



# Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

Final Summary Dated: September 27, 2017

CR/FY-16 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 13, 2017, Recovery Implementation Committee Webinar Summary

Attached are the final action and assignment summary and the general summary from the March 13, 2017, Implementation Committee webinar.

Attachment

**DRAFT**  
**IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY**  
**MARCH 13, 2017**

**ACTIONS:**

1. Approved the September 19, 2016, meeting summary as final.
2. Delegated approval of the RIPRAP revisions and assessment and the FY 18-19 Program Guidance to the Management Committee.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

1. Melanie Fischer will post recent photos to the Flickr site and send the link to the Committee.

**PARTICIPANTS:** See Attachment 1

**MEETING SUMMARY:**

**CONVENE: 1:00 p.m.**

1. Introductions, modify/review agenda, Chair's updates – Noreen Walsh welcomed the group. Noreen mentioned that the Secretary of Interior has been confirmed (Ryan Zinke), but it will likely be awhile before agency directors are named. Noreen noted that the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program continues to be an example of the Endangered Species Act working well.
2. Approve draft September 19, 2016, meeting summary – No comments were submitted on the draft summary (provided to the Committee with the agenda for this meeting). The Committee approved the summary as written; Angela Kantola will finalize the summary and post it to the listserver (done). The Committee discussed a few updates from that meeting:
  - Tom Pitts asked about the NOI that the Service and BLM received from CBD on a western Colorado oil and gas PBO; Tom Chart said the Service responded in November indicating they saw merit to reopening consultation. BLM is currently working on the Biological Assessment.
  - Tom Pitts asked about the FERC application by Ute Tribe for storage above Flaming Gorge (“Ute Pumped Storage Project”). Henry said Utah hasn't heard anything further other than the Tribe is considering it; Sonja Jahrsdoerfer and Lynn Jeka hadn't heard anything further, either. Melissa Trammell pointed to the [June 2016 Notice of Preliminary Permit Application](#). Documents related to this proposed project, including the Tribe's preliminary permit application, comments of the Department of the Interior, and a six-month progress, can be found by searching [FERC's online library](#) for “Ute Pumped Storage Project”.
  - Report to Congress - Tom Chart thanked the Program's non-Federal partners, Reclamation, and the Service for work to get this transmitted to Congress in December 2016. Tom Pitts echoed these thanks to Reclamation and the Service. Angela Kantola will re-send the final transmittal letter and report to Henry for the D.C. trip (done).
3. Program Director's report on the Recovery Program and status of the fish – Tom Chart and

Program coordinators provided an overview of Program accomplishments, issues, and future direction by recovery element (including accomplishments related to addressing nonnative fish concerns). A pdf version of the presentation will be provided with the draft meeting summary.

- Tom Chart provided an introduction and overview.
- Melanie Fischer reviewed Program outreach activities. We're doing a great job reaching elementary age children. In Utah, Matt Breen with UDWR has provided programs to >1,200 fourth-graders in Vernal and Tildon Jones with USFWS have spoken to another 178. In Colorado, Kathleen Tadvick has worked with >400 students raising razorbacks in the classroom, and Mike Gross has provided educational presentations to >1,700 people at the Service's Ouray fish hatchery in Grand Junction. Colorado and Utah both had radio broadcasts related to nonnative fish last year. New interpretive signs have been placed at the Utah Field House in Vernal, at Stagecoach Reservoir, and the Colorado River Wildlife Management Area. The Information and Education Committee has been working on messaging with an emphasis on nonnative fish management and compatible sport fisheries in reservoirs. We have live exhibits of the endangered fish at the Denver Aquarium and they are updating their educational signs to address nonnative fish. New live fish exhibits are planned at the Children's Nature Center at the Mesa Mall in Grand Junction and at Colorado Mesa University. The new *Program Highlights* document is just back from the printer, along with the *Pathway to Recovery*, which will be used by non-Federal partners in the upcoming Washington, D.C. briefings. Finally, we have several new educational items, including temporary tattoos, lapel pins, stickers, trading cards, rulers, and raft/boat beverage holders. Lynn Jeka asked if others can use the live fish photos in this presentation for their own presentations, etc.; Melanie said most photos are in public domain (e.g., USFWS photos, etc.) and she will ask Charlie Card's permission for broad use of the pikeminnow photo on the trading cards. >Melanie will post recent photos to the Flickr site and send that link to the Committee.
- Don Anderson, the Program's new instream flow coordinator, described above-average snowpack in the Upper Basin this year and the positive implications this has for managing flows for the endangered fish. Other updates:
  - White River Management Plan - modeling is underway and the Wilson Water Group and others will be working with the Yampa/White Roundtable on modeling future development.
  - The "GREAT" committee is revising the Green River flow recommendations (Muth et al., 2000). The committee met most recently in February and developed experimental flow recommendations based on larval trigger, bass-disadvantaging spike flows, and elevated base flows.
  - The "GRUWAT" team is modeling current/future water development and protection of Green River flows for the endangered fish.
  - Tom Chart discussed the review of 15-Mile Reach PBO and recovery efforts, as called for in the PBO. The two "triggers" for the review are either reaching first 60,000 af threshold (CWCB says we're probably only at about 15,000 af) or the year 2015. A first draft was distributed in August and has been revised based on comments received. We're now awaiting CWCB depletion accounting report in the near future and then will provide a final draft for Program review.
  - Long-term flow protection needs and strategies - work is underway to consider at the big picture of flow protection in light of the Program's timeline through 2023. Jana had provided a status review outlining flow targets, current protections, and needed protection. Much current flow protection is in the form of PBOs and RODs, so the Program is reviewing what

