

Management Committee (MC) Webinar Summary, June 15th, 9:30 am – 12:00 pm**CONVENED: 9:30:00 AM MT**

1. Introductions & requests to modify agenda - Tom Chart said that Steve Wolff has moved to the Southwestern Water Conservation District, and he is happy to chair the meetings until a new chair is named. Wyoming is waiting to fill a few positions before appointing a representative to the Committee. The agenda was modified as reads below. Tom Chart recommended we add determining the chairmanship at the next in-person meeting in August. *>Added to the August agenda.*
2. Hydrology Update –Don Anderson reviewed conditions in the basin & flow supplementation efforts. Conditions in the Colorado River basin are in extreme drought and are not anticipated to improve. Lake Powell Inflow projections have been extremely low, approaching the minimum conditions achieved in 2002. Projected Yampa River runoff conditions are about 35% of normal, also approaching minimums seen in 1977. Precipitation is expected to continue to be below normal through the summer. Temperatures are expected to be warmer than normal. Models are no longer suggesting a strong monsoon season. Yampa River targets for this year have been reduced to about 70 cfs, from the Dry Year target of 93 cfs. In the 15-Mile Reach (15-MR) things are even more challenging. The Program has about 22K AF of water to supplement the system, which is about 111 cfs for 100 days. The 15-MR target has been reduced from 810 cfs to 250 cfs. Don expects at least a few weeks where the only water in the river will be water released by the Program. *>Julie will include Don’s slides in the link provided for this meeting.*

Tom Pitts said flow recommendations are based on historical hydrology and habitat needs; it is possible that those historical conditions are no longer possible based on climate change. Tom Pitts recommended a reconsideration of flow recommendations based on the climate change scenarios available. Don agreed that we need to reevaluate what is possible on the landscape, but we also need to consider what the fish need in terms of flow. Bart said any reevaluation of the recommendations need to consider many components. Bart noted that flow recommendations have not been met in many places in recent years, but the biology piece remains critical in those discussions – ensuring that we are not just working with what we have but with what is needed. Don said the kick-off HUP meeting for the 15-MR will be in mid-late June; he anticipates releases will start in July which is a month earlier than normal. The Yampa River calls will likely start the last week of June, with flows likely beginning in late July. Don noted in the past, other organizations like CWCB and the Colorado Water Trust have come through with additional resources. XTO energy generously donated water last year. Don expects those conversations to continue this year and will continue to explore additional resources that may be available. Melissa highlighted the importance of the biological needs of the fish in any considered revisions to flow recommendations.

A question was raised about any volunteer fallowing that might be occurring this year. One experiment is occurring in Kremmling to fallow some acres, but the larger experimental effort has ended. Don highlighted the post-2023 efforts that highlighted the importance of identifying additional water sources for the Program. Jojo said CWCB has approved funding to purchase water from Ute Water depending on water availability. Jojo highlighted water temperature as an issue because during a substitution year, water typically released from Green Reservoir may be released from other reservoirs and temperatures are already exceeding state standards across the basin. Don said temperatures are important, especially because they promote growth of nonnative species that grow quickly in low flow, hot temperature conditions. High temperatures also increase disease susceptibility and other stressors; fish typically move to seek out better conditions. Tildon said the upper temperature threshold for Colorado pikeminnow is 30C.

- a. White River Planning continues to move forward with a number of partners, including Colorado, Utah, and the Ute Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation. Recovery actions have been identified that could be used to off-set depletions in the basin; flow mechanisms are not readily available at this time. Rio Blanco Water Conservancy District has obtained a conditional water right for their Wolf Creek Reservoir (65K AF) which may be able to provide some flow modification within the next 8 years. If that reservoir comes to fruition, it could directly off-set the depletion effects expected in the White River. The current proposal takes a phased approach to the management plan and subsequent Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO). Phase 1 would provide immediate ESA protection for current depletions and a portion of expected future depletions and will span the next 10 years. Phase 2 will be triggered by a number of things including: if ten years have elapsed, the entirety of Phase 1 depletions have been consulted on, or if Wolf Creek Reservoir becomes operational and available to provide flow-augmentation benefits for the listed fish, after which the mitigation actions could be determined in a separate Section 7 process. The Program Director's Office (PDO) is working with the White River Planning Team to refine descriptions of those phases. Once language has been agreed upon, it will be released to water users and other interested parties in the basin for comment. The State of the White River meeting will be held on June 15th at 6 pm. Jojo will be presenting at that meeting; she thanked all the parties who have contributed to the White River planning process, including CPW and Alden Vanderbrink at Rio Blanco Water Conservancy District who contributed to the management action workshops. Tom Pitts thanked everyone for their time in continuing these planning discussions.
- b. 15-MR PBO Report - The 15-MR PBO requires periodic reviews of the recovery actions, status of the fish, and depletions in the basin to determine if the PBO needs to be reopened. A draft of this report was released in late 2020 and received a number of really helpful comments from partners. Tom Chart sent a new draft with incorporated comments, requesting approval or additional comments by July 2nd. After MC approval has been obtained, the PDO will schedule a meeting with the affected Ecological Services offices and then seek concurrence with the Regional Director.

