



# Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

Dated: September 22, 2021

## Management Committee Webinar Summary, September 1st, 8:30 am – 1:00 pm

### CONVENED: 8:30:00 AM MT

1. Introductions & requests to modify agenda – agenda was modified as reads below.
2. Flow Spike Update – Tildon Jones said hydrology for Flaming Gorge fell into the Dry to Moderately Dry classification this spring, for which the flow request letter indicated the smallmouth bass flow spike would be the Program's first priority. The second priority was summer base flows to support Colorado pikeminnow and third was a spring peak flow that matched the Yampa peak. The spring peak operations were consistent with Muth et al., meaning full powerplant for 1 day, resulting in 3 days greater than 8,300 cfs at Jensen. Experimental summer base flows were not initially implemented because of drought conditions, but operations were changed to meet baseflow conditions as a result of drought response operations. The Program appreciates Reclamation's willingness to work with the Program to help design flows to assist in endangered fish recovery.

Tildon reviewed the importance of the flow-spike in relation to control of smallmouth bass. A flow-spike may allow for system-wide effects on larval bass, potentially preventing widescale recruitment for a given year. Higher flows connect channels and increase water velocity, and cooler water helps disrupt spawning behavior. Flows were designed to start after larval bass production and on a Monday (the flow spike ran from June 21-24) to avoid recreational impacts. The flow and temperature changes from the flow-spike were documented at gages at both Greendale and Jensen, UT. Monitoring occurred both before, during, and after the flow-spike to document effects on both physical habitat and nest locations. Fish response, creel surveys, macroinvertebrate, and vegetation monitoring all occurred or will be conducted later this summer. Nests and fry were detected before the flow-spike and were confirmed to be displaced from the nests in some locations. The effects varied by site, with many becoming flow through locations, but some just increasing the size of the pool and reducing temperatures. Sampling will continue through the next few years to evaluate the long-term impacts of the flow-spike. Tom Pitts asked if smallmouth bass reproduction was still occurring in the tributaries and how that affects these operations. Tildon says spawning is expected in those tributaries, but the importance of the experiment is two-fold: first, as a proof of concept that could be replicated in other areas, and secondly being that a lot of the spawning expected occurs in the Green River itself, which will hopefully limit populations for the year. Kevin said that this action could have a large impact on the whole basin. Tom Pitts asked what the economic interests thought about the flow-spike, specifically fishing guides and landowners. Tildon reviewed the extensive outreach that occurred to inform those stakeholders. He noted UDWR has the creel survey data, but he

has heard anecdotally that guided trips increased catches and non-guided fishing was less successful. The flow-spike volumes were low enough not to affect landowners. The raft guides appreciated the increased flow during the spike. Edalin asked what the next steps will be with this effort. The PDO, Kevin Bestgen and partners will begin to incorporate all of the monitoring data together to determine what the comprehensive effects are. He noted that aging bass using otoliths to determine their hatching date is tedious and time-consuming.

a. Jojo asked about the Utah resolution asking for additional Flaming Gorge coordination.

Todd said it passed, and coordination is continuing. The partners are open to continuing conversations with Rep. Chew. Tildon noted we have had 5 meetings with the Flaming Gorge Working Group since March, which is many more than in previous years. Todd recommended continued coordination with Rep. Chew and his constituents.

3. Drought Response Update – Ed Warner reviewed a series of meetings currently ongoing to share information about Drought Response Operations. He noted we have been in a drought situation since about 2000. The States put together a Drought Response Operations Agreement and identified additional planning and agreements that were needed. In 2021, soil moisture was low followed by a lower snowpack, which has introduced the possibility of Lake Powell falling below the power pool level (3490'). Hydropower is important to the basin, providing both power and funding to a number of priorities in the basin. The elevation of 3525' has been identified as a buffer to keep water above that power pool and increase efficiency of the turbines. Releases from the upstream reservoirs have begun and will be planned to try to maintain that target in Lake Powell. In 24-month studies early in 2021, falling below 3525' was within the projection window as the least probable projection. In May 2021, that transitioned to the most likely scenario. Since that time, some monsoonal moisture has helped out, but has not eliminated the concerns. Reclamation looked at the Records of Decision and the contractual obligations that Reclamation has agreed to. They determined 125K of water could be released from Flaming Gorge, 20K out of Navajo and 36K out of Aspinall. The releases are occurring under the emergency provisions. Increased releases out of Flaming Gorge started in July. Aspinall started on August 1<sup>st</sup>. The Navajo releases will occur in November and December. Robert Henrie introduced himself as the Upper Basin Drought Contingency Plan Manager. He is charged with developing the Drought Operations Plan for longer term implementation. He noted many meetings that have occurred with participants of the MC call to discuss the operations that were implemented this year. Recurring meetings with State partners will continue on Friday mornings to continue to plan. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, they defined the plan and what the key components are, including both static and dynamic portions. The static conditions include terms and conditions and processes which will stay the same regardless of hydrologic conditions. Actions based on developing conditions would be housed in the dynamic portion. Milestone dates will be discussed with the states on the next call on Friday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>. Additional consultation is ongoing with FWS, NPS and WAPA. The month of September will be used

