



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

Final Summary Dated: September 19, 2016

CR/FY-14 UCRRIC
Mail Stop 65115

Memorandum

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

From: Deputy Director, Upper Colorado River Recovery Implementation Program

Subject: Final March 29, 2016, Recovery Implementation Committee Webinar Summary

Attached are the final action and assignment summary and the general summary from the March 29, 2016, Implementation Committee webinar.

Attachment

**FINAL
IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE WEBINAR SUMMARY
March 29, 2016**

ACTIONS:

1. Adjusted the schedule for the **September 19, 2016, meeting in Denver near DIA**. However, rather than just starting an hour later at 11:30 and breaking shortly for lunch, the Program Director's Office recommends that the meeting run from **12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.**
2. Approved the October 1, 2015 webinar summary with minor revisions.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Colorado will appoint a new Implementation Committee member to replace Ted Kowalski as soon as they can.
2. The Service will do its best to hire an Instream Flow Coordinator to overlap with Jana Mohrman in order to provide a smooth transition for water operations.
3. Tom Chart will discuss staffing (and any other potential approaches to resolving concerns about Colorado River consultations) with the ES project leaders in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming.
4. The Management Committee will begin to discuss extending the funding authorization legislation and any concerns Program participants may have.
5. Henry Maddux will provide a report on the D.C. trip to the Management Committee shortly.
6. The Program Director's office and Reclamation will begin work on the Report to Congress that needs to be produced in early 2017.
7. Tom Czapla will raise Leslie James' concerns about humpback chub in the Lower Basin at next week's SSA meeting.

PARTICIPANTS: See Attachment 1

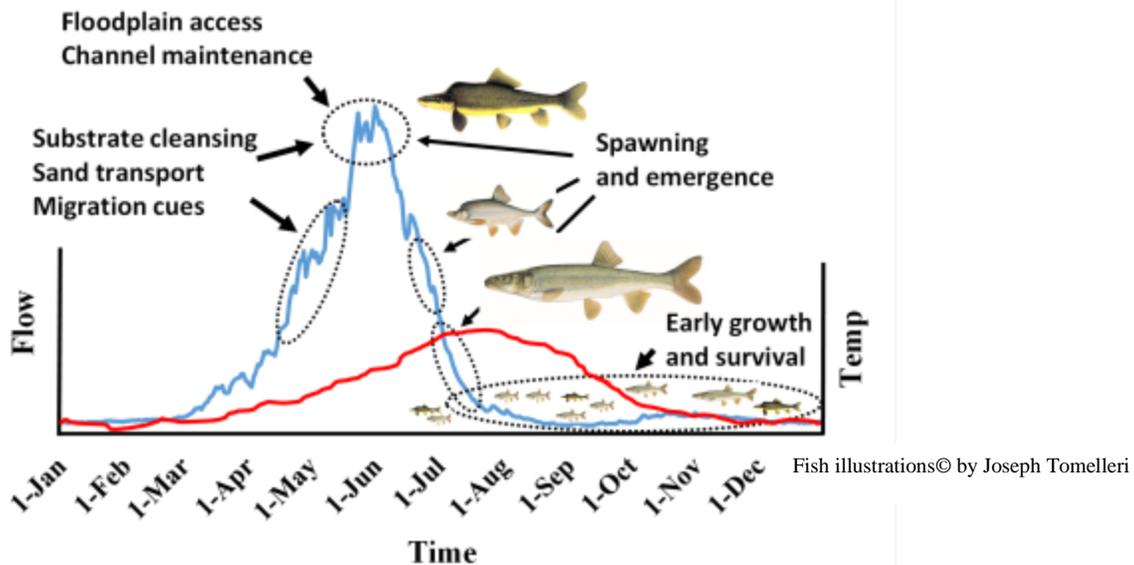
MEETING SUMMARY:

CONVENE: 1:00 p.m.

1. Introductions, modify/review agenda, Chair's updates – Noreen Walsh welcomed the group, noting she regretted the October meeting had to be changed to a webinar and that she looks forward to the in-person meeting on September 19. Leslie James asked for a later start time on September 19 and the Committee agreed; rather than just starting an hour later at 11:30 and breaking shortly for lunch, the Program Director's Office now recommends that the meeting run from 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Ted Kowalski announced he's leaving CWCB on April 8 to lead the Walton Family Foundation's Colorado River initiative. Michelle Garrison will stand in for Ted and >Colorado hopes to appoint a new Implementation Committee member soon.

