



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

Final Summary Dated: April 5, 2018

CR/FY-17 UCRRIC
Mail Stop 65115

Memorandum

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

From: Acting Deputy Director, Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery
Program

Subject: Final September 26, 2017, Recovery Implementation Committee Meeting
Summary

Attached are the final action and assignment summary and the general summary from the September 26, 2017, Implementation Committee meeting.

Attachment

IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY
SEPTEMBER 26, 2017
Residence Inn Denver Airport, 16490 E. 40th Circle, Aurora, Colorado

ACTIONS:

1. Approved March 13, 2017, draft Implementation Committee webinar as final.
2. Ratified the FY18-19 Work Plan.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Non-Federal Program participants will continue email exchanges to reach resolution on language related to the funding legislation so it can be introduced.
2. The Program Director's Office will reserve a meeting room near DIA for the September, 27, 2018 meeting (12:30 - 4:30 p.m.).

PARTICIPANTS: See Attachment 1

MEETING SUMMARY:

CONVENE: 12:30 p.m.

1. Introductions, modify/review agenda, Chair's updates - Noreen Walsh welcomed the group and thanked them for their participation. She specifically thanked the partners for their recent efforts to reauthorize funding for the Recovery Program's and especially for their prospective view of the programs beyond 2023. Noreen noted the Service is preparing species status assessments (SSA) for three of the Program's four fish species. An SSA provides the scientific basis on which the Service can decide if can move forward with a rulemaking to change a species listing status. The Service is determined to complete the humpback chub SSA by the end of 2017, and Noreen has reached out to her new counterpart in the Service's Southwest Region to prepare the way for that.

Tom Chart noted Angela Kantola will be retiring at the end of December 2017. The Management Committee held a celebration for Angela in August. Brent Uilenberg and Henry Maddux also are retiring at the end of December and the Management Committee will be celebrating with them in Salt Lake City in December. Tom Chart presented a plaque of appreciation to Lynn Jeka (also retiring at the end of December 2017) for her years of service on the Implementation Committee.

2. Approve revised March 13, 2017 meeting summary - *Action Item:* No comments were received on the draft summary posted to the fws-coloriver listserver on March 30, 2017. The Implementation Committee approved the summary as final; Angela Kantola will post the final to the listserver (*done*). Tom Chart noted that Tom Pitts had asked about an item on the March agenda regarding the notice of intent which the Service and BLM had received from the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) related to a fluid minerals programmatic biological opinion (PBO). CBD suggested the consultation should be reinitiated based on shifts in energy development technology in western Colorado since the PBO was written. In response, BLM agreed that reinitiation was warranted; they sent a biological assessment the Service in June. The Service anticipates completing the biological opinion later this year.

