



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

Final Summary Dated: February 23, 2015

CR/FY-14 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 October 2, 2014, Recovery Implementation Committee Meeting Summary

Attached are the final action and assignment summary and the general summary from the October 2, 2014, Implementation Committee meeting.

Attachment

Summary
Recovery Implementation Committee Meeting – October 2, 2014
Country Inn and Suites, 4343 N Airport Way, Denver, Colorado

ACTIONS:

1. Approved March 6, 2014 conference call summary with minor revisions.
2. Scheduled the next Implementation Committee conference call (or webinar) for March 5 from 1 to 4 p.m. and next meeting for Thursday, October 1, from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS: See Attachment 1

MEETING SUMMARY:

CONVENE: 10:30 a.m.

1. Introductions, modify/review agenda, Chair's updates – Committee Chair, Noreen Walsh, expressed appreciation for the Committee and the opportunity to work with the group. The Colorado River Program is known throughout the country as an excellent model of collaborative conservation. Noreen said she is confident the Program can meet the challenges ahead to succeed in its mission.
2. Approve revised [March 6, 2014 conference call summary](#) – Action Item: Angela Kantola said Tom Pitts noted a missing word on page 6. Angela will post the final summary to the listserver (*done*).
3. Program Director's report on the Recovery Program and status of the fish – Tom Chart thanked everyone for attending the meeting and said he believes it's important for the Implementation Committee to meet face to face once a year.

Tom gave an overview of Program accomplishments, issues, and future direction by recovery element. Tom compared Program expenditures by Program element from 2001 to 2014, emphasizing the increase in expenditures for nonnative fish management from 13% of the Program budget in 2001 to 32% of the budget in 2014. Nonnative fish management is clearly our greatest challenge at this point. The Program has accomplished so much over the years, but the nonnative fish problem is what's out in front of us, and it presents a real crossroads for the Program. However, we've identified important, tangible actions we can take to tackle the nonnative fish problem and Tom said he believes the Program can overcome this challenge.

Instream Flows - Reviewing the Program's work to augment instream flows, Tom pointed out that 2014 was the first year since the Aspinall ROD was signed that the forecasted inflow to Blue Mesa Reservoir was classified other than "dry." That forecast just reached the 'Moderately Wet' category, and Reclamation was able to make high spring flow releases from the Aspinall Unit to benefit the endangered fish. Doing so was challenging due to flooding concerns in the Lower Gunnison, however. On the Green River, Flaming Gorge releases are now timed to create a peak flow to connect the river with floodplain nursery areas coincident with the presence of larval

razorback suckers. Tom Pitts asked if colder water adversely impacts razorback larvae. Tom Chart said that doesn't seem to be the case since Reclamation waits to make the peak flow releases until the larvae are free-swimming, thus, the release temperature doesn't delay the hatch date. Future instream flow recovery activities include: 1) securing a contractor for the White River Management Plan to model water demand and endangered fish flow needs; and 2) exploring ways to meet 'dry year' baseflow targets in the 15-Mile Reach. Tom Pitts asked how OMID will help meet 15-Mile Reach baseflow target and Brent Uilenberg said it will result in water savings in ~95% of water years (except for very dry conditions).

Habitat management – Tom Chart said Aspinall operations seemed to have created great conditions for late juvenile/early adult fish that used the Redlands fish ladder this year. Also this year, the first Colorado pikeminnow used the Grand Valley Project fish ladder along with more than 20 razorback sucker. We've now collected all four endangered fish species at both of these facilities. In addition to the endangered fishes, many thousands of other native fish use these passage facilities in a typical year. The Program will need to work with GVIC to see if improvements can be made to their fish screen. At the Tusher Wash diversion structure on the Green River, large numbers of fish are being entrained and the Program is working to determine the best configuration for a screening device. Looking forward, we recognize that our passage and screen infrastructure will require maintenance, repairs, and improvements and we'll need to make sure the Program has funds for that work. The Program also may consider screens to contain nonnative fishes in various reservoirs.

Propagation, genetics and stocking – Tom said the Program recently began shifting some production away from razorback suckers, which are beginning to accumulate and thrive in the system, to bonytail where our reintroduction efforts have not yet been as successful. Going forward, we need to make better use of our accumulating razorback data. Brent asked if existing facilities can flow condition bonytail. Tom Czapla said Mumma does this now and thinks our other facilities could, as well.