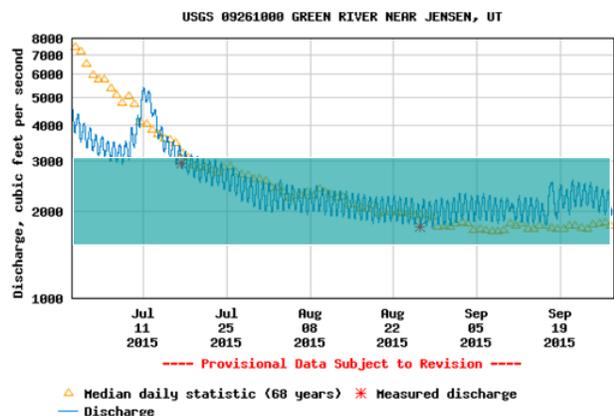
2. Approve draft revised October 1, 2015 webinar summary – The Committee approved the summary with the revisions submitted by Tom Pitts. Angela will finalize the summary and post it to the fws-coloriver listserv (*done*).
3. Program Director’s report on the Recovery Program and status of the fish – Angela Kantola expressed Tom Chart’s regrets that he could not attend the meeting due to jury duty. Angela presented Tom’s update on Program accomplishments, issues, and future direction. Highlights are described here.

This graph by Dr. Kevin Bestgen illustrates the natural flow paradigm underlying fish flow recommendations:

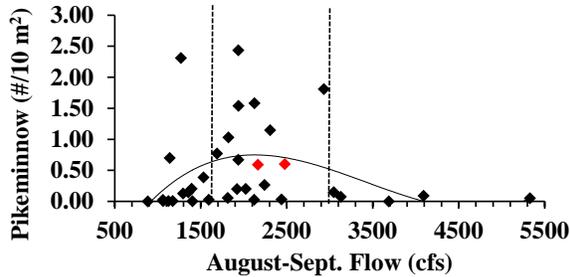


Flaming Gorge operations responsive to the Larval Trigger Study Plan have been very successful and we’ve seen good production of razorback sucker in Stewart Lake for the past three years. Through their Cooperative Recovery Initiative, the Service funded rehabilitation of the Johnson Bottom wetland on the Ouray Refuge so it can be operated similarly to Stewart Lake. Funding from this same source was just received to rehabilitate Ouray’s Sheppard Bottom floodplain (completion anticipated in 2017). New study results recommend considering a post-peak flow spike from Flaming Gorge to impair smallmouth bass recruitment and elevated summer baseflows to increase Colorado pikeminnow production. Bestgen et al’s work has shown (see below) that baseflows in the 1,700 – 3,000 cfs range have resulted in the greatest production of age-0 pikeminnow over time. Reclamation was able to provide flows in this range in 2015 and biologists recorded the third highest ever catch of age-0 pikeminnow in the middle Green River and the second highest catch ever in the lower Green River.

2015 Middle Green River Baseflows



**Age-0 pikeminnow density & flow
Middle Green River, 1979-2012**



The Program will develop study plans for spike and baseflow recommendations and Reclamation will consider what operational flexibility they may have to implement the recommendations via experimental operations under the current Flaming Gorge ROD.

In the Colorado River, coordinated reservoir releases have provided >1.5 million acre-feet of water for the endangered fishes since 1997. The Program is very pleased that CWCB renewed their lease of Ute Water from Ruedi Reservoir to release up to 12,000 af to further augment summer/autumn flow in the 15-Mile Reach. (Releases from Ruedi can be controversial with anglers and guides on the Fryingpan River. The Aspen Daily News carried a good article on this. Web version at <http://aspenjournalism.org/2016/03/27/a-sweet-spot-for-fish-water/>). Unfortunately, we continue to frequently fall short in meeting the average monthly minimum flow (810cfs) in the 15-Mile Reach in dry years. The Program Director's Office began the review required by the 15-Mile Reach Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO) last year and expects to have a draft for Biology and Water Acquisition committees to review in late spring or early summer. The review will include discussion of performance in meeting flow targets and endangered fish population response.