3. Program Director's report on the Recovery Program, status of the fish, and 2017 abbreviated sufficient progress assessment – Tom Chart and Program Coordinators gave an overview of Program accomplishments, issues, and future direction by recovery element.
- Introduction & overview - Tom Chart reviewed Program basics, including history, current totals of ESA compliance for water projects, and overview of program elements.
 - Information & education - Melanie Fischer reviewed 2017 outreach activities, including:
 - Education (e.g., Kathleen Tadvick's [CPW] "Kiss a Sucker" program, educational programs in Utah, aquaculture facility being established at Palisade high school, and more).
 - Public awareness & support (e.g., San Juan press release, upper basin newspaper articles).
 - Public outreach (in Black Rocks over Labor Day weekend that provided a way for rafters and campers interact with USFWS sampling crews).
 - Program partner outreach efforts
 - CPW and Wyoming fishing tournaments to reduce nonnative invasive species
 - New signs in the field in Utah to inform anglers about endangered and nonnative species.
 - Outreach to water users (Aurora Water, Colorado River District, Grand Junction Water, etc.) with the "Your Water -- Your Fish -- Your Future" message to communicate the threat of nonnative species.
 - Public outreach events (more than a dozen this year, several of which were multi-day events).
 - Live fish exhibits (Denver Aquarium, Children's Nature Center in Grand Junction, etc.).
 - Publications (*Program Highlights*, nonnative fish brochure, *Swimming Upstream Field Reports*, and *Path to Recovery*).
 - Educational items (temporary tattoos, lapel pins & trading cards, paper stickers, rulers, new vinyl stickers, and neoprene boat beverage holders).
 - Instream flow identification & protection
 - 2017 water conditions varied across the basin, with unusually high runoff in the Upper Green, Duchesne, and San Rafael rivers, above-average runoff in the Gunnison and Dolores rivers, and below average runoff in the Yampa, White, and mainstem Colorado rivers.
 - 2017 accomplishments included: peak flows in the 15-Mile Reach of the Colorado River successfully boosted for the third year in a row with the voluntary CROS releases; lower-Gunnison-River peak flow targets met and exceeded; Colorado River base flow augmentation; improved water management and irrigation efficiencies (e.g., Orchard Mesa Irrigation District re-regulating reservoir [\$8.86M] for which overall improvements are expected to conserve up to 17,000 af/year; Maybell Irrigation District Diversion controls).
 - Upcoming challenges in the next year include: finalizing White River flow targets and a Basin Management Plan; addressing coverage for projected new water development on the Green River in Utah over the "foreseeable future"; and coordinating with Yampa River Basin interests on long-term flow protection strategies.
 - Instream flow protection that will require continued management beyond 2023 includes: long-term flow protection (numerous strategies, possibly involving

- additional instream flow rights, conservation agreements, new/renewed/extended/expanded water contracts or exchange agreements, and potentially other creative approaches).
- Habitat restoration - Tom Chart reviewed the completed fish passage and screens in the Grand Valley and the fish passage and screening (east side) on Tusher Diversion and pending weir wall / screening on the west side. Work on floodplain management continues as the Program applies what we've learned at the very successful Stewart Lake project at other floodplains like Johnson, Sheppard, and the Stirrup. Managed floodplains require water control gates on the inlet, screens to exclude large-bodied nonnative fish, the ability to drain the facilities at the end of the growing season, and supplemental water to maintain water quality through the summer. Post-2023 habitat costs will include: O&M of screens (~\$300K/year), screen replacement costs (significant), end-of-season canal salvage, fish ladder operation (~\$150K/year), and floodplain management (~\$250K/year).
 - Nonnative fish management - Kevin McAbee described the Program's basinwide efforts to manage three focal species: smallmouth bass, northern pike, and walleye via a two-tiered in-river and reservoir management strategy. In the rivers, we're conducting large-scale removal and working to disrupt spawning. For reservoirs, we are working to eradicate/contain sources and provide replacement fisheries for anglers.
 - 2017 accomplishments/status: River - intensive disruption of northern pike and smallmouth bass spawning; declining walleye catch rates in response to increased effort. Reservoir - screening in place at Highline Lake, Rifle Gap, Starvation (semi-permanent), and Elkhead reservoirs. Screening still needed at Red Fleet and Ridgway reservoirs and Lake Catamount and Stagecoach reservoirs.
 - Challenges upcoming in 2018 include: addressing presence and reproduction of fertile adult grass carp in the system (even though both Utah and Colorado prohibit stocking fertile grass carp); our need to implement a smallmouth bass spike flow plan to provide a landscape-scale disruption; containing and reducing smallmouth bass in Ridgway Reservoir; installing a permanent screen on Starvation Reservoir; and collaborating to reduce northern pike at Stagecoach Reservoir.
 - Managing predatory nonnative fish will be a long-term commitment. Post-2023, we will need some level of consistent in-river removal (hopefully lower than current levels), being flexible in response to environmental conditions; continued suppression of reservoir populations; and maintenance of screens and nets, as needed. Water operations likely will be a component of nonnative fish control. Continued outreach and rapid reaction to new nonnative fish introductions also will be important. Kevin suggested these actions will primarily be State wildlife agency duties post-recovery because they are responsible for sportfish management. Brent noted that Green River spike flows appear to hold some promise, but supplemental NEPA may be required.
 - Database management - Julie Stahl reviewed recent developments in STReaMS, our online database management tool. More than 1M individual fish and 1.6M encounters now are recorded in the database, with ~500K encounters from the stationary antennas (so far). 2017 goals were to enhance the database structure, develop upload tools, and review quality of current records. All of this has gone very well. 2018 goals are to develop query and analysis tools, finalize help menus, and enhance quality control tools. All of this should be on a routine management track by 2023, though there will be some ongoing maintenance costs.
 - Research and Monitoring - Tom Czapl reviewed recent work on Species Status Assessments (SSAs) for humpback chub, Colorado pikeminnow, and razorback sucker.

