Remote Biologist for San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program

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Background

The San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program's (SJRIP) mission is to recover the Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker while allowing water development and management activities to continue in the San Juan River Basin. In pursuit of this mission, the SJRIP funds projects under six major program elements. These elements include: management and augmentation of populations and protection of genetic integrity; protection, management, and augmentation of habitat; management of nonnative aquatic species; monitoring and evaluation of fish and habitat in support of recovery actions; program coordination and assessment of progress toward recovery; and, information and outreach. Principal investigators representing various federal and state agencies, tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations are contracted to perform tasks associated with the SJRIP's mission. Most of these entities reside outside of the basin and, as a consequence, extensive travel costs are incurred to complete this work.

Beginning in 2008, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) New Mexico Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NMFWCO) was able to fill a position that was stationed in the Farmington/Shiprock, New Mexico Area. This position focused primarily on endangered fish monitoring, nonnative fish control, and rare fish augmentation. Additionally, assistance was provided to the Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife (NNDFW) with daily operations at a selective fish passage near Fruitland, New Mexico and with daily operation/maintenance at the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry (NAPI) Razorback Sucker grow-out ponds. Since this position was located in the Four Corners Area, the incumbent was extremely knowledgeable of various access points on both the San Juan and Animas Rivers, he was available to provide reconnaissance prior to the initiation of sampling trips, and he assisted with other research projects including the shuttling of support vehicles and equipment. In addition, his location allowed for quick response times to all program participants in cases of emergency (i.e., equipment issues/loss, injury, Gold King mine spill, etc.). In January 2016 the individual filling this position retired from federal service and that position has remained vacant ever since.

As the SJRIP moves forward with on-the-ground projects, having a highly-qualified individual that is knowledgeable of the issues and surrounding area would greatly benefit the SJRIP. This individual could participate on the following projects and activities:

- Nonnative fish removal
- Rare fish augmentation
- Daily operation of selective fish passage
- NAPI pond management and maintenance
- Maintenance of remote passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag antennas including data input
- Assistance on other program projects including: larval, small and large-bodied fish community monitoring, habitat restoration projects
- Assist researchers with shuttling of vehicles and equipment
- Operation of future larval entrainment wetland/impoundment
- Other activities yet to be identified

To that end, we propose that the SJRIP Coordination Committee consider approving funding for a USFWS employee to be locally stationed in the Four Corners Area to assist with the entire suite of SJRIP-related projects. If approved, the NMFWCO would recruit an individual with experience in the fields of endangered fish management, fish culture, specialized sampling techniques (i.e., raft-mounted electrofishing, seining, hoop-netting, river rafting, etc.), PIT tag antenna maintenance, and water control structure/impoundment management. Knowledge of the surrounding area and river system will be afforded additional consideration.

Schedule:

Annually

Nonnative fish removal	March-September
Rare fish augmentation	September-October
Fish Passage	March-October
NAPI ponds	March-December
Remote PIT tag antennas	year-round
Other Program activities	year-round
Larval entrainment wetland	seasonally
SJRIP Meetings	February, May, November, one workshop annually

During the May 2017 Coordination Committee Meeting we were asked to modify the scope of work to include potential budget changes resulting from approval of a remote biologist position and a more detailed list of potential position responsibilities. Represented below are those responsibilities and their associated budget adjustments for those projects led by or involving the NMFWCO. This list does not include participation on other yet to be determined projects that are led by other entities:

Endangered Fish Monitoring and Nonnative Fish Control

704 hours = ($17,600) Savings

- The incumbent would be expected to participate on all field activities associated with this project including two tagging trips and nine nonnative fish removal trips. Each of these trips consists of five days in the field and three days for trip preparation and gear cleanup (8 days/trip x 8 hours/day x 11 trips = 704 hours). As needed, the incumbent would be responsible for routine maintenance and upkeep of sampling gear and would be asked to provide shuttling services when available.

Augmentation

120 hours = ($3,000) savings

- The incumbent would be responsible for assisting the lead biologist with annual augmentation activities associated with Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow. This task includes assisting in the placement and removal of block nets used for soft releases and assisting hatchery personnel with the tempering and release of all fish. Since this position will be located in the Farmington area, the incumbent would be tasked with identifying and assessing potential stocking locations to expand range and reduce potential for catastrophic loss of an entire year class at a single stocking location.