Service Director Dan Ashe received a letter from Rep. Scott Tipton requesting hasty completion of the White River Management Plan (WRMP) and PBO. The WRMP will recognize historical water development and some level of future water depletion that the Program can cover from an ESA perspective and it identify Program actions to offset the effects of those depletions. The first step in the process is hydrologic modeling to determine how fish flow needs and some level of future water development compare to the current range of flows. The modeling will be led by the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), but was deferred while CWCB developed Colorado's Water Plan (approved November 2015). Fortunately, CWCB's modeling for the Water Plan is expected to contribute significantly to developing a reasonable level of future water development to be covered by the White River PBO. CWCB's most recent schedule anticipates completing the WRMP in summer 2017 and then the Service can complete the PBO by summer 2018. Michelle Garrison said CWCB is working to move get the modeling contracted and has dedicated \$250K for that contract (and may need to contribute up to another \$250K to complete the WRMP).

2015 operation of the Grand Valley fish screens was improved, but a number of issues continue to prevent operation 100% of the season, so Reclamation and the Service will continue working with the irrigation companies to see if improvements can be made to the screens (particularly the Program's first screen at GVIC).

Endangered and other native fishes continue to use the Grand Valley fish passages. The Tusher Diversion rebuild is progressing on the Green River. Fish and boat passage are included as part of this (with the Recovery Program paying for the non-federal match portion of fish detecting PIT-tag antennas) The Program's last major planned capital project will be vertical weir wall to reduce fish entrainment in the Green River Canal at the Tusher Wash Diversion.

Program participants continue to work to control nonnative fish sources and remove nonnative fishes from >600 miles of river. UDWR completed Red Fleet Reservoir rotenone treatment to eliminate the illegally-introduced walleye that were escaping to designated critical habitat. Restocking the reservoir with compatible sportfishes has begun. The Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) Nonnative Fish Workgroup continues to develop and implement a comprehensive management strategy for nonnative fish in the western slope of Colorado. New unlimited catch regulations for smallmouth bass and northern pike have gone into effect at all reservoirs, and in all streams, in western Colorado, except McPhee Reservoir on the Dolores River where this is not deemed necessary. CPW is also pursuing an injurious wildlife designation for these species to allow for their disposal by anglers. A barrier net to prevent nonnative fish escapement will be installed at Elkhead Reservoir this fall. CPW hosted a smallmouth bass angler harvest tournament at Ridgway Reservoir in July 2015 that removed 2,036 smallmouth (~30% of the estimated population). CPW plans to continue the strategy of holding tournaments in 2016. Tournaments will be conducted at Ridgway and Elkhead reservoirs. Ted Kowalski asked if Utah or Wyoming can quantify how their must-kill policies for nonnative fish in the Colorado River basin have impacted populations. Steve Wolff and Henry Maddux said they don't believe they have data on that, but the point of must-kill is more one of *messaging* – sending a strong signal to anglers that the worst-of-the-worst nonnatives just aren't acceptable. Must-kill provides a consistent message that helps support actions like Utah's treating Red Fleet Reservoir and Wyoming's burbot tournaments, and from that perspective, they have found their must-kill regulations very effective. Henry and Steve said Utah and Wyoming very much appreciate what Colorado has done with bag limits, "catch and keep" and so forth and recognize different states may pursue different solutions to nonnative fish control. Noreen thanked all three states for their work to control nonnative fishes, which is clearly the biggest problem we still need to solve to recover the endangered fishes.

- a. Personnel updates: Status of the database manager position in the PD's office – Angela said she expects the Service will advertise this position within about the next month, so we look forward to having someone on board this year to manage the Upper Basin data in the Species Tagging, Research & Monitoring System (STReAMS) database (www.streamsystem.org).
- b. Pending Hydrologist vacancy in PD's office and importance of overlapping retiring employee (Jana Mohrman, 12/31/16) with new hire – Tom Pitts emphasized the importance of overlap in this position which manages complex "fish water" operations. Tom Chart will recommend achieving this overlap by moving quickly to hire an Instream Flow Coordinator who can assume Jana's role in water management and also help coordinate flow management and reviews of flow recommendations. Tom Pitts said because of the complexity of the operations across the basin, the large number of people that work on these projects, and the vast experience that Jana provides, he thinks it is of paramount importance to allow Jana to mentor a new hire and have some overlap with an Instream Flow Position. Noreen said that although it will be impossible to replace Jana's experience, >the Service will do its best to hire someone with some overlap with Jana to provide a smooth transition for water operations.
- c. Follow-up on Service ES staffing for Colorado River consultation and related work – Angela said that this has been discussed within the Service's Ecological Services

