

**DRAFT - Water Acquisition Committee Webinar Summary**

August 22, 2022: 9:00 am – noon

**ATTENDANCE:****Committee Members:** Tom Pitts, Kara Scheel, Laura Belanger, David Jones, Lee Traynham for Erik Knight, David Graf**Interested Parties:** Paul Badame, Brian Macpherson, Michelle Garrison, Russ Franklin, Kyle Whitaker, Julie Stahl, Koreen Zelasko, Valerie Deppe

- 1) Julie asked for introductions of the committee members and interested parties.
- 2) Review / Modify Agenda: There were no modifications to the agenda.
- 3) Assess ability to maintain flow targets in all systems in all hydrologic categories
  - a) Flow Target Assessments – data review – David presented an analysis of how well we have met the targets in each of the following river basins: Colorado River 15-Mile Reach, Yampa River, Duchesne River, and very briefly the Flaming Gorge and Aspinall ROD implementation (See Flow Targets Presentation attachment).
- 4) 15-Mile Reach – Discussion of how we (WAC) would like to approach the recommendation of the FWS Region 6 Director, 15-MR PBO Review Memo from spring: **"We recommend coordination between the Recovery Program and the Service to evaluate the recommended flow targets in the 15-Mile Reach by the end of the year 2028, ensuring this evaluation is available to the Service before the next PBO re-initiation checkpoint."**
  - a) Discussion of Biology Committee and Program Director's Office (PDO) suggestions.
    - i) Laura was supportive of the BC/WAC approach because both of the pieces are essential
    - ii) Pitts – The process will be much more complex than development of the original flow recommendations; a couple of years will be needed to develop the scope and revise the flow recommendations, integrated approach with lots of input from experts from both BC, WAC, water users, staff of the FWS Grand Junction office, and others; , CWCB climate change models will be needed to consider availability of natural flows and releases from reservoirs that are now taking place to develop credible flow recommendations
    - iii) Expect 3-6 months to get the scope drafted
    - iv) **Kyle Whitaker, Laura Belanger, Kara Scheel all volunteered to help with development of the scope**
  - b) An 'Integrated sub-committee' was agreed to be the best approach to pair the hydrologic and operational realities with biological needs within the reach

- c) Should this be perused through a third-party scope of work or as an in-house project?  
There was support for PDO making inquiries with former staff or others already familiar with the 15-MR issues to assist or take the lead in development of SOW, with an integrated oversight committee. There was support for hiring a contractor to assist in developing the flow recommendations with substantial input from biology and hydrology technical advisory committees.
- 5) Review Post-2023 recommendations and identify priority actions to begin discussions:
- a) Julie reviewed the post-23 selection tool developed in 2019 which was used to lay out all actions and estimated costs. These tables provided the foundation for discussing the size of the program moving forward and the PDO is using this information for reviewing and updating scopes. Julie wanted to let the committee know how this information is being used and said the 15 MR is being used as our template or priority area for these discussions. Pitts asked for clarification if this was being used to update the RIPRAP or flow rec's directly. There was a request directly in the RIPRAP comments to reassess all the Program flow recommendations. Tom Pitts commented that the 15-MR must be the priority because of the ESA compliance issues raised by the Service in the 15 MR PBO review. The other basins will have similar issues but are not currently as pressing of an issue.
- 6) Review of CO Depletion Analyses and Reporting, 2016-2020, Yampa and CO Basins
- a) Kara Scheel introduced herself as the new Endangered Species Coordinator for CWCB and provided a broad overview of the reporting time spans (5 years) and noted the 2020 change in methodology for depletion accounting.
  - b) Brian led an overview of the accounting methodology, which was changed and accepted in 2020, followed by the depletion accounting results for both the Yampa River and 15-MR of the Colorado River. (See PBO Presentation attachment)
    - i) Laura asked if "natural flow" into the 15-MR could be identified within this accounting. Brian said that the information is not in this reporting, he said the BOR would be the best source for data regarding changes in natural flow in all reaches of the Colorado River.
    - ii) Pitts asked when Wyoming would have their depletion accounting report available for the Little Snake tributary to the Yampa River. **>David Graf will follow up with Wyoming (Mike Robertson) to find out the timing of that.** The Little Snake accounting does not need to be completed in tandem with Colorado's reporting. Tom Pitts commended the quality and timeliness of the depletion accounting reports from Colorado.
  - c) Vote to accept Colorado Depletion Analyses, 2016-2020. David recommended acceptance of the report and the committee agreed to provide their acceptance via email. **>David Graf will provide an email with the reports and a clear request for acceptance to the committee.**

- 7) Water Year 2022 – Review of CO River and Yampa Basin Operations and water supply outlooks
  - a) David Graf presented an overview of 2021 supply and operations followed by a summary of water year 2022. (WY 2022 15MR Example attachment)
  - b) David Graf outlined the concerns of Erin Light, Division Engineer regarding Elkhead flow releases from the Recovery Program pool above the flow recommendations in the PBO and whether those releases are beneficial uses. Tom Pitts and Kyle Whitaker both supported continued use of our entire fish pool and noted that the goals as laid out in the PBO are minimums, not specific flow targets. Kyle suggested reviewing the storage decree, as it should govern allowable release of the Recovery Program pool. Kara noted that David, Erin, and she have talked about it several times and will continue to discuss it moving forward. Kara advocated for sticking to the PBO as much as possible. Tom noted the important distinction between a target and a minimum.
  
- 8) White River Management Plan Update
  - a) David Graf thanked Tom Pitts, the State of CO, and David Jones (UT) and other participants in the planning team for their notes and edits. A revised draft is nearing completion and the final document should be available for Committee review by September 2<sup>nd</sup>.
  
- 9) Next Meeting scheduled for **December 5 from 9-12 MST**

**ADJOURNED at 12 PM**