

San Juan River Basin Recovery
Implementation Program
Summary of Biology Committee Meeting
August 16-17, 2000

Welcome and Introductions: A meeting of the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program (SJ RIP) Biology Committee was held on August 16-17, 2000, in Durango, Colorado, at the Best Western Rio Grande Inn. The following members were present:

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| Jim Brooks, Chairman | US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2 |
| Ron Bliesner | US Bureau of Indian Affairs |
| Larry Crist | US Bureau of Reclamation |
| Paul Abate for Paul Holden | Jicarilla Apache Tribe |
| Vince LaMarra | Navajo Nation |
| Bill Miller | Southern Ute Indian Tribe |
| Tom Nesler | State of Colorado |
| Frank Pfeifer | US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6 |
| David Propst | State of New Mexico |
| Tom Wesche | Water Development |
| Paul Sawyer | US Bureau of Land Management |

Also in attendance were Shirley Mondy, Program Coordinator; Steven Platania and Sarah Gottlieb, University of New Mexico; Matthew Anderson and Steve Meisner, State of Utah; Rob Ashman, Public Service Company of New Mexico; Dale Ryden, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Steve Harris, San Juan Water District.

Review/Approval of June 13-14, 2000, Meeting Summary: The June 13-14, 2000, meeting summary was approved

with the stipulation that editorial changes be made. Changes should be sent in by the week of August 21.

July 28, 2000, Biology Committee Meeting: Members agreed to accept a summary letter written by Chairman Jim Brooks as an account of the meeting.

Agenda: There were minor changes to the agenda to allow time for making additional copies of the Work Plan 2001 handouts.

Biology Committee Listserver: It was decided that those using the listserver would include only biology committee members, and researchers Matt Anderson, Steve Platania, and Dale Ryden. People previously on the listserver who are non-members will still receive information through the Combined Listserver.

Results of Hydrology Committee Meeting: Changes were made in the wording in the proposal regarding the formation of the Hydrology Committee after it was presented to the Coordination Committee. Biology committee members had concerns regarding the deviation in wording from the original proposal.

-No expertise is required for membership on the Hydrology Committee-yet it is required for the Biology Committee. There should be consistency for membership requirements.

-Wording in the new proposal indicated that the Hydrology Committee would be responsible for geomorphology issues (habitat issues), which is currently a responsibility of the Biology Committee. This is a duplication of responsibilities of the Biology Committee. There is no need for the Hydrology Committee to be addressing geomorphology issues, especially since the Biology Committee Peer Review Panel has a professional geomorphologist.

-New wording is also proposed regarding flow recommendations. The new language deletes "working to meet flow recommendations" and substitutes new language "to provide water for endangered fish." The Biology Committee does not support that language change.

Action Item: *Jim Brooks will draft a letter to the Coordination Committee asking for an explanation/further clarification of the rationale for making the identified concerns in the Hydrology Committee proposal, particularly as the proposal relates to geomorphology responsibilities. The draft letter will be sent to Biology Committee members for review before the next Coordination Committee meeting before it is presented to the Coordination Committee in September.*

Flow Recommendations/Modeling:

Ron Bleisner has requested more calibration/gage adjustment from the U.S.G.S. during base flow periods. The additional measurements (biweekly) at each station along the river will cost an additional \$1,800 per month. With

additional readings in July, August, September, and October (critical months due to the irrigation season), additional costs would probably run close to \$8,000. With the additional information, natural flows could be reassessed, analyzed, and the model upgraded. The Biology Committee supported the biweekly calibration for the entire year.

Errol Jensen is putting together a \$400,000 project proposal for the 2001 Work Plan utilizing Colorado natural flows and estimating procedures to upgrade the model. There is a line item of \$20,000 to complete the model runs that the Hydrology Committee will want to look at. One issue involves using Program funds. If the Program gets \$2 million in Congressional funding, the work could be paid out of that money. Errol Jensen is putting together the \$400,000 project. There will be a separate Work Plan for the work at the gages and the model runs.

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) did not meet the flow recommendations during most of July. It has been well below 500 cfs in the habitat range. The first of August, BOR raised it to 900 cfs. Frank Pfeifer will continue to discuss the latest flow readings weekly with BOR.