division, but funding other personnel priorities has taken precedence to date. Tom Pitts noted the Program has resulted in significant streamlining of consultations, otherwise many more positions would be needed and he hopes the Service will consider that. Noreen said the Service has experienced a 20% staff reduction over the past 5 years, but will consider this. If there are specific problems with a consultation, that should be raised to the Service to try and solve the issue. >Tom Chart will discuss staffing (and any other potential approaches to resolving concerns about Colorado River consultation) with the ES project leaders in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming.

4. Update on recovery plans, species status assessments, and Colorado pikeminnow PVA – Tom Czapla said he expects all the SSAs to be completed within the year, i.e. by March 2017. Colorado pikeminnow - A draft revised Colorado Pikeminnow Recovery Plan that was developed with advice from a Recovery Team was shared with recovery program stakeholders in December 2014. Webinars to discuss the draft Plan with the Management Committee and the San Juan Coordination Committee occurred in April and May 2015 and stakeholders submitted written comments, but stakeholders and the Service subsequently agreed that a Population Viability Analysis (PVA) should be completed prior to finalization of the Plan. A kickoff PVA meeting was held March 7-8 and the next meeting is scheduled for May 17-18. The PVA work is being led by Phil Miller, Rich Valdez, Bill Miller, and Kevin Bestgen. Tom Czapla said the pikeminnow process is more technical (a PVA then SSA then Recovery Plan) because we have more data, especially long-term, for this species. Tom presented the Green and Colorado river basin population estimates for this species. Humpback chub - a Recovery Team has been convened to advise the Service in revision of the species' recovery plan. The Science Advisory Subgroup began working on a species status assessment (SSA) at a February meeting and will continue that work at a meeting April 5-6. Rich Valdez and Shane Capron are leading the SSA effort. The SSA will evaluate both upper and lower basin populations; Tom discussed the population trends in upper basin populations and the management actions underway. Razorback sucker - Brandon Albrecht of BioWest has been contracted to develop a razorback sucker species status assessment. The Lower Basin, the San Juan Program, and the State of Utah are cost-sharing this effort with the Upper Basin. Brandon is preparing a survey for species experts to help populate the SSA (emailed to species experts on March 30th). Good things are happening for razorback sucker in the upper basin (high catch rates, larval entrainment, expanding range, and wild spawning) and the lower basin as well.

Noreen highlighted the new [“Path to Recovery” document](#) that describes how our Program and the stakeholders are moving the species closer to recovery. The non-Federal partners used this document extensively in Washington, D.C. and really appreciated the efforts by Melanie and the Program Director's staff.

We continue to have difficulty getting stocked bonytail established in the system. However, some young bonytail may have been found in Stewart Lake last year; (results of genetics analysis pending this summer). Tom Czapla said our understanding of bonytail has shifted somewhat to thinking they may be more of an alluvial species like razorback than a canyon-loving fish like humpback chub (even though the last wild bonytail specimens were captured in canyon habitats). We're now stocking bonytail in spring and summer to improve their condition and increase overwinter survival.

5. Focusing the Program on Recovery – Noreen Walsh said she believes it's important to ask if

we're doing what's needed to achieve recovery and if there are additional actions we need to take. Tom Pitts recalled we've discussed this at the last two Committee meetings and an ad-hoc group convened via conference call to discuss it in October. Tom said he's been reviewing the RIPRAP and thinks it has been used successfully for a long time to identify important activities we need to conduct. The RIPRAP has been our principal means of adjusting Program based on new information. This year, he is reviewing the RIPRAP from the perspective of 2023 and recommends we focus on what the recovery plans say we need to get to downlisting and delisting. Tom said he doesn't expect we can fully refocus the RIPRAP in the 2016 review, but we need to begin to identify what needs to be brought to conclusion by 2023, what management actions will need to continue in post-delisting conservation plans, etc. Bart asked if that would benefit from a team of folks like those on the October conference call; Tom Pitts thought we could reconvene that group.

