

**Water Acquisition Committee Summary
March 24, 2022: 9:00 am – 11:30 am**

ATTENDANCE:

WAC Members: Mark Wondzell, Tom Pitts, David Jones, Jared Hansen, Laura Belanger

Participants: Julie Stahli, Dave Speas, Kyle Whitaker, Melissa Trammell, Paul Badame, David Graf, Kevin McAbee, Tildon Jones

1. Greetings and Introductions – David welcomed all the WAC members and participants. David noted that Laura Belanger has replaced Bart Miller as the official WAC representative from Western Resource Advocates (WRA). Laura is a water policy advisor for WRA. Kara Scheel was just hired with CWCB and will be joining the WAC at our next meeting.
2. Looking Back 2021 WY Review – David reviewed the water conditions from 2021, noting that it was a dismal year with a total result of 29% of median inflow into Lake Powell. Average peaks around the basin ranged from 19% to 58% of average, illuminating poor conditions across the Green, Colorado, and San Juan basins. August – October flows were higher in the Gunnison and San Juan systems, but in the more northern basins, flows continued to be very low through the fall. David highlighted the effects of Program efforts on flow conditions in the 15-Mile Reach. Partners leased or donated 7550 AF of water for that river section. Despite great efforts, flows did fall below 810 for 124 days during the summer and the minimum flow was 233 cfs. Program water did prevent the river from completely drying out in late September. CROS was not implemented in 2021, but some bypass water was made available from both Denver Water and Northern during spring runoff. David highlighted the value of the different ‘colors of water’ showing the value of having a lot of different sources of water to support instream flows. Assistance was received from CWCB, CRD, CWT, Garfield County, Ute Water, Caerus Energy, the Town of Frisco, and the Town of Palisade. Peak program releases were approximately 175 cfs. 11,000 AF was carried over in the HUP for spring releases if needed. In the Yampa River, fishery pools from Elkhead Reservoir were released in conjunction with ‘pilot releases’ from CRWCD, which added water to the river with the objective being keeping the lower river administrative call off at Lily Park. Despite these releases, the 93 cfs dry year target was not met 45 days, but conditions without the fish flows would have dried the river. At Flaming Gorge, dry year peak targets were met in early June. The flow-spike to target smallmouth bass occurred for the first time, and baseflows during August – October were augmented by the first DROA releases. Kyle Whitaker noted that 6,000 AF of water was released from the HUP in Green Mountain in October, in addition to HUP water released in spring of 2020. David thanked Kyle for that info and will include it in future graphs depicting annual releases and their sources.
3. Looking Ahead WY2022 & Basin projections – David reviewed the current and projected conditions for WY 2022. Early 2022 showed slight improvements in the upper basin, with higher snowpack in the Gunnison basin. The upper Green and the southern part of the basin are still very drought impacted. David noted that snow water equivalent (SWE) does not

always directly relate to forecast flows (yield) in the same year. This is illustrated by the SWE for the upper Colorado region tracking just below median but the April to July streamflow forecasts averaging to about 75% of median. David stated that dramatic recovery of water conditions in the basin is not anticipated. Storage around the basin remains low with Lake Powell's elevation below 3,525 as one of the most extreme examples. David reviewed the sub-basin forecasts starting with the Gunnison, which is anticipated to be in 'average dry' condition, with peaks of 8,070 (10 days) and 8,700 (1 day). In the Colorado, Green Mountain expected to 'paper' fill, but not fill physically. Ruedi is expected to fill so the '4 in 5 year' water should be available in 2022. Wolford will likely not fill. An April Hole meeting will be held in coming weeks to determine whether some of the HUP surplus water should be used. CROS operations will be discussed in early May. Colorado Water Trust is continuing to support the flows in this reach. Kyle noted that a series of flows could affect the '4 of 5 years' in Ruedi, in that the use of Ruedi water, specifically 'abundant use' of contract pools for leasing flows to the 15 MR, could influence yield the following year. Because the 5,000 AF of '4 in 5 yr' water is the last to fill, over-using the available lease water in 'Year-0' might affect the availability of ANY of the '4 in 5' water 'Year-1'. David asked how Ruedi fills. Kyle said its typically less than 10k AF.