Program Evaluation Report/Long-Range Plan: Ron Bliesner: Ron Bliesner had specific concerns on the development of the Long-Range Plan and Program Evaluation Report (PER), which he discussed in depth with other Biology Committee members. Based on those discussions, he will make further changes and modifications. Biology Committee members should send any suggested changes to him. Another revised version of the Long-Range Plan will be sent out in 4-5 weeks. Some areas of discussion included:

Chapter 5: There are three goals in Chapter 5 of the Program Evaluation Report (PER) that have evolved and changed from the original goals identified in the Long-Range Plan. In trying to maintain continuity between the PER and the revised Long-Range Plan, the goals will need to be restated in the revised Long-Range Plan to be consistent with the PER. Of concern are currently active projects; e.g. nonnative species control, that cannot be addressed in the current Long-Range Plan draft without revisions in the PER. It was decided that nonnative control will become a specific objective under each of the three goals identified in Chapter 5 of the PER.

Ron Bliesner will continue to use the new format/structure to reduce confusion and will work with the old format to convert to the new structure. He will use 4.1 in the past Long-Range Plan to close it out. The PER will be developed to include what is in the table and relate it back to the old plan. The goals and objectives will be the same in the Long-Range Plan and the PER so that they can be referred to in future Work Plans and provide consistency.

Jim Brooks will draft wording on the non-native control issue to be included in the goals and objectives of the PER, and send a draft to Biology Committee members for comment.

Page 6, LRP: The bulleted list will be removed. Its function will be covered in Table 4.2 by identifying specific items that will show progress. Italicized items in Table 4.2 are ongoing. Non-italicized items are completed and will be removed. Table 4.2 will become 5.1.

Native fish community enhancement goals were discussed as to when researchers will know when they are done. Need stated goal. How do researchers know when populations are going up or down, and what is the goal. Is there a way to make a statement that states when researchers need to worry-any parameters on when concerned-can there be an objective or statement that states what the native community should look like. Need to define triggers-warning signals. By 2002-2003, there should be data on native fish. Populations should be reviewed and compared to the model. Tom Nesler expressed concern that the word "goal" is overused. People want a specific number associated with a goal. Ron Bliesner will work on verbage that is not sensitive to analyze overall native fish populations in the system and indicate what a viable population would be. Final population goals will be refined constantly based on new information.

FY 2001 Work Plan Development: Biology members briefed the Committee on their individual Work Plans and solicited comments. Based on comments received, changes will be made. Individual Work Plans will be revised and sent to all Biology Committee members by August 25th on the listserv. Comments on individual Work Plans should be made to the author by August 29, Tuesday. A revised 2001 Work Plan will be submitted to the Coordination Committee for review by September 1st and discussed at the Coordination Committee meeting on September 19. The Biology Committee will reconvene and prioritize work plan elements if the entire work plan as presented is not funded by the Coordination Committee. All members were encouraged to attend the September 19 Coordination Committee. It was felt that monitoring needed to be a high priority in the 2001 Work Plan. Most comments were on specific wording in the Work Plans and projected costs.

GIS: Committee members should continue to send GIS data to Ron Bliesner. The need for a standardized GIS format was discussed. If all data was in a standardized format, analysis of the data would go smoother. There is also a need to decide what researchers want standardized and that the same format be used from year to year.

Peer Review: The question was raised as to whether there was anything the Peer Review group should do that was not in the Work Plan. They are already going to review the Long-Range Plan and the Program Evaluation Report. Most members felt it was not necessary for the Peer Review group to also review Annual Work Plans. The Peer Review group will also be reviewing the augmentation plans. The bioenergetics model will also be reviewed-primarily by Dr. Ron Ryel.

Further, since the Peer Review group is in place, it is very important to keep the geomorphology issue with the Biology Committee.

PAH Studies: Paul Sawyer: The study focused on stormwater runoff. Five sites were monitored which covered street runoff. Research did not show any seriously elevated PAH levels.

Predators: Vince LaMarra: It is important that predators such as striped bass be removed from the system as

quickly as possible. Removal efforts need to increase. Some members mentioned concentrating on catfish and other predators instead of carp. More money needs to be spent on actual removal instead of refining how they should be removed. Efforts should be concentrated around Cudei and Hogback diversion dams.

Dale Ryden found striped bass while electrofishing during research studies; he caught 279 striped bass in 15.8 miles of river between Shiprock Bridge and the Drift Station. The numbers of striped bass collected in a given mile varied from 0 fish to 35 fish per mile. The mean was 17.7 striped bass per River Mile (RM). Striped bass collected ranged in size from 456 mm to 545 mm TL. They had been preying upon native fish, mostly speckled dace. One factor encouraging striped bass movement is that the river has been clear for the past few months. When the river is muddier, there are fewer striped bass. Flannelmouth sucker populations are again increasing from their previous decline, but this increase could be eliminated with continued striped bass predation in the river. Members expressed a sense of urgency about removing them from the system--especially from Shiprock to the Drift Station. Of the 17 fish examined, all were females--no males were found.