Nonnative fish management – Tom Chart illustrated how nonnative fish have expanded throughout the upper basin over the last 40 years. The Program must work diligently to implement the [Basinwide Strategy](#) approved in February. Future critical recovery activities are to: 1) control source populations (e.g. Elkhead, Starvation, and Stagecoach reservoirs); 2) promote 'compatible' sport fisheries to reduce illegal introductions; and 3) conduct outreach and consistently communicate "Zero Tolerance" (e.g. 'must kill' regulations) for the 'worst of the worst' species (northern pike, smallmouth bass, walleye, and burbot).

Research and monitoring – Tom said the adult Colorado pikeminnow population in the Colorado River has shown a slowly increasing trend, but the Green River population has declined in recent years. The Black Rocks/Westwater core humpback chub population showed a dramatic decline in late 1990's, but seems to have stabilized at the lower level. We're seeing positive trends in razorback populations in both the upper and lower basins, including more wild production of larvae and now more wild-produced juvenile fish, and the Service likely will prepare a species status assessment soon to determine if downlisting is justified.

As part of our ongoing monitoring efforts, the Program has installed antennas that detect pit-tagged fish at six different locations. The amount and type of information we're gathering from

these antennae is astounding and raises interesting questions, such as whether fish avoid our standard sampling techniques and if our standard sampling techniques effectively sample nocturnal behavior. The Program just contracted with the Colorado Natural Heritage Program to update our database to handle historical information as well as the volume of new information these antennae are generating in both the Upper Colorado and San Juan programs. Tom believes the Program will need to commit to a full-time database manager.

Information and education – Although we’ve been without a full-time I&E Coordinator since Debbie Felker retired in spring of 2013, the Program has continued to produce the annual [Program Highlights](#) briefing document and [Swimming Upstream](#) newsletter and now also has higher-quality, value-added digital versions, along with an active [Facebook page](#). After meeting with water users, anglers, a local newspaper reporter, and Program participants in Craig in early September, Tom Pitts said he concluded no one outside the Program in that area knows anything about the Program, which reflects a serious problem. Tom recommends we fill the I&E position and start getting press releases out again. Angela Kantola said the Program Director’s office remains committed to keeping outreach on par with the other technical Recovery Program elements and is working towards hiring a new Information and Education coordinator. The Service was been under a hiring freeze since Debbie retired, although waivers can be sought. In light of the freeze, the Service tried sharing an outreach position between its Regional Office External Affairs group and the Recovery Program. By the first quarter of 2014, both the Program Director’s Office and External Affairs agreed this wasn’t a viable solution because both offices needed more than 50% of an outreach specialist’s time. The Program Director’s Office has since been working with its Regional managers to determine how to structure a full-time position and anticipates the Service will soon submit the required waiver and public affairs position requests to its Washington headquarters. Following approval, the next steps would then be advertising and filling the position. Although this position vacancy has put a real strain on the Program, Angela credited Melanie Fischer for doing an amazing job of picking up extra duties of newsletter and briefing book coordination and design, social media, and exhibits (in addition to all of her administrative work). Noreen said the requirement for Washington-level approval of hiring was just lifted (though public affairs positions must still be approved in Washington), so that will simplify hiring this position somewhat. Tom Pitts also encouraged reexamining the relationship with the San Juan Program (which has never issued a press release, for example), even though it is contributing to the cost of Upper Basin I&E efforts. Leslie James described similar I&E challenges in the Glen Canyon program. Angela noted the increasing importance of social media. An August 14 facebook post “One Lucky Fish” showing a bonytail that had been swallowed and regurgitated by a smallmouth bass reached almost 4,000 people. Melanie Fischer said our facebook statistics show that Grand Junction area folks engage most with our posts, and the most engaged age group is 25-44. Noreen commended the Program on an excellent job with facebook photos and postings. The Program has both many excellent accomplishments and challenges to communicate. Noreen asked if the group has discussed whether we might want to focus the I&E position explicitly on nonnative fish. Bart Miller agreed this is a good idea in light of the big nonnative hurdle in front of us. Ted Kowalski noted the recent good article by Willoughby in the Denver Post about nonnative and endangered fish didn’t mention this Program. Tom Pitts said anglers will be a most important communication target and CPW and the other States’ fish and game departments will need to play a critical role in that (e.g., illegal stocking needs to be identified as criminal activity, etc.). Noreen agreed this will need to be a partnership effort. Perhaps we’ll need to develop a targeted campaign on this

issue, with, for example, CPW having the lead on certain aspects. It may be helpful to bring in someone who can work with all of the stakeholders to focus on this problem. Darin Bird cited similar issues in the Virgin River and June Sucker recovery programs. Tom Chart noted we'll need to tap interest groups on this too (e.g., what this Program does for water users) and get out ahead of these issues more than we've done to date. Tom Pitts agreed, suggesting we could provide information for newsletters sent to water users in their monthly bills.

