

December 14, 2001

**San Juan River Basin
Recovery Implementation Program
Biology Committee
September 4, 2001
Conference Call Summary**



Members Present:

Jim Brooks, Chairman
Ron Bliesner
Tom Chart
Paul Holden
Bill Miller
Dave Propst
Dale Ryden
Tom Wesche

Representing:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Jicarilla Apache Nation
Southern Ute Indian Tribe
State of New Mexico
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Water Development Interests

Others Present:

Matt Andersen
Steve Platania
Shirley Mondy, Program Coordinator
Marilyn Greenberg, Program Assistant
Mike Buntjer

State of Utah
University of New Mexico
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Summary of Agenda

FY 2002 Work Plan and Budget and Action Items

All items on the work plan have been finalized, with a possible exception of the scope of work for selective fish passage operation. There has not been a response from the Grand Junction office of Reclamation, on the request from the Biology Committee regarding the proposed \$8,000 cost reduction for the equipment costs of the PNM Weir fish passage. Tom Chart will check the status of the new budget submission and recommend to Bob Norman that equipment and training expenses be pulled out of next year's budget. The Biology Committee thinks that \$7,000 - \$8,000 in startup costs would fall out next year. The Biology Committee does not want to set a precedence for a higher than necessary budget.

There is also \$500 in the budget for pit tags. Frank Pfeifer indicated that they had enough pit tags, and a pit tag wand reader. This equipment is already available and would not need to be purchased. Dale Ryden has 5 or 6 pit tag readers in his office and could get one down there for a spare.

Costs that are not recurring (i.e., training, equipment, first year start up supplies) need to be identified. The Committee would also like a breakdown of daily operation, equipment, and manpower costs. The expenses would likely be \$35,000 or less for next year. The Redlands' budget is approximately \$28,000 or \$29,000. Additional costs of maintenance of the structure, such as shutting it down, winterizing, and spring startup, are included in Redlands' budget. This includes ground maintenance, pulling weeds, etc. The PNM fish ladder may have more human trash clean up and a heavier sediment load that would require cleanup.

The Biology Committee agreed to go with the current budget for the first year, and add out year funding to this scope of work and address the issue of redundancy of equipment, training, and startup supplies. Another concern is using personnel that live a distance away which affects travel time and costs, and impacts response time in case of adverse weather or other unexpected/unforeseen circumstances. It was agreed to run the fish ladder for the first year and see what happens.

Please provide Dale Ryden with your comments on the draft augmentation plans, including the redraft of the razorback sucker plan.

Coordination Committee Meeting

The Biology Committee agreed that a meeting date of October 22 or later for the Coordination Committee would be better for the majority of the committee. It was also agreed that people whose names are on the work plans should be in attendance to respond to questions. Jim Brooks will request that the Coordination Committee be rescheduled so that the majority of the Biology Committee can attend. The Biology Committee concurred that a separate Biology Committee meeting would not be necessary before the next Coordination Committee meeting; that everything could be covered today.

Work Plans

The \$10,000 for videography is not in the 2002 Bureau of Reclamation work plan. ***This needs to be added, as a line item of \$8,500 for videography in the habitat mapping scope of work, and identified as funded to the Bureau of Reclamation.***

Out year funding still needs to be added on some of the work plans.

Monitoring will continue every year, with cost of living adjustments for each year.

Please get just the numbers to Shirley Mondy and she will modify the work plan and get it out to the Coordination Committee.

Program Coordination and Program Management were not discussed because those are to be reviewed by the Coordination Committee.

Steve Platania will add a sentence to his scope of work to include products and stating that final data will be available in March 31, 2003. The data will be available for review sometime in 2002.

Summer Water Flow

Navajo Dam dropped to 500 from 800 cfs. At the time, flows were way over the 500 cfs minimum. There was plenty of water coming down the Animas so the Bureau of Reclamation dropped the water release. The bottom dropped out of the Animas and there were flows of less than 400 cfs for at least a week. New Mexico State University was trying to collect fish at the time and there was some discussion about whether the flows were lowered for safety reasons for that project. Some felt that this adversely affected the fish habitat and was completely avoidable.