- The humpback chub SSA is in its 7th draft (went to peer reviewers and stakeholders). Peer review comments have been received and Dr. Valdez and the Program Director's office are addressing those comments in version 8 (this will be the final draft for the Service). Region 2 comments focused on characterization of the nonnative fish threat. The Program Office is responding to those comments with more information and descriptions.
 - The Program Director's office is developing the draft Colorado pikeminnow SSA. The viability chapter is based on a population viability analysis (PVA) being conducted by Dr. Phil Miller. Three subbasins and scenarios are reviewed. (Tom Pitts asked for follow-up on the scenario that would include the Animas River.)
 - The razorback sucker SSA contract was completed in November, additional comments were received in August, and the Program Director's office is reformatting it to better fit with the humpback chub SSA and Service SSA guidance.
 - Post-2023 monitoring may be less intensive, using catch-per-effort monitoring instead of mark-recapture population estimates.
 - Propagation - Tom Czapl described the reversal in bonytail and razorback sucker stocking, where we now stock more (~35K) bonytail /year (average length 250mm) and fewer (6,000-10,000 razorback sucker (average length 350 mm). If we can reach critical mass with bonytail, then post-2023, we should be able to significantly reduce stocking. We will always need to maintain broodstock, at least at the Service's Dexter, NM facility.
4. Capital projects update - Brent Uilenberg said total costs for the OMID irrigation efficiency project is \$16.5M (plus indexing for inflation). The re-regulating reservoir was completed this year and we'll see how it performs in 2018 before deciding what additional components of the project should be implemented for completion in 2019. Brent said we've achieved real diversion savings this irrigation season with our OMID and Grand Valley irrigation efficiency projects. Brent anticipates construction will begin on Green River Canal Company fish screen after irrigation season in autumn 2018. Remaining capital projects are: floodplain restoration (Stirrup), and reservoir screens for Starvation (by fall 2018), and then Red Fleet, and finally Ridgway Reservoir and Lake Catamount. Brent provided an update on Grand Valley Project Power Plant rehabilitation, for which the financing is nearly complete, designs are being reviewed, and construction may begin this winter. Tom Pitts commended Brent for his expertise and perseverance in completing some \$200M of capital projects to date.
5. Update on 2017 Washington, D.C. briefing trip and discussion of potential dates for 2018 trip - Henry said the [trip report](#) is available on the Program's website. The group was successful in meeting with most delegation and committee staff. A number of people they met with in Interior were acting at those positions at that point. Henry suggested the 2018 trip should be the week of March 19. Henry anticipates Tom Pitts and Steve Wolff will arrange the 2018 trip. Tom Chart said the Program Director's office will begin working on the briefing book soon and may have some suggested format changes.