more will be needed. Don will convene a sub group of the Water Acquisition Committee for a pilot study of long-term flow protection in the 15-Mile Reach.

- Tom Chart said this year's Flaming Gorge flow request letter will address spring and summer flows and look very similar to last year's, with larval-triggered spring flows and flexibility to experimentally release elevated base flows important to survival of young Colorado pikeminnow. The draft letter will go to the Biology and Water Acquisition committees this week. Much of the Flaming Gorge flow releases will really be driven by this year's snowpack, not by endangered fish releases. Leslie James agreed and said this is important for Reclamation and others to emphasize that to the public.
- Tom Chart reviewed floodplain management activities. Stewart Lake in Utah has been an ideal site. Dave Speas, Tildon Jones, and Matt Breen recently described in a white paper how Stewart Lake works and related that to other habitats available to the Program. We're working to create similar conditions at Johnson and Sheppard Bottoms on the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge. Tom reviewed fish screens and passages. Our final fish passage was completed last year at Tusher Wash in the Green River in Utah, and Reclamation is planning a fish screen in the irrigation canal there.
- Kevin McAbee outlined our current strategy for nonnative fish management. We focus on smallmouth bass, northern pike, and walleye because of their predatory impact on the endangered fish. In addition to removing fish from the river and screening reservoirs to prevent escapement, we're also working with anglers to provide reservoir sport fisheries that are compatible with endangered fish recovery. Kevin described potential landscape-scale nonnative fish management via manipulating flows in drier hydrologic years to disrupt smallmouth bass reproduction in the Green and Yampa river confluence area. This strategy would reduce bass year-classes that are produced in dry years which then grow and persist in subsequent years. A natural "experiment" along these lines occurred in 2015 with a rain event in the Yampa River and resulted in a very positive response, so we hope to emulate this in the future with releases from Flaming Gorge reservoir. Lynn Jeka asked about NEPA on these proposed releases; Kevin McAbee and Tom Chart said they've been discussing with the Provo Reclamation office to determine what could be done under the current ROD and/or if supplemental NEPA would be required. Noreen asked what those releases would look like; Kevin said we envision one spike flow per season in below-average hydrologic years, with perhaps two spike releases considered in an extremely dry year. Brent said Reclamation believes some level of additional NEPA would be required for this experimental approach, but the details haven't yet been determined. Leslie James said she'll also be interested in how this would interact with drought contingency planning. Kevin noted that smallmouth bass typically spawn between humpback chub and Colorado pikeminnow, so we believe a spike flow could be made without negatively impacting those species.
- Julie Stahl described our public database ([STReaMS](#)) that tracks PIT tags. The database has records of 995,000 fish and 1.4 million encounters associated with those fish (nearly 900,000 of those encounters are stocking events, but we also have 145,000 captures and nearly 400,000 stationary antenna detections). We now have over 20 stationary antennas detecting fish -- including many fish that were stocked but never otherwise recaptured. These antennas have increased our fish detections and are helping us better understand long-range fish movements over many years. Antenna data show that >500 razorbacks have moved from the Upper Basin into Lake Powell and 20 of these fish have been detected moving back into the Green River by the antenna at the Green River Canal and Tusher Diversion.