NAPI Ponds

.25 FTE = $13,000 increase

- The NMFWCO's currently-approved budget associated with the NAPI Razorback Sucker grow-out ponds focuses primarily on the provision of assistance during active harvest and with periodic assistance during the grow-out season as requested by the NNDFW. If approved, the incumbent would be expected to provide

daily assistance to NNDFW including assisting in the collection of daily water quality data, fish feeding, monthly inventories, active and passive harvest and problem resolution. The incumbent would also be able to provide assistance, as needed, with the operation of the selective fish passage near Fruitland, New Mexico.

Operation of Larval Fish Entrainment Wetland/Impoundment

- Once constructed, the incumbent would be responsible for operating the water control structures associated with this wetland/impoundment to maximize native larval fish entrainment. Other duties would include assistance with monitoring of larval fish within the impoundment, aquatic vegetation control, and light maintenance of all water control structures and levees. Associated costs would be shared with the NAPI Ponds project.

Sub-adult and Adult Fish Community Monitoring

153 hours = ($3,825)

- The incumbent would assist the USFWS' Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (GJFWCO) with annual monitoring of sub-adult and adult fishes in the San Juan River from Bloomfield, New Mexico downstream to Mexican Hat, Utah (RM 196.0-53.0). This would consist of 17 days of work (17 days @ 9 hours/day – 153 hours).

Budget at full funding level:

FY 18	**$63,818**
FY 19	**$75,641**
FY20	**$77,754**
FY21	**$79,868**

Budget if FY18 is the first year of funding for a GS-482-7/9 position

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - New Mexico Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office							
FY 2018							
SJRIP - Remote Biologist							
Labor Cost							
Position	**Grade/Step**	**1/2 Year Salary**	**Fringe**	**Salary w/ Benefits**	**Hours/Day**	**No. of Days**	**Sub-total**
Fish Biologist (1/2 FTE)	GS 7/1	$40,790.00	27.06%	$51,827.77			$51,827.77
Adminstrative Officer	GS 9/8	$29.49	26.12%	$37.19	9	5	$1,673.68
					Total Labor		$53,501.45
Travel and Per Diem	**Days**	**Rate**					**Sub-total**
Hotel Costs (four two-day meetings; Durango, CO)	8	$102.00					$816.00
Per Diem (Travel Day)	4	$48.00					$192.00
Per Diem (Full Day)	4	$64.00					$256.00
Per Diem (Camping Rate)	6	$29.00					$174.00
					Total Travel/Per Diem		$1,438.00
Equipment	**Miles/Qty**	**Total Miles**	**Rate**				**Sub-total**
Vehicle Fuel							
1 truck used throughout year	50	13,000	$0.54				$7,020.00
est. 50 miles/day 5 days/week							
52 weeks/year					Equipment		$7,020
		Sub-total for Program Biologist - NMFWCO only					**$61,959.45**
		Administrative Overhead (3%)					**$1,858.78**
		Subtotal for Remote Biologist					**$63,818.23**
		Savings from other NMFWCO-funded projects					**($37,425.00)**
		Total additional funding needed					**$26,393.23**

Budget if FY18 is the second year of funding a GS-482-7/9 position with the associated step increase to a GS 9-1

FY 2018							
SJRIP - Remote Biologist							
Labor Cost							
Position	**Grade/Step**	**Yearly Rate**	**Fringe**	**Salary w/ Benefits**			**Sub-total**
Fish Biologist (1 FTE)	GS 9/1	$49,894.00	27.06%	$63,395.32			$63,395.32
Adminstrative Officer	GS 9/8	$30.23	26.12%	$38.13	9	5	$1,715.67
					Total Labor		**$65,110.99**
Travel and Per Diem	**Days**	**Rate**					**Sub-total**
Hotel Costs (four two-day meetings)	8	$102.00					$816.00
Per Diem (Travel Day)	4	$48.00					$192.00
Per Diem (Full Day)	4	$64.00					$256.00
Per Diem (Camping Rate)	6	$29.00					$174.00
					Total Travel/Per Diem		**$1,438.00**
Equipment	**Miles/Qty**	**Total Miles**	**Rate**				**Sub-total**
Vehicle Fuel							
1 truck used throughout year	50	13,000	$0.54				$7,020.00
est. 50 miles/day 5 days/week							
52 weeks/year					**Equipment**		**$7,020**
		Sub-total for Remote Biologist - NMFWCO only					**$73,568.99**
		Adminstrative Overhead (3%)					**$2,207.07**
		Subtotal for Remote Biologist					**$75,776.06**
		Savings from other NMFWCO-funded projects					**($37,425.00)**
		Total additional funding needed					**$38,351.06**