Database manager – Lynn Jeka noted their Biology Committee representative believes this will be a critical position. Tom Chart said we've entered FY15 and will be moving forward on this soon, recognizing how long it takes to fill a position. Tom thinks we will need a full-time position just to handle our upper basin data, but upper basin and San Juan data will be managed in the same *system*. Tom Pitts said he fully supports hiring a database manager.

4. Sufficient progress and nonnative fish action items update – Tom Chart said the sufficient progress letter is awaiting signature. It concludes sufficient progress, but calls attention to recent reports of low densities of Colorado pikeminnow in the Green and Colorado River sub-basins and low numbers of humpback chub in many Upper Basin locations. Specific recovery actions to receive greater attention are identified in the areas of nonnative fish management, flow management, and reducing endangered fish entrainment in irrigation canals.

With regard to nonnative fish management actions, Ted Kowalski said Colorado has a different view of must-kill, but is willing to explore a pilot. Henry Maddux said Utah's law enforcement hasn't found enforcement of must-kill regulations to be a problem. Law enforcement is not issuing tickets, but is using the regulation as an opportunity to educate anglers found in possession of live fish on the must-kill list. As to effectiveness, Utah sees this as part of messaging, so the measure of effectiveness is whether we're reducing illegal introductions, not whether the regulations reduce nonnative fish populations. Noreen said CPW's Greg Gerlich has established a work group and Ted said that group will explore a must kill pilot along with other tools. Colorado sent a letter back to Utah DNR outlining CPW's activities in this arena. Noreen observed that one thing we're trying to do in meeting the nonnative fish challenge is to change people's behavior, so we'll want to consider how to measure effectiveness in that regard. Ted noted that in addition, we're trying to get at the *source* of these nonnative fish and eradicating the fish or screening those sources.

5. Update on Upper Basin Drought Contingency Planning – Ted Kowalski said that Secretary Jewell met with the 7 Basin States in June 2013 and asked them to develop a contingency plan to address the potential for Lake Powell and Lake Mead to drop below critical levels for hydropower generation. The Upper Basin conversation has focused on: weather modification; “extended operations” (releases) from Navajo, Aspinall, and Flaming Gorge; LTEMP emergency operations; and demand management (a system conservation agreement would require Upper Colorado River Commission approval). The emphasis is on prevention. Tom Pitts asked what happens if power generation were affected. Lynn Jeka said WAPA budgets 2-3 years out, so trying to get a congressional appropriation in lieu of power revenues in the event that were to happen would be a big challenge. Tom Pitts asked if the non-federal program participants should raise the issue with Congress during the 2015 congressional visits. Both Ted Kowalski and Steve Wolff said this should not be done, as this is a larger issue than the Recovery Program. If the situation arises in which congressional action is needed, in coordination with the seven

basin states congressional delegations will be needed. The states participating in the Recovery Program will advise other non-federal participants if action is needed and the strategy for that action. Ted Kowalski said he believes it will be helpful to have Program participants to review the contingency plan.

6. Glen Canyon Dam Long-Term Experimental and Management Plan (LTEMP) EIS update – Rob Billerbeck gave an update on the [Glen Canyon Dam LTEMP EIS](#) (public draft anticipated early next year). The EIS is jointly led by Reclamation (operates the dam) and the Park Service (manages Grand Canyon National Park and Lake Mead National Recreation Area) and is being prepared by Argonne National Laboratory. The new EIS considers information gathered in the 18 years since the 1995 EIS and 1996 ROD, which specified a flow regime of Modified Low Fluctuating Flows. The EIS will consider actions that could change flows from Glen Canyon Dam and a set of non-flow actions. All alternatives will comply with 2007 Interim Guidelines for annual volumes. The EIS won't consider major infrastructure changes to the dam. All of the action alternatives include High Flow Experiments with maximum flows of 45,000 cfs, but variation of frequency, duration and constraints. Examined alternatives vary in their approaches to fish management. Some alternatives have mechanical removal, some have trout management flows (TMFs) and mechanical removal and one alternative (SASF) has neither. Rob outlined seven alternatives carried forward for analysis in the EIS:

