

BIOLOGY COMMITTEE CONFERENCE CALL

April 19, 2001

Biology Committee: Paul Dey, John Hawkins, Tom Chart, Ron Brunson (for Utah), Tom Nesler, John Hayse (for WAPA), Tim Modde and John Wullschleger (Absent: Bill Davis, Tom Pitts)

Other participants: Frank Pfeifer, Angela Kantola, Tom Czapla, Gerry Roehm, and Bob Muth

Assignments are indicated by > and at the end of the document

1. Schedule next meeting - The Committee canceled the meeting scheduled for May 1-2 and rescheduled it for May 30 - June 1. >Utah will arrange for a meeting room in Salt Lake. Agenda items will include: Redlands fish passage report; Hamilton's selenium reports; Yampa River nonnative fish control activities; and perhaps an update on the variance from Utah Fish Health Board.
2. Razorback sucker spawning to complete the 25 x 25 matrix - Tim Modde raised a question about using nearest-neighbor fish versus taking additional fish from the spawning bar this year. The group agreed that the goal is to complete the matrix this year. If we can't complete the matrix this year with wild Green River razorbacks from Ouray or Grand Junction, then we will use Colorado River nearest neighbors (eggs from Grand Junction spawning).
3. Yampa River northern pike control - The group discussed the options outlined in the March 27 northern pike workshop. Tom Nesler expressed concern that Rio Blanco Lake may not be large enough to handle all of the pike removed from the Yampa. To sell the idea of expanding the scope of nonnative fish removal (e.g., at Carpenter Ranch) in the Yampa basin may require approval of a variance to allow stocking pike and smallmouth bass in Elkhead Reservoir (as discussed at the workshop). CDOW's request for such a variance is somewhere in their pipeline; Nesler will track it down. Bob Muth asked if it might be enough if we only granted a variance to put smallmouth bass, but not pike, in Elkhead. Nesler thought that would go a long way toward appeasing bass fishermen, but he couldn't say that pike fishermen would be as agreeable.

John Hawkins recommended changes to their FY 2001 nonnative fish control SOW on the Yampa (by converting the second net boat to an electrofishing boat to electrofish both sides of the main river channel simultaneously, streamlining backwater sampling to focus on primary backwaters, and reprogramming money within his budget to purchase a new motor for the second boat). To expand beyond this (e.g., capture smallmouth bass) would require additional funds and planning. Hawkins' proposal not to extend sampling 10 miles upstream was accepted. Runoff is late and expected to be lower and shorter than normal; Hawkins will need that time just to sample the same reach he sampled last year.

Frank Pfeifer has proposed to run traps at Yampa SWA and Carpenter Ranch twice a week and pick up fish from Hawkins on the way to Rio Blanco. Pfeifer will be surveying these areas tomorrow to see what's workable. Nesler warned that portions of the Yampa SWA may not be accessible due to irrigation of adjacent hay meadows. However, Pfeifer proposes to work the traps from a boat, so access to remote sloughs on the SWA may not be a problem. Nesler suggested that Pfeifer not trap the most accessible slough at the SWA, as this is particularly popular with local anglers. Hawkins pointed out that these anglers differ from those who float through the Carpenter Ranch. Anglers who fish the SWA typically are after meat, while guided flyfishing floats are oriented more toward wealthier recreationists.

Regardless of where Pfeifer works on the SWA, Nesler thinks it would be advisable for the DWM (Haskins) to be there during these activities to defuse any potential conflicts with anglers. Public relations will be vital, and we'll just have to see how much of this we can make work this year.

Nesler mentioned the possibility that CDOW could use its funds to transport smallmouth bass to Elkhead, if a variance is granted. But who would collect smallmouth? Hawkins' first priority is the pikeminnow population estimate, and he shouldn't be burdened with processing smallmouth, too. Muth stated that we need to get going soon and given this constraint we can only handle expansion of Hawkins' work (to 2 boats) and Pfeifer's work at Carpenter Ranch/SWA.

Hawkins said we need to begin work above critical habitat this year to set up for more ambitious effort next year; a low-profile project to remove pike from Carpenter Ranch will serve to introduce the concept of removing nonnative fish from river reaches above critical habitat. Hawkins and Pfeifer need to coordinate their efforts. Pfeifer said he probably can adjust his work schedule to better accommodate Hawkins' work.

Muth said we shouldn't table the variance issue until next year; it needs to be addressed this year. Nesler would like to implement some translocation to Elkhead Reservoir this year if variance is granted; he is concerned that rejection of a variance may foster hostility toward translocating pike out-of-basin. According to Muth, the success of nonnative fish control bears heavily on the outcome of the Yampa PBO; many basin residents are interested in nonnative fish control as a means to allow water development to continue and are not averse to some form of control, including lethal control.

Modde thought we need to clarify the issues to be addressed. Nesler will lay out the issues as they become apparent. Nonnative control is a valid topic for the next Biology Committee meeting.

4. Schedule July meeting - (The Committee will get the draft 2002 work plan on June 18 and their comments are due to the MC by July 20). The meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m. on July 10 and end by 3:00 p.m. on July 11 in Denver (>Tom Nesler will arrange for room at CDOW).

ACTION ITEMS

Utah will arrange a meeting room for the May 30 - June 1 Biology Committee meeting in Salt Lake City.

Tom Nesler will arrange for a meeting room at CDOW for the July 10-11 Biology Committee meeting in Denver.