html>. Communicating the need for annual funding legislation is their highest priority in this visit. John reviewed the amounts in the President's 2013 budget for both Reclamation and the Service for both Recovery Programs. Darin Byrd said Gov. Herbert of Utah has signed letters of support. Becky said they heard last week that Gov. Hickenlooper wouldn't sign letters (and DNR can't write a letter that would go against that). Colorado supports the President's budget and the recovery programs and is working to craft a letter to stay within the Governor's policy not to sign letters requesting funding. Becky will keep the programs informed. Pat Tyrrell said Wyoming's governor also is very sensitive to asking for additional funding from Washington, so they are trying to nuance their letter so it's helpful to the Program without overtly asking for funds
 - c. Capital projects – Brent Uilenberg said damage was sustained to ~300' of the setback levee at Thunder Ranch and repairs will begin this week with hope of completing in about a month before heron and eagle nesting (~\$400K). The Horsethief Canyon fish rearing ponds are under construction (~\$6M) and should be completed by end of June. After 2012, the Program will lose 10,825 acre-feet of water from Ruedi Reservoir, so in an attempt to maintain baseflow augmentation on the Colorado River mainstem, Reclamation is working with the Orchard Mesa Irrigation District to install a canal automation system in their irrigation delivery system to provide ~17KAF to indirectly augment 15-Mile Reach flows. They are working with Colorado to put \$1.5M of grant funding into trust fund for the O&M costs, and then can begin expending Program funds for construction. They anticipate being able to move forward with construction in 2013 and complete it in 2015.
8. Southern Rockies LCC update – Steve Guertin said the steering committee met last week in Albuquerque. The essence of that meeting was identifying scientific information needs and priorities critical to inform partners' operational needs on the ground. These priorities largely focused on information needs related to water and energy issues in the SRLCC. Laverne Kyriss said that in light of that focus, Western might like to join the SRLCC (they weren't previously included because they are not a land management agency). Steve said he

would pass that on to SRLCC coordinator Kevin Johnson and said he thinks Western would be a valuable addition.

9. Regional Director's 2012 Program priorities – Steve Guertin said the Service tries to provide clarity to all its offices on priorities so that all are moving in the same direction on large, landscape objectives. The Region 6 priorities call out three recovery programs for the grizzly bear, black-footed ferret, and Colorado River fishes. All Service offices in the relevant geographic area are working toward these priorities, outlined in the November 16, 2011, "Mountain-Prairie Region Resource Priorities" as follows: "The four endangered fishes (Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, bonytail, and razorback sucker) in the Colorado River represent a conservation priority in this Region. The Colorado River Fishery Project and the Upper Colorado River Fish Recovery Program will work together to understand fish responses to the near-record high spring flows experienced throughout the Green River in 2011. With partners, we will determine overwinter survival of young razorback suckers that were swept into important nursery habitats on the floodplain last spring. We will partner with the Bureau of Reclamation to experiment with their timing of spring releases from Flaming Gorge Reservoir on the Green River to better assist in endangered fish recovery. We will finalize a Basin-wide Nonnative Fish Management Strategy, which will coordinate extensive, ongoing nonnative fish control efforts with much needed commitments to prevent future introductions of aquatic invasive species. We will also continue stocking hatchery reared razorback sucker and bonytail; using mark / recapture techniques to estimate population size; providing technical assistance to manage flows; and providing information and outreach to the public."
10. RIPRAP revisions/assessment; 2012-2013 Program guidance – Angela Kantola said the Program Director's draft RIPRAP revisions/assessment were posted to the listserver on February 3. Technical committees have reviewed and commented on these documents (Biology Committee on Feb. 24, Information and Education Committee on Mar. 1, and Water Acquisition Committee on March 2) and the documents are scheduled for Management committee review on March 21. The Implementation Committee delegated approval of the RIPRAP revisions and assessment to the Management Committee.
11. Agenda items for September 19, 2012, Implementation Committee meeting – The Committee's next meeting is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at the Country Inn and Suites in Denver near DIA, and a draft agenda will come out at least 2 weeks in advance.

ADJOURN: 11:00 a.m.

Attachment 1 - Participants

IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Steve Guertin, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Chairman)
Ed Werner (acting IC representative), U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
John Reber, National Park Service
Dan Luecke, Environmental Groups
Leslie James, Colorado River Energy Distributors Association
Pat Tyrrell, Wyoming State Engineer's Office
Rebecca (Becky) Mitchell for Mike King, Colorado Department of Natural Resources
Mike Styler, Utah Department of Natural Resources
LaVerne Kyriss Western Area Power Administration
Tom Pitts, Upper Basin Water Users
Program Director Tom Chart, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (nonvoting)

OTHERS:

Julie Lyke, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
John Shields, Wyoming State Engineer's Office
Brent Uilenberg, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Steve McCall, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Clayton Palmer, Western Area Power Administration
Robert King, Utah Division of Water Resources
Jana Mohrman, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Debbie Felker, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program
Tom Czaplá, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program
Angela Kantola, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program
Dave Speas, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Melissa Trammell, National Park Service