There was a Navajo Dam operations meeting with discussions that Reclamation has to give power plants a week notice before they drop flows. The weekly average flow should not be below 500 cfs. Once it is that low, it is too hard to chase it. When the Animas changes quickly, it takes more than a day to change the flows coming out of the dam. It takes two days, once you make the change, for the flows to reach the habitat range. Actually a 500-1200 cfs range is more ideal. Why don't we aim for an 800 cfs target instead of 500 cfs? We would have to give up storing water for the peak periods/spring release.

The Biology Committee agreed that it needs to get more information, since in 1999 the non-natives took off due to a drop below 500 cfs for 6 weeks. The Biology Committee will discuss later, with more data, the pros and cons of increasing the minimum flows versus having less water for spring release. This can be completed in the 2002/2003 review. Revising this recommendation will not have an adverse impact until water use is at full development. Everyone is looking at that piece of water - especially at full development. There was a question about how do we justify increasing the flow recommendation when the 500 cfs is based on specific data? We could advise Reclamation that if the river is descending, look at kicking the release up at 700 cfs, instead of waiting until it drops to 500 cfs or below. If we are not at full development now, why not try to get the minimum up a bit - while we still have the opportunity? The question is: Will flows above 500 cfs maximize the river habitat? There will be many more options for days well over 1200 cfs.

Requests to Reclamation need to be prioritized with endangered species needs versus other authorized uses. The Biology Committee will discuss this further in its integration efforts. The flows were 3000 cfs at the river when it was dropped from 800 to 500 cfs. Summer storms were coming through. Reclamation is being forced to keep the flows between 500 and 1000 cfs. Reclamation probably waited until Wednesday because of the New Mexico State University fish survey.

Peer Review Candidates

Fishery Biologist Candidates:

Rich Valdez

Rich has a Ph.D. in fisheries, and 25 years of experience. He participated in the Colorado River Recovery Team and helped develop the recovery goals. He has knowledge of the pikeminnow and razorback ecology and habitat. He has a lot of experience with the species that we are concerned with and with the basin. He is well trained and would do an excellent job. He has 20 days available and is comfortable with the rate of pay. The contract for his services would be through SWCA. His ALP oversight monitoring contract was independent. Rich is extremely intelligent, however his closeness to the situation may cause him to develop very set opinions about what he thinks is needed for recovery. We may need someone with less biases, who doesn't have as much experience here; perhaps more experience in other places; someone who is able to interject new ideas and new ways of doing things. The Coordination Committee is looking for that also.

We were nominating without any criteria to go by. The above points are valid. Originally we were just looking for the people in the disciplines who had the time. Peer review was initially established to bring outside rigor and perspective to what we were doing. Will these needs change over time: integration review now, and other tasks in the future? Is this a long term or just a three year evaluation? We would want to keep the same people, for continuity, to become aware of our weaknesses and be able to work on them more than once.

Josh Korman

Josh is likely one of our top two candidates. He does not have extensive experience in the basin, and no San Juan experience that we know of. He has a Bachelor's and a Master's degree and 15 years of experience in computer simulation models and monitoring design. He has worked on the Colorado basin evaluation of adaptive management in the Grand Canyon. He sees the big picture - the adaptive management perspective - not exclusively a fisheries biologist perspective. His experience is similar to Ron Ryel's, with a bend to biostatistics and ecosystem modeling. He may have differing opinions to Ryel as to interpreting what our data is saying - this would be a good thing. He is also good at getting his thoughts on paper.

Keith Gido

Keith finished his Ph.D. at the University of Oklahoma within the last two years. He has an impressive publication list for having recently completed his degree. He does have familiarity with the SJRIP. Keith is an Assistant Professor at Kansas State University. His discipline and breadth of knowledge would be good for our peer review panel, and he would be a good complement to Dave Galat. He has extensive background in the life history of fishes and the system, and is good on the integration work.