6. Capital projects update – Brent Uilenberg referred to the capital projects budget spreadsheet. The biggest 2016 capital cost will be the OMID regulating reservoir for which Reclamation just awarded a contract with an expected completion of spring 2017. The OMID check structures have been in place for two seasons and are exceeding expectations of water savings. Reclamation also will spend ~\$300K on Tusher Wash weir wall design engineering and expects to award a contract in FY17 and complete the weir wall in FY18 for a total cost about \$4M. The Elkhead Reservoir fish escapement net will cost ~\$1.2M, of which CWCB is providing \$500K. Repairs will be made to the Wahweap flood control levee at a much lower cost than expected because UDWR secured ~\$1M of NRCS funding. The Program has ~\$38M remaining in its capital project cost ceiling, which should allow us to complete current projects as planned and some additional reservoir screening, but leave only ~\$9M unallocated for unexpected repairs to our many large projects. Tom Pitts asked about the projected nonnative fish screen costs at the Ridgway Reservoir spillway. Brent said there's some basis for the projected cost for Ridgway, but he has only very rough estimates for potential costs of screening Red Fleet, Starvation, and Catamount reservoirs. Tom commended Reclamation's Grand Junction office for all they've accomplished to construct the Upper Colorado and San Juan programs many capital projects.
7. March 2016 D.C. trip report and related topics including extending authorizing legislation for annual funding and for additional capital funds – Henry Maddux thanked all the trip participants. They had a great contingent this year and many times split into two or three groups to cover all the needed briefings. Henry thanked Melanie for the *Path to Recovery* document which was very well received. It shows we've made great progress and what we still need to do to accomplish recovery. Henry thanked Tom Pitts for compiling the non-Federal Program participants' budget request and Steve Wolff for preparing talking points for the pending legislative reauthorization. The group did briefings on the House side on day 1, the Senate on day 2, Federal agencies (USBR, FWS, DOI Budget) on day 3, and OMB, the Western Governors Association, and NFWF on Day 4. The Service directorate noted how well the Program brings together all the FWS branches – utilizing hatchery, refuge, fisheries, Tribal liaisons, and Ecological Services offices. Staff from the Senate Appropriations Committee said California is scouring for any sources of funding for drought, water, and fish issues. They said support letters were important, so a support letter from some members of our delegation was sent to the Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee. The contingent heard some of the usual comments and questions about how are we progressing toward recovery, wish they could clone our Program, and why are we successful (partnership; willingness to work together, resolve issues, and move forward). They also heard concerns about long-term costs, but the *Path to*

Recovery document helped illustrate how we've put those funds to good use. They discussed legislation and need to start on that in early 2017 once the new Congress is seated. First, the Management Committee will need to discuss and make sure all partners support extending the funding authorization through 2023 (>this will be on a future Management Committee agenda). We also will need to consider Tom Pitts' recommendation to outline our "map" through 2023 and Brent Uilenberg's recommendation to review the adequacy of our capital funding ceiling. Henry said they >will provide a trip report to the Management Committee shortly.

Tom Pitts said he attended the meeting with House Water, Power, and Oceans Subcommittee staff with Cathy Condon and Bill Miller. Kiel Weaver, Majority Staff Director, again asked "when will these Programs end?" and Tom Pitts responded "2023." Kiel asked how long annual funds need to be extended and Tom again responded to 2023. Kiel said those were the right answers and thought next year would be a good time to start the process. The current authorization for annual funding goes through 2019 and the plan is to request an extension of annual funding authorization through 2023 at the same levels, assuming everyone is on board. Kiel noted the current version of the authorizing legislation includes a requirement for the Secretary of the Interior to provide another report to Congress discussing the status of the fish and projected downlisting and delisting dates along with justification for continued use of the funds. This report is technically not due until 2018, but will be needed to introduce the legislation in 2017, so it >needs to be produced in early 2017. Tom Pitts said they discussed the proposed extension with the delegation and are confident they'll have strong support for it. That said, there will be considerable scrutiny of the Program and what we've accomplished; though it's roundly touted as a model, we have to show positive results toward our goals.

