

November 27, 2002

**San Juan River Basin
Recovery Implementation Program
Biology Committee
July 16, 2002
Conference Call Summary**



Members Present:

Jim Brooks
Ron Bliesner
Tom Chart
Paul Holden
Vince LaMarra
Bill Miller, Chairman
Dave Propst
Tom Wesche

Others Present:

Matt Andersen
Mike Buntjer
Sara Gottlieb
Pat Page
Steve Platania
Dale Ryden, for Chuck McAda
John Simons
Shirley Mondy, Program Coordinator
Marilyn Greenberg, Program Assistant

Representing:

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

Utah Department of Natural Resources
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
University of New Mexico
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
University of New Mexico
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Welcome and Review of Agenda

Bill Miller welcomed those participating, who then introduced themselves, and the agenda was approved.

Final Recommendation on the Scopes of Work for GIS and Trophic Relationships

GIS Scope of Work - Ron Bliesner, Steve Platania, Sara Gottlieb

Steve Platania stated that he incorporated the comments from the last Biology meeting and compressed the proposal from four to two years, with the third year being mostly database management. Sara Gottlieb added that the web prototype is very basic, the ultimate data base will be a lot more robust and fully downloadable from the website. There will be query capabilities on the web and the web can be continuously updated, unlike the CD's.

Steve Platania also explained that access to the web database would be controlled. It would be password protected, and the Biology Committee and the researchers would have access. The

Biology Committee would determine who would have access. Also, everything would be seamless with the Service, as a part of the Program. UNM would also like to give updates and demonstrate progress regularly, like at each Biology Committee meeting, as well as receive feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Many Committee members indicated that they would like to continue the use and distribution of the data on CD's, also.

The Biology Committee agreed that both projects should move forward at this time. Bliesner and Platania need to work out the details of incorporating Bliesner's work and data into Platania's database.

Trophic Relationships - Dave Propst and Keith Gido

The current draft incorporates comments from the May 21st meeting in Farmington, but Tom Chart's comments have not yet been included.

There was discussion about the feasibility of the field experiment aspect of the study. Dave Propst explained that in looking at the hydrograph over the last 20 years, there is usually a 3 - 4 week period of time which does not have a flow pulse that would disrupt the field experiments. The field experiments will only take 2 - 3 weeks, so there is a risk, but choosing the right time to do the field work diminishes the possibility that flow spikes will interfere.

There was discussion about how the block nets would stay in place. Committee members suggested that pilots should be tested during the first season.

Bill Miller added that in doing the Population Model, the caloric content of the lower trophic levels is needed, and that information does not seem to be available elsewhere. If this proposal can do caloric testing on lower trophic levels, that would be extremely helpful for the model. Some of the smaller fish might be forage for pikeminnow, and would be more readily replenished. This study will show what the system actually supports.

It should be clarified in the scope of work that an evaluation will occur at each step to determine if it is reasonable to go on to the next step. The whole study is in the scope of work so that everyone knows the study is going.

The scopes of work should discuss that the artificial streams are up and running/completed at the Kansas facility. Trash control should also be discussed. Determining the efficacy of the netting can be added to the first year work plan.

The list of objectives are really tasks on page 5 of the proposal. The proposal needs a clearer statement of what the goal is. Include the goal of determining what pikeminnow are feeding on in the San Juan and is there enough food for them. Is there a sufficient amount of suitable prey in the San Juan River to support a viable population of pikeminnow? Is what they consume in rough proportion to what is available? Is there enough food, of suitable quality, to support a viable population of pikeminnow? These goals need to be clearly stated and address why this is the best way to answer this question.

The study done by Bill Miller and Vince LaMarra looked at the lower trophic levels. Propst's

study identifies how fish consume those resources, and how much of each. This data will enable the model to be more useable.

Dave Propst asked the Committee to please get their key points to him by July 23.