Keith Gido has indicated that he has the time. He is not teaching this fall, although he is a new assistant professor. He is confident that he has plenty of time to devote to this.

Keith has specific experience with red shiners. He has done a lot of community based work. He is a good systems ecologist, and works hard at everything he does. We would get far more than what we are paying for out of Keith.

Keith has a depth of knowledge and experience. He has had some involvement in the basin, sort of in between Valdez and Galat in terms of basin experience. His publications go well beyond the basin, and his Master's is based on work in the basin.

Steve Ross

Steve Ross is a top candidate, pending review of his resume. He is a professor at the University of Southern Mississippi. His work has been more on eastern fishes. He has impressive publications which include work on the relationships between habitats and communities. Steve is a distinguished professor in the sciences. He may retire in 4 - 5 years, and has a home in Pagosa Springs, Colorado. This would be a way for him to stay active in conservation issues after his retirement. He has spent nearly 2 decades at the University and has focused on the community approach; he also has hydrology & geomorphology research experience. We would be very fortunate to have his involvement.

Steve has done review work in the Grand Canyon. He has some western experience, and does go to Desert Fishes Council meetings out here. Steve would bring a new and clean perspective to what we are doing and where we should go. He can help us avoid tunnel vision. He has 5 - 7 years of editorial experience at Copeia, The Journal of Freshwater Ecology. He has the advantage of writing and editing a wealth of different writing styles. Steve has served on committees and editorial boards. He participated on a peer review panel for the Upper Basin, attended meetings, and provided a broad perspective, as well as written comments.

Steve Ross is very distinguished, well published, has broad experience, and is very interested. He is a senior person, he has already made his career, and public service is important to him. Like Galat, he would probably be a true peer reviewer and looking at the overall models and perspective.

Carl Walters

Carl Walters did not have the time, and so was not officially nominated. He has been working with Grand Canyon data sets on the humpback chub. His work has been shaking things up. He uses a stock assessment approach and it has been rumored that he is looking at our data sets and our SJRIP program as well. It seems that he is throwing the catch per unit data out. He could not detect trends in the population. He was doing population estimates - just looking at pit tag information. His focus is on recruitment. He is detecting real reasons for concern - his observations indicate a lack of recruitment for several years. Again, his focus is a stock assessment approach, with

stronger monitoring. This focus may be coming - Josh Korman may have that kind of expertise. Ron Ryel is probably familiar with that approach also. Dave Galat has a good, community based, ecological background. If Galat were available full time, we wouldn't be talking about another fishery biologist. Korman offers a different point of view. Perhaps we could bring him on a year or so down the road.

Criteria

We already have Ron Ryel, who is a biostatistician and biologist. We have Dave Galat part-time (10 days); he can attend the main meetings, but not the subcommittee meetings. We are seeking a fishery biologist and a geomorphologist with expertise in those specific areas. We also want a true peer reviewer who can look at the overall models and perspective, from their background in their specific discipline with respect to the habitat and recovery of the fish species. Not being closely tied to the San Juan would give more objectivity. The ideal peer reviewers would bring a willingness and ability to participate, have an academic and publication record, and little or no affiliation with fish recovery in the southwest to maintain impartiality and give us a new and clean perspective. If they are familiar with at least part of the Colorado basin, not just the San Juan basin, that helps. We do not want to exclude someone because they are participating in another part of the Colorado basin - that could be very helpful.

Time table for filling peer review panel:

We would like to complete our selections before the next Coordination Committee meeting, especially if that is not held until the end of October. ***Biology Committee members agreed to complete an e-mail vote by the end of this week (September 7, 2001)***, particularly if the Coordination Committee decides to meet next week.