6. Update on Reclamation and Service 2018 budgets - Ed Warner said Reclamation is under a continuing resolution until December 8 with only a 0.7% reduction. They had \$4.915M enacted for capital funds in FY17. Noreen Walsh described the Service's ongoing annual fund contribution from ESA recovery funding (~\$730K) and Fisheries (~\$600K), for a total of ~\$1.3M. Enacted ESA recovery funding in 2017 was \$84M; the President's 2018 budget has \$79M, and House proposals increase FY18 recovery funding to \$85.5. Noreen can't predict at this time what potential cuts to recovery funding would have on the Service's contribution to the Program.
7. Update on reauthorization of Program annual funding (included discussions of the post-2023) – The Committee heard an update on the status of legislation to extend use of power revenues beyond 2019. Henry Maddux said that during the briefing trip, they informed the delegation and committees they would be seeking a date change in the legislation. Program participants had contemplated changing that date to 2023 to synchronize with capital projects and cooperative agreements, and include language for a new report to congress due in 2022. Sen. Gardner's and Bishop's office were working on draft bill language. Since then, Program participants have been discussing the language modifications to address participant concerns.. Brent reminded the group of costs (including to hydropower) of *not* continuing to fund these programs (ESA compliance). Lain expressed similar concern in light of the current 2019 date; Colorado does not want to reopen biological opinions. Leslie and Tom Pitts noted that for post-2023, a new Program Blue Book will be required. The group discussed potential language changes to the briefing document and will follow up with further email exchanges on this point and see if resolution can be reached so the legislation can be introduced.
8. FY18-19 Work Plan (Chart, 15 min) (3:55 – 4:10)

Action Item: Draft work plan documents were posted to the listserv in June and subsequently revised by the technical committees. FY 18-19 scopes of work are on the Program's website at: <http://www.coloradriverrecovery.org/documents-publications/work-plan-documents/project-scopes-of-work.html>. On August 7, updated materials were sent to the Management Committee via the fws-coloriver listserv. The Management Committee approved the work plan (for your ratification) on August 15.

[Angela Kantola provided the following background information to the Implementation Committee prior to the meeting]: *Although the total cost of the FY 18 and 19 work plan exceeds available funds by ~\$1.5M, USFWS has carry-over funds which will cover those overruns. Outyears are a concern, however, and the PDO will be working on reining this in. The Biology Committee recommended a couple of contingency projects for FY18, should funds be available (lower Green River pikeminnow monitoring and Matheson wetland). The Management Committee recommended maintaining at least of \$50K/year for lease of Elkhead water. The Program could accomplish more with additional funds, but we take a hard look at all the activities to make sure that funds are being directed to the highest priority recovery actions.*

The Program spends considerable funds for facility O&M (GVIC, GVP, OMID, Redlands, Price-Stubbs, and eventually Tusher) and Brent Uilenberg has suggested and the Management Committee agreed to basing O&M budgets on combined annual facility costs, perhaps through a general umbrella scope for the Grand Valley, GVIC, and Redlands facilities (pending). This will provide more realistic budgeting for O&M costs and reduce carry-over in these contracts.

The Committee ratified the work plan as approved by the Management Committee

9. Regional Director's 2017 and 2018 Program priorities – Noreen Walsh said the Region has [stated priorities](#) for people, partnerships, and resource accomplishments. Recovery of the four Colorado River fishes is one of those priorities and will remain so as long as she is Regional Director. And the Region will continue to provide funding for the Program as long as recovery funding is made available to the Region.
10. Wrap-up and schedule discuss dates for next Implementation Committee webinar and meeting - The Committee will meet via webinar on April 5, 2018, from 1-4:30 p.m. and in-person September 27, 2018, from 12:30 - 4:30 p.m. near DIA (>the Program Director's office will reserve a meeting room).

ADJOURN: 4:30 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
Edalin Koziol (The Nature Conservancy) for Bart Miller, Environmental Groups (Western Resource Advocates)
Lauren Ris, Colorado Department of Natural Resources
Lynn Jeka and Steve Johnson (replacing Lynn as of January 1, 2018), Western Area Power Administration
Tom Pitts, Upper Basin Water Users
Henry Maddux for 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)

Not in attendance: Steve Wolff, Wyoming State Engineer's Office

OTHERS:

Lain Leoniak, Colorado Department of Law
Carlee Brown, Colorado Water Conservation Board
Harry Crockett, Colorado Division of Wildlife
Kathy Callister, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Brent Uilenberg, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Dave Speas, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (via phone)
Melissa Trammell, National Park Service
Melanie Fischer, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program
Julie Stahli, 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
Don Anderson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Angela Kantola, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Recovery Program