3. Flow spike update – Tildon Jones reviewed the process used to determine the timing of the Flow Spike. Kevin Bestgen predicted the end of bass hatching occurred in early June based on temperature and flow conditions. FWS Ecological Services office formally requested the flow spike to start on June 21 to avoid significant changes in flow on the weekend. Substantial monitoring efforts are planned to document flow, habitat (NPS looking at native and nonnative vegetation), biological (macroinvertebrates in tailrace, effects on bass and native species), and angling (creel survey) effects. Peak flows will be achieved by 4 pm on Monday and will last for 72 hours. WAPA and Reclamation are continuing to work on a ramp down schedule. Reclamation will lower the selective intake structure to reduce temperatures as well. Tildon expects the timing to line up nicely with the bass spawn to impact early hatches and eggs in the river. Tom Chart highlighted the importance of this event.
4. GREAT Report – Tom Chart reminded the committee that our Green River flow recommendations were approved by the Program in 2000 (Muth et. al.) and identified year-round flow needs for the fish that corresponded to five hydrological categories (dry through wet). The Green River Evaluation and Assessment Team (GREAT) Report updates those flow recommendations with new information, and recommends further experimentation of larval-triggered spring flows (LTSP), smallmouth bass flow-spikes in drier hydrologies, and revised baseflows to benefit young Colorado pikeminnow drifting out of the Yampa River. The report cleared Program technical committee(s) review in 2019 and was presented to the MC in December of 2019. WAPA and CREDA requested, and the Program agreed, to an assessment of the impacts of the GREAT experiments on hydropower resources prior to MC final approval of the GREAT report. The MC requested that WAPA’s impact analysis be completed in a timely manner so that the GREAT report could be approved prior to the Program’s 2021 Green River flow request. The hydropower impact analysis has not been completed; the Program developed the 2021 flow request (submitted to Bureau of Reclamation on February 26, 2021) with the GREAT report still in draft. As the Program developed the flow request through the winter 2020/2021, river forecasters were signaling another dry year (potentially the 4th dry year in a row), which we know benefits invasive smallmouth bass reproduction. The PDO decided it was biologically important to include the smallmouth bass flow-spike experiment as the primary component of the Program’s 2021 flow request if hydrology remained dry. The Program approved the request, but CREDA and WAPA abstained from that vote. WAPA cited concerns in the form of their preliminary cost estimate (primarily power replacements) of the flow spike experiment and the general poor financial condition of the Basin Fund as the reason for their abstention. CREDA agreed with WAPA’s position. WAPA followed up (via email to Chairman Wolff and Tom Chart dated April 28, 2021) with the message that their cost estimate of the flow spike experiment had nearly doubled and that the Program might want to consider “off ramps.” In their email, WAPA asked if the MC would like further discussion. Edalin Koziol, TNC, expressed interest in discussing two issues: 1) would the 2021 flow spike experiment be implemented, and 2) how would the Program process similar experimental cost estimates in future flow requests and what would be the timeline for doing so, recognizing that impacts could

change from year to year and earlier conversation could potentially allow for partners to figure out how to best address and balance concerns and needs in any given year? Tom Chart reported that Reclamation was planning to implement the flow spike and thanked everyone that was involved in planning it (NOTE: the flow spike occurred June 21-24, 2021). Tom reiterated the importance of a comprehensive hydropower analysis so all program partners can better understand those specific resource impacts and finalize the GREAT report. He reiterated that the Program will need to compare those resource impacts against the costs of not doing these experiments from the fish recovery perspective.