- Tom Czapla reviewed propagation activities, noting that in 2013 the Program began stocking fewer, larger razorback and more, larger bonytail. We continue to study humpback chub genetics and determine how/if we need to develop humpback broodstock. Recent bonytail results indicate they may use floodplains and alluvial reaches much like razorback sucker.
4. Update on recovery plans, species status assessments, and Colorado pikeminnow PVA – Tom Czapla described progress.
- Humpback chub - a Recovery Team was convened to advise the Service in revision of the species' recovery plan. Rich Valdez and the Science Advisory Subgroup began working on a Species Status Assessment (SSA) in 2016 (scheduled for completion in 2017). The last set of comments are being addressed and Rich Valdez will provide a new draft by the end of the week that will shortly be sent to the recovery team, recovery program and GCDAMP for review. In response to Lynn Jeka's question about the process, Tom Chart said the SSA looks at species needs, species current condition, and viability and Marj Nelson clarified the SSA is not a policy document, but would lead to a Service decision (via a "5-year review") as to whether they want to pursue downlisting. Tom Chart said the 5-yr review should tier directly off of the SSA and therefore should happen in fairly short order. The last 5-year reviews were done for all four species in 2012. Leslie James asked how recovery goals/plans fit in; Tom Chart said one outcome of an SSA can be revising recovery plan/goals. Noreen pointed out that the SSA deals with science and biology, then a 5-year review can be a fairly simple template or letter written to accompany the SSA to make a policy recommendation (e.g., for downlisting). Tom Chart said he would provide a short summary clarifying the process and schedule prior to the non-Federal Program partners visit to Washington, D.C., next week (and include the terms of reference from the humpback chub recovery planning process). (Done: Realizing the summary graphic he had in my mind was attached to the razorback sucker SSA scope of work, Tom sent that, instead.) Lynn asked if the humpback chub recovery plan implementation subgroup will have the opportunity to review the draft. Tom replied that although the SSA is science based and should focus on input from the Science Advisory Subgroup, the Implementation Subgroup has been, and will continue to be, informed and invited to all related discussions. Marj said SSAs take the place of the background and threats assessment typically part of a recovery plan. Henry anticipated that D.C. trip participants may be asked at what point the Service will make their decision on whether to pursue a change in status; Tom Chart said the intent is that the SSAs and PVAs will provide the necessary scientific foundation (with peer and partner review) so that the Service can quickly make a decision regarding potential change in status.
  - Razorback sucker – Brandon Albrecht of BioWest was contracted to develop an SSA (cost-shared with the Lower Basin, the San Juan Program, and the State of Utah) which is scheduled for completion in 2017.
  - Colorado pikeminnow - A draft revised Colorado Pikeminnow Recovery Plan 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 2015 and stakeholders submitted written comments. Stakeholders and the Service subsequently agreed that a Population Viability Analysis (PVA), which was in the draft as the basis for proposed quantifiable demographic criteria, should be completed prior to finalization of the Plan. The PVA is in process, being led by Phil Miller, Rich Valdez, Bill Miller, and Kevin Bestgen. Analysis of future species scenarios are underway with a webinar scheduled for April 6. A species status assessment

(SSA) is scheduled for completion in 2017.