for focus teams within the upper division states and Reclamation, which will look to the other DOI agencies for input. The focus teams will work with FWS, NPS, and WAPA during their development. The plan will be distributed to the larger planning group by October 8<sup>th</sup>. A draft will be distributed on November 12<sup>th</sup> for wider review (FWS, NPS, and WAPA) for two weeks. A final draft is expected by the end of the calendar year. The beginning of 2022 will be used by the States to complete and agree to the plan internally. The first action under the plan could possibly occur after April 1<sup>st</sup>. A parallel process may be used to develop a release prior to the plan being finalized. The States would like a draft of the first response action by the end of the year as well, based on whether or not an action is needed. Reclamation expects these conversations to be ongoing and fluid over time. Edalin asked about public outreach about the plan, including to Native American Tribes, local governments, and interested stakeholders. Robert noted Tribal outreach has been considered and developed, and Reclamation is relying on the States to distribute information for public comment. Some public outreach may be needed before December, but that plan has not yet been developed. Kevin thanked Robert for all the outreach that Reclamation has done.

Kevin and Tildon have been in meetings with Reclamation about how flow releases can be timed to support endangered species recovery. Tildon is working to summarize the actions recommended in the GREAT report as well as Muth et al to be included in plan development. Melissa noted that Rob Billerbeck and Mark Wondzell have been coordinating with this group from NPS's perspective. Robert appreciated the weekly meetings and the commitment of time from partners. He noted that they have been beneficial in developing the long-term plan. Ed thanked the Program partners and opened the door to future conversations. He noted that changes are likely as this plan develops. Kevin thanked Ed and Robert for their time and reiterated the importance of flows out of Flaming Gorge to the Program.

4. Hydropower analysis update – Derek Fryer reviewed that WAPA requested to review the GREAT to evaluate the effects on hydropower before the MC approved the report. WAPA is using CRSS modeling to look at each experiment individually and in combination. WAPA received model runs using the entire hydrologic record (1906-present) and stress test hydrology (1988-present). WAPA is planning to analyze the full hydrologic record at this time. Argonne National Lab is performing the analysis. WAPA will then look at a subset of those experiments to obtain full details. Results are expected to WAPA in mid-late October with a report back to the group and finalization in December-January. Edalin noted it may be prudent to start discussions about a peer review process for that report. She noted that proprietary information may be included, and is seeking a process that would be respectful of that. Shane said that Argonne has their own peer review process, and WAPA does not intend to do any peer review after that. Shane said WAPA has been discussing the analysis with the Service (e.g. which years were selected for analysis, etc.). Edalin thanked Shane for the information. Shane said that Argonne's internal process mirrors that of USGS for peer

review. Melissa noted the importance of getting the information in this report prior to the decisions that may be made for flows next summer. Melissa noted there are facts involved in the analysis, but also assumptions that should be examined by partners. Shane noted a draft will be released prior to finalization where partners will be able to evaluate the assumptions. The Argonne peer review process will really cover whether the models were run appropriately, not assessing the assumptions. Shane said WAPA wanted the report before finalization of the GREAT, but did not see that delaying the Flow Request Letter for 2022. Kevin reviewed the culmination of all of these Flaming Gorge issues that are all happening at the same time and the importance of regular conversations on these topics. Leslie noted the complexity added by drought operations on top of regular flow requests. Kevin noted that TNC requested an MC meeting specific to Flaming Gorge operations that the Program has delayed because of the rapidly changing landscape. >Edalin encouraged meeting scheduling in late October or November to coincide with the distribution of the hydropower analysis (*done-scheduled for November 10<sup>th</sup>*). Jojo thanked Shane and Derek for the information, she noted that CWCB learned a lot from the 15-MR assessment. She recommended talking the stakeholders through that using the WAC and providing assumptions ahead of time to help people understand the analysis. Shane said WAPA will have conversations on how best to address that request. Shane noted the analysis is a long-term analysis, which may not tell us a lot of what would happen in any particular year. Higher base flows off-set a lot of the costs associated with costs from the flow-spike. Shane noted how each of these experiments are examined on a year-to-year basis is really complicated with no straight answer. For WAPA, the ability to have higher base flows are really important for power and fish – a win-win for the Program. Edalin noted that WAPA price adjustment meetings have been occurring with the public in regard to rate adjustment and whether those are impacting this conversation. Shane noted that process is on-going to support the basin fund. Leslie said August 31<sup>st</sup> was the last day for comment on the plan.