Comments and Final Version of the Base Flow Guidance Memo Drafted by Ron Bliesner

The Biology Committee needs to clarify their base flow recommendation for Reclamation, and then clarify (separately) what to do in extremely wet or dry years. [See attached memo] It does not ensure that the entire habitat is above 500cfs, but that the majority of the habitat would be. This does not change the original recommendation of 500cfs, but indicates a better way to maintain what was intended.

John Simons is working on a risk analysis to evaluate the potential outcomes of releasing more water out of Navajo Dam. Approximately 850 cfs is being released now. To maintain flows of 500 cfs in the majority of the habitat, the release would have to be increased to 1100 cfs, and that would reduce the water in the reservoir by about 4 feet. Reclamation has released 710,000 acre feet out of the reservoir since October, with no spring release this year. Historically 65% of the years have had the inflow needed to meet demands for next year.

Vince LaMarra is mapping the river at this time. Temperature and turbidity is being recorded also. We are almost in an emergency condition now. We would not want to implement any new recommendations for another week and a half - until the river mapping under current conditions is complete. There is some risk that we may not have enough water to make a 500 cfs release next year.

Extreme conditions issues will have to be in a separate memo, to ensure that it does not become institutionalized.

The Biology Committee approved the issuance of Bliesner's Flow Recommendation Guidance memo from the Biology Committee to Reclamation, with a copy to FWS. "Extreme conditions will be handled on a case by case basis." will be added. Extreme conditions will be addressed in a separate memo.

The Biology Committee agreed to recommend maintaining flows of 350 cfs for the rest of the summer. We want to maintain at least 300 cfs in most of the habitat range, using the same three gage method described in the attached memo. This is an extremely dry year and 350 cfs is reasonable and will save water. Reclamation will continue to release about 860 cfs from the dam, as they are now. The fish may struggle through this year, but the true effects may not be obvious until next year.

Once John Simons completes the risk assessment, he will share it with the Hydrology and the Biology Committees.

Ron Bliesner will draft the flow guidance for Bill Miller's signature this afternoon, then it will go out to the Biology Committee for review. Once the edits are complete, Miller will send the memo to Reclamation with a copy to the Biology Committee, Hydrology Committee, and FWS. Two memos will be sent to Reclamation from the Biology Committee: one regarding regular flows and one regarding emergency (high or low) flows.

Discussion of the Need to Allocate Funds in the FY2003 Budget For Growout Ponds

The Hydrology Committee sees a potential opportunity for additional private ponds and are asking the Biology Committee to request an additional \$400,000 to create more growout ponds as land becomes available. Jim Brooks indicated that the new ponds could probably be stocked from Dexter and Willow Beach National Fish Hatcheries.

There was also discussion about using fertilization and pond management to increase productivity of the current ponds. Dale Ryden added that the Upper Basin is running 60 acres of ponds, but they are not getting anywhere near the productivity that they projected. He agreed that an additional 9 - 15 acres of growout ponds would be to the Program's advantage. In order to get better survival in the river and to reach the Program goals, the return on the larger size fish is much better, and adding more ponds helps to raise larger fish.

This would be capital projects money which is spent as it is invoiced. It does not have to be turned back in at the end of each year. ***Shirley Mondy agreed to verify the capital funding procedures with Brent Uilenberg.***

PNM Fish Passage Operation SOW

Shirley Mondy reported that no one had turned in a proposal for operating the fish passage at the PNM Weir. ***Vince LaMarra will work with the Navajo Nation to submit a proposal by July 19th.***

Long Range Plan Discussion

Jim Brooks would like comments by July 31st. A new revision went out this morning (July 16th) for the Biology Committee to review the Hydrology Committee's comments. The Biology Committee agreed to have a conference call specifically to discuss the LRP on Friday, August 2nd, from 8:30am - 9:30am. ***Those who will not be available, please send your comments to the Committee before then.***

Subcommittee Meeting Dates

The Biology Subcommittee meeting for data integration will be Sept. 4 - 5, from 1pm until early afternoon on Sept. 5th, in Albuquerque. Ron Bliesner and Vince LaMarra have not yet received funding, but Dale Ryden's, Dave Propst's, and Jim Brooks' data can be reviewed.