- a. Hydropower analysis update – Shane Capron said the analysis has taken longer than expected due to the complexity of developing the hydrologic traces and he does not expect preliminary results until at least October, and a final hydropower impact analysis until December. Argonne has been contracted and they are working on the analysis. Tom expressed concern that lacking that more comprehensive analysis, the Program will be in the same position when we develop our 2022 Green River flow request. Shane agreed and pointed out that if the drought continues a cost estimate for a flow spike experiment in 2022 (if requested by the Program) may carry a higher price tag. If that is the case, WAPA would likely not support such a request. From a biological perspective, Shane acknowledged the importance of these experiments, but we cannot ignore the financial impacts. Shane was asked if the impact analysis would explore experimental alternatives that might mitigate impacts. WAPA will not include an alternatives analysis in the first version of the report, but they may be included in future drafts. Shane said that experimentation with higher base flows can off-set some of the costs of other experiments. Bart Miller called attention to worsening hydrology and asked how the MC could best assess some of the other management options to best support future discussion. Argonne is working on the impacts of hydrological projections based on Reclamation data. Looking at possible management strategies will be an additional step after the modeling is complete. Bart clarified that the first stage is constrained to just the data and asked if there are opportunities to incorporate some of those conversations earlier in the process. Shane said the analysis of traces has to be completed first. WAPA is trying to look at this in the near and long term – Can we support the GREAT recommendations over the next 10-20 years and can we support experiments in 2022? Flaming Gorge storage is a huge resource, but there are many competing priorities for that storage. Bart supported starting those conversations as soon as possible and asked about availability of the information WAPA is using in their report. He expressed an interest in partners being able to see and understand the analysis. Melissa Trammell suggested that the Drought Contingency Planning conversations, might be a good venue to explore these reservoir storage issues. Melissa noted that the Program requested higher base flows this summer, but the dry hydrology precluded those releases. Therefore, the cost estimate of the flow spike experiment was exacerbated by the drought. Shane disagreed; saying that WAPA assumes that water for the flow-spike is coming from baseflows. Without the experiment, WAPA could move the water into other months. Jojo noted the MC will be put in a difficult position this upcoming year and asked if

there were other efforts we could address now to make those conversations easier in the winter. Tom noted that the Program is committed to evaluating the flow spike this year and will bring the best available information to future discussions as it becomes available. He noted that this conversation will always be difficult because flow-spikes are most important in the dry years, when conditions are challenging for all resources. Reclamation has always been charged with determining its management strategy to meet conditions as outlined in the flow recommendations. Tom noted that the Program does support baseflows to support better survival of young Colorado pikeminnow, which aligns with WAPAs perspective on the issue. Jojo asked if there is an equivalent cost to the Program for mechanical bass removal over the same scope. Kevin McAbee noted that in many places we are doing as much mechanical removal as is physically possible, whereas the flow-spike could affect populations on a river-wide scale, which in effect makes the flow-spike priceless. After we document the biological effects of the flow-spike that occurred this year, we will have additional information to assess.

5. FY22 Funding – Tom Pitts said in FY22, Reclamation has requested the \$21.4M budget for appropriations as part of a package of Colorado River Compliance Activities. Those funds historically came from the basin fund. Yesterday, Tom sent a request to the Management Committee members and the Coordination Committee members for non-federal parties to send supportive letters to the Senate Energy and Water Subcommittee. He noted the importance of the broad range of interests in these programs. Capital funding is also in Reclamation’s budget at \$5.7M for FY22. Any reductions in those funds would mean reductions in Program budgets. Support from the Senators from the four upper basin states is very important. A question was raised about the \$1.4M designated for the water quality/consumptive use studies. Lee Traynham noted Reclamation is required to continue those efforts and looks at water quality in and around Lake Powell. The Consumptive Use and Loss Reports are completed in accordance with the Colorado River Basin Project Act of 1968, and evaluate the use and loss of water throughout the upper Colorado River basin.
6. Post-2023 – Michelle Garrison highlighted the recent preliminary decision on a 15-year authorization and discussions on program efficiencies seeking streamlining of the programs. The efficiencies conversation will continue in the next meeting (June 16th). Recommendations are broad and have a diverse set of final decision makers. We are looking for consensus on language for the Report to Congress and then commit to looking into these discussions moving forward. She asked if MC members had any thoughts on the language that was presented. Michelle noted that the annual funding will be the next step, followed by capital.
7. Program overview ppt – Because of many staffing changes and committee member replacements, Julie drafted a presentation at Jojo’s request to help new partner representatives orient themselves to the Program and its structure. Julie quickly reviewed the presentation and requested input from the committee. The PowerPoint was attached to the meeting information as a file sharing link, and can be reviewed for additional input.