CREDA submitted comments to support the rate case, but acknowledged it is the best of some bad options. The rate case increased rates by about 14% and shifted risk to customers when energy is needed to be purchased outside of hydropower. Leslie thanked both WAPA and Reclamation for their efforts to reduce maintenance to mitigate the rate increase.

Leslie asked WAPA to review the monetary effects from the flow spike. Shane said a post hoc analysis of the experiments will be completed and reported back to the Program at that time, typically about 6-8 months after the end of the water year. To date, everything done in the Upper Basin has been reimbursable, passed on to customers in the rate. For Glen Canyon, the experiments have previously been calculated and subtracted from Treasury Repayments. WAPA is prioritizing those analyses and noted the importance of the assumptions used. Leslie said the extreme prices and volatility in the market are adding a lot of complexity. She said since the rate case was released in the Federal Register, the expectation of purchase

power has increased dramatically (~\$60M to over \$100M, increasing pressure on the basin fund).

5. MC Updates

- a. Utah Representation Changes—Todd Adams explained that Darrin Bird retired and was replaced by Nathan Schwebach. Todd will become the Deputy Director for UT Department of Natural Resources, expanding his portfolio. Chris Keleher will take over as the Utah Representative on the MC and will continue to coordinate with Todd.
- b. Welcome to Lee Traynham and Mike Robertson—Julie welcomed Lee and Mike. Lee will be joining the MC as USBR’s alternate. Mike Robertson will be representing Wyoming on the MC. Julie thanked Lee and Mike for their participation as roles shift in all the agencies.
- c. Nomination of a chair-- Julie opened the floor to nominations for a new chair to replace Steve Wolff. Jojo nominated Chris Keleher. Todd Adams 2nded. Chris is currently the Recovery Programs Director for Utah Division of Wildlife. He also participates on the June Sucker and Virgin River Recovery Programs. Julie asked if there were any objections to Chris assuming the chair. There were no objections. The MC welcomed Chris and thanked him for his willingness to serve.

6. RIPRAP discussion – The PDO incorporated comments from partners after the last BC meeting. The general feedback was that providing comments via email is more difficult than the traditional approach of gathering to discuss RIPRAP. Julie committed to a more collaborative approach in the future, even through Teams if necessary. Julie reviewed the responses to comments. Julie then asked Edalin to review her comments on the RIPRAP. Edalin explained that TNC and WRA have experienced significant personnel changes, which required a learning curve from the new staff. The larger questions after some explanation related to activities being marked “completed” when they might be ‘periodic’ or ‘ongoing’ to capture things that might be revisited in the future. There were also questions about nonnative fish management such as considering barriers for all new reservoirs. The PDO is planning to bring these questions to the BC. One item that will come up at the WAC is the ability to meet flow recommendations for dry year targets. Bart will bring this to the WAC to consider opportunities to augment flows. Julie thanked Edalin and Bart for being flexible in bringing some of these to the technical committees for consideration as we move ahead with approving this round of the RIPRAP and the subsequent sufficient progress memo. Julie thanked Mike Gross for his hard work making the RIPRAP 508 compliant for posting on the website. Dave Speas asked about how his comments for the Dolores River were addressed. Julie said she worked with Harry to revise that section. Dave was OK with the changes shown. Julie thanked the committees and partners for their input in improving these documents.