Geomorphologist Candidates:

Brian Richter

Brian has worked and traveled around the world and has published work that integrates geomorphology and fisheries issues. Does he have the time? Dave Propst and Jim Brooks will contact him and get a resume out to everyone, if he is interested.

John Pitlick

John is a professor at the University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado. His expertise is in large gravel sediment transport. Our work involves more large sediment transport. John has worked in Colorado doing work similar to what we are doing.

John has experience in the Mississippi River floods, and has worked with biologists in other basins. He has a hydrology/morphology perspective. John has some idea of what we are doing, and he is available and interested. He was originally on the panel, then we went back and opened it up. John has reviewed the flow recommendation report. Has he bought into the process that we are following already? Or do we need a fresh, outside point of view? Sounds like he might have less of an outside perspective.

John's strengths are that he has worked with fish, so he has some familiarity in that area. He is creative, he thinks outside the box, and he is a pretty open minded thinker.

As stated above, John is a solid guy, has solid work experience, and is well respected. John is very professional, he takes great pains to be unbiased, and he always defends his data scientifically. He has worked with Doug Osmundson on the Colorado River. John is still doing some monitoring work up there. He is familiar with the issues, the native fish, etc.

John is not on the Upper Basin geomorphology peer review program panel. That panel has reviewed some of Pitlick's stuff. He is very objective about his own data. He also sent a follow up letter which supported FWS's interpretation of his data. He is a very pure scientist. John seems to be aware of the concerns of having his stuff taken to court and will not go beyond what his data can support.

Bob Mussetter

Bob Mussetter has qualifications that are similar to Pitlick. He is working in the private sector and has 25 years of experience in large sediment transport. He is familiar with the biology of at least one of the fishes that we are dealing with, including channel maintenance and the physical processes involved in the pikeminnow spawning habitat. Bob has worked around the west. He is not in an academic setting and has less publications - but he does have some published work and has presented a number of conference papers. He has good, broad experience. The sediment work he participated in at Cleopatra's Couch was highly and quietly criticized. He would be likely to know both sides of the issues. He would not be hesitant to speak up and say what is on his mind.

Bob is interested and has the time. He has returned phone calls and e-mails promptly. He would work with us as we needed him to.

Robert Strand

Bob Strand retired from the Bureau of Reclamation in the middle 1990's. He has 30 years of sedimentation experience all over the west. Bob has done consultation since retiring and has fish passage experience and a broad perspective.

Bob has the time. He has more experience in fine sediment transport. Bob has worked on fish passages (passive structure) in the Pacific Northwest. He had interaction, but perhaps not direct involvement, with fisheries and endangered species issues. He has done private work since 1994 and consulted with some pretty good sized firms. Does he know the nuts and bolts of research, data manipulation, and synthesis; and does he have the ability to interpret the results of analysis correctly? He did technical peer review, on the Henry's Fork, toward the end of his tenure with Reclamation. He was there technically, not administratively.

Brian Richter

Brian is a geomorphologist. Frank Pfeifer is working on getting a resume from him.

Bill Trush

Bill has worked on the Trinity River, an entirely regulated stream. He was a strong lead in working with Reclamation.

Richard Marston

Dick is a professor at Oklahoma State University, and was formerly on the faculty at the University of Wyoming. He has worked in the Rocky Mountains and is active in geomorphology circles. Dick is very well published and has extensive international experience.

Matt Kondolf

Matt is a tenured Associate Professor at the University of California, Berkeley campus. He presented papers at instream flow conferences in the 1980's. He still publishes quite regularly.

Other possibilities:

Matt Andrews and Jack Schmidt.

The Biology Committee agreed to get their Fishery Biologist votes to Paul Holden by Monday, September 10, 2001.

Resumes for all Geomorphologist candidates should be out to the Committee by Monday, September 10th. Please get your vote to Paul Holden by Wednesday, September 12th.

Other:

An augmentation plans discussion will be held at the next Biology Committee meeting.

The fish ponds are under construction as we speak.