5. Capital projects update - Brent Uilenberg outlined 2017 activities including the Grand Valley Power Plant rehabilitation (critical to legal protection for flows from OMID canal improvements); OMID canal improvements that will provide at least ~17,000 af of additional flow in the 15-Mile Reach (check structures are completed, the regulating reservoir will be completed this June, and the remaining features will be in place for the 2018 irrigation season); and Tusher Wash barrier weir with integrated screen to prevent fish entrainment in the canal (expected to be under construction in 2018). In design are devices to prevent nonnative fish escapement below Red Fleet, Ridgway, and Starvation reservoirs. Reclamation is assuming a budget of ~\$4.9M for FY17 and has identified a need for ~\$3.795M in FY18 and ~\$4M in FY19. Inflation indexing for capital funds was last done in 2011 and is now being updated through the end of 2016 (should be available in about a month). Brent said we have ~\$7.5 in unobligated capital funds before indexing.
6. Delegating review and approval of RIPRAP revisions and assessment and FY 18-19 Program Guidance to Management Committee – In keeping with past practice and to maintain the schedule for the Service’s sufficient progress determination, the Implementation Committee delegated review and approval of RIPRAP revisions/assessment and FY18-19 Program Guidance to the Management Committee (meeting March 27 in Salt Lake City).
7. March 2017 D.C. trip and related topics including extending authorizing legislation for annual funding and for additional capital fund – Henry Maddux reviewed the schedule and trip plans. Fourteen non-Federal partners from both Programs will be participating this year and this broad diversity of non-Federal stakeholders is always noted and appreciated. Henry thanked those who helped arrange briefings. Henry will send out a final itinerary this week (done). Henry made a request to meet with Secretary Zinke, but that meeting is unlikely (and assistant secretaries and agency directors aren’t appointed yet). Rob Billerbeck asked if there would be an opportunity to meet with Scott Cameron, Special Assistant, Office of the Secretary of Interior, Office of Water and Science, who has a nonnative fish background. Henry will make that request. Tom Pitts has been working on draft legislation and associated related briefing paper as well as Program funding needs for FY18. Tom Pitts said they’ll be asking for support of Program budget needs (the identified \$3.795M as needs for capital projects and the same figures as past years for the Service). The proposed legislation would be a simple amendment to extend authorization through 2023 and the water users would like to see that passed this year. Tom said they may ask Senator Gardner and others to sponsor the bill. Leslie James clarified that CREDA’s board has discussed the proposed amendment and they’ve supported this Program since its inception, but they would like to defer introduction of a bill until the new Administration has people in place in Interior and it’s clear the Administration supports the legislation. Tom Pitts and Henry Maddux agreed. Leslie James recommended we emphasize that the amendment is only a date change. Leslie noted her board is meeting again the week after the D.C. trip. Leslie James added that their D.C. lobbyist has retired and Leslie is working with their new DC representatives at the firm Brownstein, Hyatt, Farber, and Schreck on the Recovery Program and other matters.
8. Update on Upper Basin Drought Contingency Planning – Steve Wolff noted the upper basin plan was close to being finished last fall, but stakeholders are currently considering: 1) how upper basin and lower basin plans would impact lakes Powell and Mead when operated together; and 2) the connection between the lower basin plan and the new Minute with Mexico. All three remain in draft and will need to move forward together. Carlee Brown said there’s considerable momentum and she’s optimistic these documents will move forward.

9. Southern Rockies LCC update (including the Green River Landscape Design Project) – Tom Chart said the oversight team on the Design Project is meeting monthly and has scheduled a summer workshop. The focus of the LCD is streamflow, riparian health, and sage / steppe habitats; the key stressors are climate change and energy development.
10. Wrap-up and schedule discuss agenda items for next Implementation Committee meeting – The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 26 from 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in Denver near DIA (location TBD). Agenda items will include FY18-19 work plan, 2017 (abbreviated) sufficient progress, recovery plans, 2018 Congressional briefing trip report, and more. Reflecting on the upcoming DC trip; Noreen Walsh appreciated the Committee’s discussion about how to communicate the Service’s process on SSAs, etc. Noreen agrees we need to be able to accurately reflect where we are in the process.

**ADJOURN: 4:15 p.m.**

## Attachment 1 - Participants

### IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Noreen Walsh, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Chair)  
Ed Warner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Rob Billerbeck, National Park Service  
Bart Miller, Environmental Groups (Western Resource Advocates)  
Steve Wolff, Wyoming State Engineer's Office  
Carlee Brown, 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  
Tom Chart, Program Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (nonvoting)

### OTHERS:

Henry Maddux, Utah Department of Natural Resources  
Brian Sadler, Western Area Power Administration  
Michelle Garrison, Colorado Water Conservation Board  
Kathy Callister, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Brent Uilenberg, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Melissa Trammell, National Park Service (via phone)  
Harry Crockett, Colorado Division of Wildlife  
Lauren Ris, Colorado Water Conservation Board  
Sonja Jahrsdoerfer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Marj Nelson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Melanie Fischer, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program  
Julie Stahl, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program  
Don Anderson, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program  
Kevin McAbee, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program  
Tom Czapl, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program  
Angela Kantola, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program