8. Program Director's Update

- a. Federal Register updates - The reclassification rule for humpback chub will go to Gary Frazer next, then the Director, then Interior. The proposed downlisting rule for razorback sucker is in the final stages before publication. Noreen is pushing hard to move both the humpback chub and razorback sucker rules.
- b. RIPRAP - The PDO has received comments from Colorado, Reclamation, TNC/ WRA. TNC and WRA provided some very detailed comments on long-standing pieces of the RIPRAP that have been lingering for some time. The PDO will incorporate the 2020 pieces and would like to schedule some time with the MC to review many of the activities that have been marked as complete for a long time, but may represent ongoing actions in the basin. The new eyes on the table have provided an opportunity to reexamine critical pieces of actions going forward. Bart reiterated the importance of this conversation, especially in light of the deteriorating hydrologic conditions. >Julie will add time on the Aug meeting. Jojo suggested a Water Acquisition Committee (WAC) meeting might be appropriate prior to MC review. >Julie will look to incorporate discussions at the BC and WAC level before August. >The PDO will get the response to comments out as soon as possible.
- c. Upper Colorado River Commission will have a semi-annual meeting next week. FWS will provide an update as usual. The San Juan program will have the lead on the update to that group this year.
- d. Personnel changes - Don's position has been posted, interviews have been conducted, HR currently is in conversations with the selectee. Tom's position will likely be announced later this month. Noreen's position is filled differently, appointed by the Director. Martha Williams has recently talked about the future of our agency, choosing Noreen as the Regional Directors' representative for the national level. We will update the Committees as we get more information. Matt Hogan, Noreen's Deputy, will be our point of contact in the interim. The PDO is unsure how quickly either of these positions will move, but they have both been identified as priorities.
- e. Friends of the Yampa float – Tom was able to participate in a float reviewing Yampa River management with a variety of stakeholders. Jennifer Holloway was a representative from the City of Craig and was just interviewed in an article on the [Aspen Daily Times](#). She is interested in using the river to keep the City robust as coal declines. The PDO will continue to take advantage of these network opportunities with others interested in river health across the west.

Reminder: next meeting in person in Denver on August 31 – September 1st.

ADJOURNED: 12:00 PM MT

Attachment 1: Meeting Attendees

Management Committee Members In Attendance:

Not yet appointed	State of Wyoming
Todd Adams	State of Utah
Michelle Garrison	State of Colorado
Jojo La	State of Colorado
Tom Pitts	Water Users
Edalin Koziol	The Nature Conservancy
Leslie James	Colorado River Energy Distributors Assoc.
Shane Capron	Western Area Power Administration
Melissa Trammell	National Park Service
Ryan Christianson	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Kathy Callister	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Marj Nelson	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Tom Chart (non-voting, Interim Chair)	Program Director, Upper Colorado Program

Upper Colorado Program Office Staff:

Kevin McAbee	Nonnative Fish Coordinator
Julie Stahli	Deputy Director
Don Anderson	Instream Flow Coordinator
Tildon Jones	Habitat Coordinator

Interested Parties:

Bart Miller	Western Resource Advocates
Dave Speas	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Derek Fryer	Western Area Power Administration
Chris Keleher	State of Utah
Colleen Cunningham	State of New Mexico
Greg Johnson	State of Colorado
Paul Badame	State of Utah
Rob Billerbeck	National Park Service
Christopher Breidenbach	Colorado Attorney's General Office
Matt Fry	USFWS, Ouray NFH Randlett Unit
Gene Seagle	National Park Service
Emily Halvorsen	Colorado Attorney's General Office
Harry Crockett	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Kevin Johnson	USFWS, Fisheries and Aquatic Cons.
Bart Leeflang	Colorado River Water Cons. District
Lee Traynham	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Melissa Mata	San Juan River Recovery Program