- No-Action Alternative
- Balanced Resource Alternative
- Condition-Dependent Adaptive Strategy
- Resource Targeted Condition-Dependent Alternative
- Seasonally Adjusted Steady Flows
- Year-Round Steady Flows
- Hybrid Alternative

Rob described the hybrid alternative, saying they hope to gain consensus support for it, but it's still under development and analysis and has not yet been the subject of government-to-government consultation. Leslie James noted that CREDA received an update on the hybrid alternative, but doesn't support it at this point.

7. 2014 D.C. [trip report](#) and 2015 plans and topics(extending Program legislation, extending capital projects ceiling, drought planning Basin Fund contingency) – Tom Pitts described the 2014 trip, noting that members of Congress appreciate that the group supports what is in the President's budget and did not ask for more. They appreciate the briefing and stress the importance of the in-person briefings each year, as they receive thousands of email letter requests for support for appropriations. Congress understands that the goal of the Program is recovery of the species. Members and their staffs consistently ask about species status and progress toward recovery. In 2014, the Recovery Program group discussed with members the need to reauthorize the programs' authorizing legislation for hydropower revenues that expires in 2019. Congressional staff recommended beginning this effort and 2016, given the difficulty of getting legislation through Congress. The capital funding authorization also is approaching its ceiling. We have some remaining capital projects to construct, but also will need funds for repair and rehabilitation of existing facilities. Therefore, increasing the ceiling could well be part of the reauthorization request. The Upper Colorado and San Juan programs will be subject to scrutiny when we ask Congress for this. Program participants will need to talk about long-term accomplishments and remaining needs (Tom thinks we might need to restructure our *Program Highlights* document

beginning in 2015 to help with that). We need to be able to answer questions about where we are with regard to recovery. Henry added that collaboration isn't enough in Washington, D.C. Now, we also need to start showing success with species status, i.e., status with respect to downlisting and delisting. Another aspect of the programs they'll have to address at some point is what happens after recovery. Many things won't change: 1) our capital infrastructure will require indefinite support after we achieve recovery; 2) flows for the fish will still need to be provided; and 3) fish populations will still need to be monitored. Tom and Henry both said that Congress and the programs' participants need to understand the commitments that are needed after 2023 to maintain recovered populations. Brent asked if the Program should try to extend capital project authority beyond 2023. Tom Pitts didn't think so, but said he thinks the Program will need to have a discussion about what recovery looks like and what will be needed long-term.

8. Recovery plans update – Tom Czapla said the writing team is very close to getting the draft Colorado pikeminnow plan back to the Service for review, then once more through the recovery Team, and then it will go to the two recovery programs' partners (potentially by the end of October or mid-November). The Service has developed the terms and conditions for humpback chub recovery team participants, is seeking initial response from potential members, then will send official letters of appointment in the coming month. Tom Chart said we have considerable "raw" info about razorback sucker and the Service has been discussing a species status assessment. A project plan will be developed and then an RFP will go out to develop the assessment to determine where we are on this species and whether we might be approaching a downlisting. Tom Chart said the Service doesn't believe there's enough new information to warrant revision of the bonytail recovery plan at this point.
9. Capital projects update – Brent Uilenberg said ~\$15.8M of the capital projects authorization remains unexpended. We're assuming a weir wall will work to screen fish from entering the Tusher Diversion, but that isn't fully decided yet. Remaining capital funds would *not* be adequate to cover a number of suggested activities. For example, should Program participants decide the Program would pay for screening to prevent nonnative fish escapement, Ridgway and Elkhead nets would cost ~\$1 million plus replacement costs. Tom Chart said Utah also is considering screening Starvation Reservoir, and there may be others. Other activities would include filling levee breaches we made in gravel pits that have become a source of nonnative fish (~\$100K just for the three identified so far); modifying Stewart Lake control structure (~\$100K); and retrofits to improve the GVIC fish screen (~\$500K). If the concept of a fish barrier weir wall at Tusher isn't viable (awaiting results at Hogback), then a fixed-plate screen would be ~\$6M more. Finally, with ~\$200M of infrastructure, we'll have needs for ongoing maintenance above what O&M can cover. Ted Kowalski said if there's some way to cost share on screens, Colorado likely would consider exploring using Species Conservation Trust Funds. With regard to OMID, Brent said the check structures were installed last year, but they couldn't get the Phase II small reservoir under contract this fall and will solicit new bids by the end of December, award a construction contract, and begin construction next fall. They'll try to construct some of the other components this winter, but it will be spring 2017 before entire project would be completed and operational.
10. Update on discussions with States regarding oil and gas development in and near endangered fish habitat – The invitation letter idea was abandoned, and instead, States' representatives on the Management Committee spoke with State oil and gas divisions and invited them to a meeting