Flows in the Yampa are projected to be 87% of median April-July inflow; Elkhead is expected to fill so both the 5,000 AF firm pool and 2,000 AF lease pool will likely be available. David noted we may have opportunities to engage sources beyond Elkhead and suggested discussions on that topic. David said the 2,000 AF lease pool currently expires in 2025 and should be discussed for continuation. CWT is looking at options to lease water specifically to flow through Critical Habitat in the lower Yampa. CRWCD is looking to support flows as well. Conversations through the Integrated Water Management Plan are ongoing in relation to future flows, flow monitoring, and infrastructure needs. Melissa asked if the Maybell diversion rebuild would affect how flows are diverted in that area. Most of the down ditch improvements have occurred already, allowing them to operate efficiently. Part of the rebuild will allow for control of the flows remotely to help address their demand more precisely. Tildon has been involved in those plans and consideration for fish passage and entrainment has also been part of those discussions. The White River is predicted to be 81% between April and July. In the Duchesne, both the 44,400 and 2,900 AF of "Program water" will be available, so the Duchesne will be managed similarly to 2021. Jared said the same water from Starvation will be available, but less water will likely flow into the system. More snow is expected than in 2021. Both the 30- and 90-day outlooks for the basin look like hot and dry conditions will likely continue.

- a. FG ROD Implementation – Tildon reviewed the Flaming Gorge process. The Recovery Program has provided the flow request letter. The Flaming Gorge Technical Work Group has met and is working on their recommendations. The Upper Green is currently in the Moderately Dry category. The Yampa is also in the moderately dry category but is just below average condition. The current proposal includes a spring peak either LTSP or to match the Yampa depending on conditions, the flow spike for smallmouth bass, and baseflows for Colorado pikeminnow. Those decisions will be made in real time based on how conditions develop and monitoring of fish activity (spawning, larval presence).

- b. DROA Update – The framework will be complete by May 1st. Proposals are being developed for implementation after May 1st based on the April 24-Month Study. Some considerations are being made to determine how much the water in Flaming Gorge can help conditions in Lake Powell.
4. RIPRAP Review – Julie reviewed the purpose and development of the RIPRAP and then tied in the review process including each of the committee reviews. Laura asked when comments are due from the WAC and Julie ask that they be completed by April 1st. Green River - TNC will provide an update on Price River activities to enhance flows. Laura asked if there was an update on the timing the Flaming Gorge block lease and ongoing litigation, there was not a current update from Utah. Yampa – No comments. Melissa asked for the appendices to the 2004 Yampa Management plan (Roehm 2004). > **Julie or David** will send that out. White River – No comments. Colorado – Row 17 “Revisit instream flow filings or other flow protection” needs to be updated in the table. David is still waiting on an OMID project update. Gunnison – No comments. Dolores – No comments. General – Laura asked to change the wording on lines 3 and 17 to say “will likely” affect flows in habitats occupied by listed fish - because the DCP and the like are still in development. David noted that these management scenarios will affect those habitats but whether those affects are positive or negative are to be determined. RIPRAP text – Melissa wanted to hear the WAC members opinion of this document. Julie reviewed some of the comments from the BC, the text is a good running summary for those new to the Program, maintains an ongoing narrative of where the Program is going that doesn’t exist elsewhere.
5. White River Management Plan / PBO Update – A lot of progress has occurred over the past year in drafting a White River Management Plan. A few reservoir proposals in the basin and a climate change analysis increased the interest in a management plan. ERO was hired by CWCB in 2018 to write the White River Management Plan. A phased approach was developed including a phase 1, which did not include a reservoir, and phase 2 which could include changes in the fisheries, additional storage options, and/or additional depletions. The goal is to focus the document on phase 1 while allowing for phase 2. Staffing changes both in and outside of the PDO delayed the drafting of that plan. Tom Pitts provided a streamlined outline of that document. ERO is reworking the document into the new outline and then the document will return to David and a small team to simplify the document to enhance understanding and move some details into appendices. David is pushing to try to get that document out in May/June. David noted there is not currently an ability to add flow augmentation in the White as there is in other basins.
6. 15-Mile Reach PBO Update – David discussed why we review PBOs. He reviewed the importance of the 15 MR as habitat for Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. The PBO called for a review either once a depletion block occurred (50,000 AF) or in the year 2015. The CWCB provided a depletion accounting report in 2020 that indicated that were variable, dependent on water supply, and that over both Program periods analyzed (2006-2010; 2011-2015), depletions declined. A review document describing the conservation actions, status of the species, and water depletion calculations was drafted by the PDO. A response letter from the FWS Ecological Services office concludes that re-initiation is not required has been attached to that document. The FWS review is in the final steps of review with Regional Director Matt Hogan right now. David reiterated the importance of the CROS