7. Work plan review and approval – Julie explained the process the BC went through to reduce the workplan budget to \$500k over budget rather than over \$1M over budget. The remaining overage can be covered with existing FWS carryover generated by savings from staff vacancies. Julie described how the revised work plan table is structured to allow for separate budget amounts for each agency receiving funds. This allows for more quickly summarizing budget totals by agency, source, etc. There are no amounts indicated past 2023 due to the ongoing development of a Post-2023 Program. Dark green "program guidance" amounts show projects allowed to inflate based on contractual agreements. There are notes explaining changes that have been made through the process of reducing budgets. Green and red for SOW amounts show projects under or over budget, respectively. Blue were amounts where specific changes were recommended. >A request was made to provide a key; Julie will add that to the table. Julie acknowledged Don Anderson's hard work to get some of the gage funding shifted to partners who work with specific gages in their basins. Julie also recognized the work Ryan Christianson did in getting a SOW from the Green River Canal Co. for the Tusher Diversion passage and fish screen. Julie also recognized Kevin's hard work to revise many nonnative fish SOWs. Edalin noticed there were no funds in FY22-23 for ISF coordination on the White and Price rivers. Edalin asked if that meant there would be no effort in those areas or whether they were covered under something else. Julie said she still needs to update some SOWs that may describe some of that work by other partners. Some of the work will be covered by the Program's hydrology support. Jojo said CWCBC would be taking on some of the flow coordination on the White River with the development of the management plan in that basin. Jojo commented on the USGS gages. Jojo reviewed some congressional actions that might impact USGS "priority stream gages" and noted that as new bills move through Congress, there may be some other funding options for those types of gages. Dave asked if the funds identified in the bill were capital or annual funds for those gages. Jojo was not sure. Leslie asked about capital funds in the bipartisan infrastructure bill. Ryan Christianson has been working to identify projects for those funds, but the details for how those might be distributed were not clear. Kevin McAbee presented SOW changes for humpback chub work in Desolation Canyon and Cataract Canyon. The changes allow monitoring of populations in Desolation and Cataract while also bringing in fish from Desolation for broodstock development while that population is still stable. There is a possibility that these fish could go to repatriate the population in Dinosaur National Monument. Even if fish are not reintroduced, there is a need for a refuge population for the Desolation fish to conserve the unique genetic makeup found there. Julie asked if there was a motion to approve the FY22-23 workplan. Chris motioned to approve. Melissa seconded. There were no objections. >The work plan was approved by the Management Committee. Julie thanked the MC and the BC reps, as well as partners and PIs, for all of their input and work to develop this work plan.

8. Post-2023 – Michelle Garrison reviewed the progress made by the post-2023 group, coming to consensus on several items, including a 15-year reauthorization, a shared \$100M capital ceiling for both programs and that matching capital funds from partners would be sought on a project-by-project basis. The \$100M is expected to cover both programs’ top priorities while allowing Reclamation some additional flexibility. The group will continue to explore a repair and replacement fund for our capital facilities. Repair and replacement of many of our facilities have been identified as priorities. The Funding Group will now move on to discussing annual funding. A summary has been developed for our agreements to date by Tom. Program efficiencies have been recommended at both the program level and the field level. Both PDOs have convened some work groups within the BCs to address those proposals.
  - a. Report to Congress – The report was originally due this fall, but recent legislation proposes to move that deadline to next year. Julie will be working on the Report to Congress, picking up where Don Anderson left off. She is incorporating comments received more recently. Michelle noted that will come back to the MC and CC for discussion.
  - b. Recent legislation - recent legislation has been proposed to adjust schedules and add clarification. For the most part, those extensions are for one year. The legislation has been introduced by Joe Neguse, but cosponsors are still being sought. Edalin asked if indexing was included in the extensions. Ryan said the amount remaining under the capital cost ceiling is adjusted for inflation annually. Tom said the indexing was a long-term issue, and the legislation is trying to deal with short-term concerns. Concern was expressed about making the legislation more complicated. Others were less concerned about how this was viewed but expressed larger concerns about how to get the bill moving.
9. Capital project updates
  - a. Recovery Program Cost Ceiling Issues - Tom and Ryan are suggesting changing the allowed ceiling amounts to move \$5M from the San Juan Program ceiling to the Upper Colorado. Ryan clarified that inflation was last calculated in 2017. The \$5M move will allow us to build projects in FY21-24. The plan still allows the San Juan to construct a \$7M project and maintain a \$5M buffer. No funding is moving between the two Programs, only the allowed ceiling amount.
  - b. Ryan said the GVIC screen was the first screen built by the program and noted it has not been performing as efficiently as the other screens in the Program. The biggest problem is the geometry of the system and water availability at that location. Water to run fish back through the fish return is a challenge at certain times. Options are being explored to help resolve the issues, including a bypass option, a traveling screen, or a v-screen with the dam raise. GVIC would benefit from the dam raise. Ryan noted a traveling screen would prevent debris from clogging the screen. Other options have been considered, but

are substantially more expensive. Reclamation is continuing conversations with GVIC to develop an acceptable list of options that will be brought back to the Program in the future.