now scheduled for October 15 at the Hilton Garden Inn near DIA. The meeting purpose is to begin discussions among the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program Director's office, State Program representatives, and Upper Basin State oil and gas representatives about program / agency goals and operating procedures related to energy development in and near endangered fish critical habitat. The Program is interested in what environmental protections are in place for important floodplain habitats.

11. FY 2015 Work Plan update – Angela Kantola said FY 2015 is the second year of the two-year FY14-15 work plan. The budget is tight, but work will be added for the peak flow study plan and Green River flow and temperature evaluation as funds are available, as well as for a potential database manager (requires coordination with the San Juan Program). The Management Committee approved expenditure of Section 7 funds for an engineering feasibility study for Walton Creek channel modification, The Service and Reclamation are meeting on October 24 to discuss ways to improve the process used to transfer Program (Reclamation power revenue) funds to the Service (it has become quite bogged recently with the advent of new rules, etc.).
12. Southern Rockies LCC update (including the Green River landscape project) - Kevin Johnson, SRLCC Coordinator, said the SRLCC steering committee has heard desire to coordinate work going on in the Green River Basin, so have committed funds to a [Green River landscape design project](#) to gather existing data and begin to analyze it across the landscape. The idea is to answer where, when, why, and what do we do collaboratively on the landscape to meet partners' identified objectives. An example would be identifying hotspots for screening reservoirs to prevent nonnative escapement. Tom Chart said he thinks another complimentary activity is the Program's evaluation of our Green River flow recommendations; Kevin agreed. Henry asked about the timeline/process to get to the plan; Kevin said they're working on identifying oversight team members (by the end of October), and then will proceed at the direction of that team. Based on other landscape design efforts, Kevin anticipates this will be a two to three year commitment from the LCC for the initial phase. Target species/resources include native fish, streamflows (ecological & societal), mule deer, sage-steppe, and Colorado cutthroat trout. With regard to nonnative fish, Kevin said those are clearly important stressors on the landscape, and so the landscape design project will want to address that. Tom Chart said Kevin McAbee and Tildon Jones have submitted a proposal to the LCC's consideration to explore some of the more experimental nonnative fish management tools identified in the the Basinwide Strategy.
13. Wrap-up and schedule next Implementation Committee meeting call/webinar and meeting. The Committee scheduled their next call/webinar for March 5, 2015, from 1-4 p.m. and meeting on Thursday October 1, 2015, from 10:30-3:00 p.m. The DC briefing trip hasn't been scheduled yet. Congress typically breaks for a week and a half before Easter (April 5 this year), so the briefing might be after that or earlier in March.

ADJOURN 3:00 p.m.

Attachment 1 - Participants

IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Noreen Walsh, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Chair)
Ed Warner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Mark Sturm, National Park Service
Bart Miller, Environmental Groups (Western Resource Advocates)
Leslie James, Colorado River Energy Distributors Association
Philip Stuckert, Wyoming State Engineer's Office
Ted Kowalski, Colorado Water Conservation Board
Lynn Jeka, Western Area Power Administration
Tom Pitts, Upper Basin Water Users
Darin Bird, Utah Department of Natural Resources
Program Director Tom Chart, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (nonvoting)

OTHERS:

Steve Wolff, Wyoming State Engineers Office
Brent Uilenberg, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Melanie Fischer, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program
Tom Czapl, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program
Jana Mohrman, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Angela Kantola, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program
Bridget Fahey, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Lauren Ris, Colorado Department of Natural Resources
Rob Billerbeck, National Park Service
Melissa Trammell, National Park Service (via phone)
Dave Speas, U. S. Bureau of Reclamation (via phone)
Robert King, Utah Department of Natural Resources (via phone)
Henry Maddux, Utah Department of Natural Resources (via phone)
Michelle Garrison, Colorado Water Conservation Board (via phone)