efforts in supplementing peak flows. He reviewed a table that shows how effective the Program has been at meeting flow targets. Meeting targets in dry/average and dry years has been a challenge. Meeting flow recommendations in July-October in dry years has been especially challenging. Part of the PBO acknowledged that meeting them in 4 out of 5 years was a good target, but even that goal is frequently not met. The PBO update acknowledges all the work completed by the Program in all the elements that support fish populations and suggest that conditions are supported sufficiently that a reopening of the PBO was not necessary. ES office staff agreed and in their Draft Memo, have requested that the current flow targets should be evaluated for the 15-MR including looking at climate, changes in water supply, and some indication of the significance or implications of not meeting targets consistently. Julie said determining how this assessment should occur will likely fall to the WAC and we will be bringing that discussion to the WAC in coming months, noting the short time available before 2028.

7. 'Futures' Discussion – David introduced this topic by bringing up some of the RIPRAP comments from 2021 that ask how we assess our progress in meeting our flow targets, assess flow targets themselves, and assess fish habitat and flow conditions to determine how they affect those targets, particularly in basins without PBOs that set the periodicity of those reviews. Managing flows in the 15-MR without sufficient water to reach 810 for the entire summer produces some interesting trade off discussions that would be well supported by science that shows how different levels affect fish. Dave Speas asked if there are deadlines in the documents that can provide some guidance. Tom Pitts noted that our current flow recommendations (especially peak flows) are based on historical hydrology and noted a need to assess them within the context of current and future hydrology. Tom reiterated the importance of flow augmentation efforts from water users and the Bureau of Reclamation. He asked if we need to consider tradeoffs between peak flows and base flows depending on conditions in any given year. Melissa noted the trigger that created the assessment on the Green River was a report from Kevin Bestgen to enhance the base flows for Colorado pikeminnow). The report became more extensive over time but was not triggered by any internal deadline or recommendation of the ROD itself. During early discussions, conversations around reducing peak flows occurred. The group found them to be biologically sound and maintained those targets. Melissa noted reaching depletion targets does trigger an analysis and argued for more frequent depletion analyses to assess whether those targets are reached. Tildon noted the difference between systems with RODs and ones with PBOs and that every system has its own dynamics. David noted that the PDO typically looks at things as required only because of limited capacity within our office. He envisions renewed efforts on the Yampa in addition to the 15-MR requirements currently being discussed. Melissa noted that most of the work for Flaming Gorge was done by Argonne with support from biological experts throughout the basin. Tildon noted that Argonne had a lot of information to draw from based on ongoing Program projects. Tildon asked if we need additional data or more information specific to these questions. Tom suggested that we develop a subgroup to develop a SOW to find a contractor to write this report, with the first piece being to assess the current data available. David said he would bring this conversation back to the WAC and asked for volunteers if people had specific interest in this topic. Tildon said the 15-MR deserves attention but an assessment of the 18-MR below the Gunnison/Colorado confluence may be needed to fully evaluate how fish are using the 15-MR. David agreed and noted the

importance of the 3-MR below Redlands as well. Melissa noted the RIPRAP does also suggest an assessment of flows downstream of the Green and Colorado rivers that has never been done. David highlighted a river corridor initiative for the Grand Valley that may also add some tools to the toolbox.

ADJOURN: 11:30 am