- c. Construction is imminent for the Ridgway Screen. The Red Fleet Reservoir improvements have been completed.
- d. Paul Badame reviewed the value engineering exercise for Starvation that resulted in a picket weir as the final solution. Utah will likely ask that the Program fund the concrete pad that the picket weir would sit on. Utah would cover design and fabrication of the weir itself. Ryan is working on a cost estimate for the Program. Catamount preconstruction activities are expected in 2023, with construction expected in 2024.
- e. Dave Speas and Ryan met with Tildon at the Stirrup. Construction is ongoing and an additional 6 weeks are expected. Ryan showed photos of the construction efforts. Tildon noted the drought year supported construction by drying the wetland.
- f. Negotiations have been completed on the LPPP for the Grand Valley Power Plant. The water right will remain in effect and allows for water delivery to the 15-MR. Jojo asked if the \$1.5M in funds were already moved to OMID. Ryan indicated the grant is complete.
- g. Ryan has set aside some funds to address concerns related to cleaning the fish passage at the Tusher Diversion. Ryan and the GRCC have mechanisms in place to fund that O&M work. A few modifications are needed for that system. An excavator has been used to clean the passage, which is causing safety concerns. Ryan is in discussions around a track-mounted excavator designed for cleaning without the possibility of a large machine falling into the river. Debris is also piling up on the fish screen, which will likely need a track mounted excavator for the trash rack along with a pressure washer to address. Ryan is not asking for approval yet, but wanted to make the MC aware of the ongoing discussions. Tom thanked Ryan for his excellent work managing the capital project element of this program.

#### 10. Program Director's Update

- a. Federal Register – Kevin reminded the MC that the razorback sucker proposed downlisting rule was published in the Federal Register. The comment period for that rule closes in 6 days on September 7<sup>th</sup>. Some environmental nonprofits did oppose the proposed rule in comments submitted to date, but it is unknown what level of opposition or support the final rule will receive. The PDO is cautiously optimistic that the final downlisting rule for humpback chub will publish in the Federal Register soon.
- b. Staffing Updates - Two new staff members will join the PDO in late September. David Graf will join us as the new instream flow coordinator. David has been the Regional Water Specialist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife for over 20 years. He has been involved in the Colorado Water Plan and has managed CPW's water portfolio in that Region. Chris Michaud will be joining the office as the Database Manager. Chris has been one of the shining stars in the Program for pulling long-term datasets from STReaMS. Kevin

noted FWS is actively working on the process to replace Tom Chart. A question was raised about Noreen's replacement. Marj Nelson noted that job has been posted, but FWS staff had no additional information. Matt Hogan is the Acting Regional Director and will attend our IC meeting and act as chair.

- c. 15-MR PBO - Tom Chart is continuing to work on incorporating comments and finalizing the 15-MR PBO. Once complete, he will bring it back to our office, when we will present it to the ES office staff in Grand Junction. The document will then go up to our Regional Director for signature and approval.
- d. Tom Chart Send-Off – We have scheduled a virtual happy hour for Tom on Friday that we hope all will attend.

11. Meeting scheduling –

- a. Three meetings have been scheduled: An MC meeting including the hydropower analysis on November 10<sup>th</sup>, a hold on calendars to support a post-2023 discussion on Nov 16<sup>th</sup> if needed, and an MC meeting on December 16<sup>th</sup>.
- b. Last meeting summary. Edalin requested more time to review that summary, it will be moved for approval at the November meeting.

**ADJOURNED: 12:31 PM MT**

## Attachment 1: Meeting Attendees

### Management Committee Members In Attendance:

Mike Robertson	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	Bureau of USBR
Marj Nelson	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Kevin McAbee (non-voting, Interim Chair)	Acting Program Director

### Upper Colorado Program Office Staff:

Julie Stahl	Deputy Director
Tildon Jones	Habitat Coordinator
Melanie Fischer	I&E Coordinator

### Interested Parties:

Dave Speas	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
Gene Seagle	National Park Service
Lee Traynham	Bureau of Reclamation
Melissa Mata	San Juan River Recovery Program
Katie Duncan	Colorado Attorney's General Office
Erik Knight	Bureau of Reclamation
Ed Warner	Bureau of Reclamation
Robert Henrie	Bureau of Reclamation