During May 2000, only 9 striped bass were collected in 61.3 RM of electrofishing, with all of those being collected downstream of Montezuma Creek. However, between May and July, their numbers in the river increased dramatically. Striped bass most likely moved upstream from Lake Powell during runoff. Researchers found few juvenile native suckers during July sampling. As many as three year-classes of juvenile native suckers could potentially be lost to striped bass predation. Researchers wanted to know why the dramatic increase? Are striped bass populations in Lake Powell exploding? Is only the San Juan River affected? Is the forage base crashing? If large numbers of striped bass continue to inhabit the river from year to year, they will likely cause serious setbacks in recovery efforts for the two endangered fishes, as well as severely impacting the more common native fishes such as flannelmouth sucker and bluehead sucker. Since 1995, striped bass have been collected in the San Juan River downstream of Montezuma Creek, with the majority of those being collected downstream of Mexican Hat. However, now they are being caught as far upstream as Farmington, New Mexico.

Committee members recommended:

- The States of Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico remove catch/fishing limits on striped bass in the San Juan River.
- Use three boats during fall monitoring trips (September 18-22/October 1-10) and remove any striped bass found from the system.
- There is nothing specific about their removal in the Work Plan. A riverwide removal trip may be needed in the future.
- A weir (possibly a capture facility) may be needed in the future to prevent striped bass from moving up the river and threatening nonnatives.

BLM River/Camping Permits: Dale Ryden: The Bureau of Land Management's Bluff, Utah, office is trying to alleviate the problem of campsite congestion in the lower 18 RM of the San Juan River (where sign-up camps are located) during the seasons when commercial and private boaters use this section of the river. Complaints have been received from both private boaters and commercial river guides regarding the lack of campsites on the lower 18 miles of the river, and noise from generators and motors on boats used by researchers. The BLM has requested that researchers submit a field schedule (up to a year in advance, if possible) to their staff at Bluff, Utah, in order to allow for scheduling of campsites to be used. Hopefully, conflicts with private and commercial rafters can be avoided in the future.

Members felt it was reasonable to submit a tentative schedule for river research activities-but not a year in advance. Researchers can give a general time frame for scheduled research trips but not specific dates. Trips are dependent upon flows and other river conditions, as well as logistical constraints on manpower and equipment. Members also wanted to know where the problem was. At times, researchers have not been able to do scheduled work as there are too many rafters already on the river. It was stated that since BLM is part of the Program also, Program activities need to be a priority with BLM. Rafters need to be informed of Program activities and how important they are to the health of the river. *Paul Sawyer volunteered to check into the problem and will report to Biology members on what he found at the next meeting.*

Dale Ryden requested that researchers provide Paul Sawyer with a general idea of when they will be conducting research on the lower San Juan River and include information on the numbers of boats to be used, the number of people going on each trip, the approximate number of days necessary to perform research in the BLM-regulated section of the river, and specific campsite needs, preferences, etc.

Recapture Reservoir: Matt Anderson, State of Utah: The State of Utah is proposing to stock Recapture Reservoir with four non-native species, and requested input from the Biology Committee on their proposal. The species proposed for stocking were tiger muskie, channel catfish, largemouth bass, and bluegill. These species would be stocked as needed to maintain the sport fishery in Recapture Lake.

Biology members biggest concern was the threat of escape and subsequent movement into the San Juan River. The Program is spending a large amount of time and funding on the removal of non-native species. Now the State of Utah wants to introduce another predator, tiger muskie, into the system.

One worry was anglers who deliberately stock non-natives in reservoirs, rivers, streams, and lakes.

Members stated they would approve the proposal only if tiger muskie were taken out. It was pointed out that the use of Federal Aid funds would require a Section 7. Most likely there would be a jeopardy opinion.

Action Items:

- Scopes of Work should be sent to Shirley Mondy by September 1.
- Jim Brooks will send a draft memorandum commenting on the Hydrology Committee proposal to Biology Members.
- Biology Committee members are encouraged to attend the September 19, 2000, meeting if at all possible.
- The next draft of the Long-Range Plan will be out in 30 days.
- Paul Sawyer volunteered to check into the problem and will report to Biology members on what he found at the next meeting.

Next Meeting: November 28, 2000, in Durango, Colorado: The next meeting will cover such topics as the Long-Range Plan, 2001 Work Plans, BLM river permits, and an update on non-natives and pond harvest.

Tom Nesler, State of Colorado, offered to make meeting room arrangements (possibly the fairgrounds) and check into the availability of a block of hotel rooms for members.

Attachments:

Agenda