Leslie James apologized that it turned out she couldn't participate in the DC meetings. Leslie suggested the Management Committee draft a resolution on extending the authorization. Leslie will need to have conversations with the CREDA Board regarding extending the authorization for power revenues to 2023. Leslie said she's very encouraged by the progress of the recovery teams on the SSAs and PVA, but is simultaneously concerned about potential impacts to humpback chub from the Glen Canyon LTEMP EIS wherein they seem to be having very different discussions about humpback. (The draft EIS was released January 8 and the comment deadline has been extended to May 9.) Leslie said CREDA's Board finds it difficult to reconcile these two very different-sounding messages about humpback chub status and will be thinking about that as they consider request to extend power revs through 2023. Tom Czaplá noted the next humpback chub SSA workshop is next week and >he will raise this concern with that group. Leslie will attend the workshop if possible. Melissa Trammell asked more explanation of the "two different stories," and Leslie said she thinks some actions in the EIS preferred alternative may adversely impact humpback chub. Melissa responded that she's not sure these actions would be as adverse as Leslie imagines. Melissa recognized some actions are focused on trout, but the Park Service thinks they will be helpful for humpback chub overall. Melissa also will attend the humpback chub SSA meeting in Salt Lake City next week. Henry affirmed that we will have to work through issues that Program participants have related to extending the funding authorization.

8. Update on Upper Basin Drought Contingency Planning – Steve Wolff said Upper and Lower Basin entities are preparing drought contingency plans. Upper Basin discussions have involved the four Upper Basin states, DOI, USBR, NPS, FWS, power interests, and some NGOs. The primary goal has been to try to minimize the chance of Lake Powell dropping below minimum

power pool. Though the probability of this happening is low, it would carry a very high risk. The component of the plan most significant to the Recovery Program is reservoir drought operations that would move extra water from Navajo, Aspinall or Flaming Gorge down to Lake Powell, if needed. This would be done within existing RODs. The group is currently drafting an MOA along with an operations plan outlining a timeline and process the group would follow to make decisions if this was ever needed. Their goal is to finalize the MOA and plan by the end of 2016. Ted Kowalski said Upper Basin participants have met with key environmental stakeholders (FWS, NPS, Western Resource Advocates, etc.) in the past and likely will engage those groups again this summer. Steve said Wyoming continues to discuss the proposed plan with Flaming Gorge stakeholders. Steve added that a need to move water from Upper Basin reservoirs would be predicted 18-24 months in advance and would be discussed with stakeholders at that time.

9. Southern Rockies LCC update (including the Green River Landscape Design Project) – Angela said a Green River Basin Landscape Conservation Design (GRB LCD) workshop will be held April 27-28 at the Holiday Inn in Rock Springs, Wyoming. The workshop will begin at 1 p.m. on the 27th, and conclude at 5 p.m. on the 28th (with a field trip to Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge from 1:15-5 p.m. on the 28th). Objectives of the workshop are to:
 - Share background on context and approach for the GRB LCD
 - Develop shared understanding of project process, data availability, and analytical capabilities
 - Understand existing programs, initiatives, and priorities for conservation actions
 - Review available data sets: understand why they were chosen, what is under development, and data gaps
 - Interact with data developed in order to refine data products and identify opportunity areas
 - Determine next steps, including participation in working groups and meetings going forward
10. Wrap-up and schedule discuss agenda items for next Implementation Committee meeting – The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 19. Rather than starting at 11:30 and then breaking for lunch, the Program Director’s Office recommends that the meeting run from 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The meeting will be held in Denver near DIA. Agenda items will include sufficient progress, recovery plans, 2017 Congressional briefing trip and authorizing legislation, focus on recovery, and more.

Noreen Walsh encouraged the group to consider what we need to accomplish by the September meeting to keep moving toward the milestones we’ve talked about for 2017 and 2018.

ADJOURN: 3:45 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)
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
Mike Styler, Utah Department of Natural Resources
Leslie James, Colorado River Energy Distributors Association
Angela Kantola, Deputy Program Director, for Tom Chart, Program Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (nonvoting)

OTHERS:

Henry Maddux, Utah Department of Natural Resources
Steve Wolff, Wyoming State Engineers Office
Robert King, Utah Division of Water Resources
Brent Uilenberg, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Melissa Trammell, National Park Service
Michelle Garrison, Colorado Water Conservation Board
Lisa Reynolds, State of Colorado
Marjorie Nelson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Seth Willey, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Kevin McAbee, 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
Melanie Fischer, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program
Sandra Spivey, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program

