



**BIOLOGY COMMITTEE MEETING
FINAL SUMMARY
18 July 2023**

Biology Committee (BC) Members

Absent

Kerri Pedersen

Jacob Mazzone

Vincent Lamarra

William Miller

Harry Crockett (Chair)

Matthew Zeigler

Sarah Seegert

AJ Keith

Brian Westfall

Tracy Diver, BC alternate

Benjamin Schleicher

Absent

Tom Chart

Program Office (PO):

Melissa Mata, Program Coordinator

Eliza Gilbert, Assistant Program Coordinator

Scott Durst, Science Coordinator

Raphaella Ware, Program Biologist

Other Interested Parties:

Mike Farrington

Steve Platania

David Speas, BC Alternate

Sanskriti Shrestha

Dan Lamarra, BC alternate

Ben Zimmerman, BC Alternate

Colleen Cunningham, CC member

Katie Creighton, BC Alternate

Joseph Trungale, CC member

Chris Kitcheyan, CC member

Kathleen Callister

Lee Traynham, CC Member

Diego Araujo

Kin-Lan Han

Nate Caswell

Nathan Franssen

Melissa Trammell

Carrie Padgett, BC alternate

Representing

Bureau of Land Management

Bureau of Reclamation

Jicarilla Apache Nation

Navajo Nation

Southern Ute Indian Tribe

State of Colorado

State of New Mexico

State of Utah

The Nature Conservancy

U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, R2

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, R6

Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

Water Development Interests

Representing

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Representing:

American Southwest Ichthyological Researchers

American Southwest Ichthyological Researchers

Bureau of Reclamation

Keller Bliesner Engineering

Navajo Nation

Southern Ute Indian Tribe

State of New Mexico

State of Utah

The Nature Conservancy

Bureau of Indian Affairs

Bureau of Reclamation

Bureau of Reclamation

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

National Park Service

Water Development Interests

Introductions and changes to agenda

Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe do not have BC nominations at this time, so that will not be addressed in today's meeting.

Approve draft summary from 9 May 2023 BC meeting; review Action Item list – Ware

Ware reported that Chart and Miller provided some minor comments and those were incorporated. Chart motioned to approve the summary; Miller seconded. There was no further discussion, summary was approved.

Action Items from 9 May 2023 Biological Committee Meeting

1. Update Sage Dunn on BC roster – Ware will do. *Completed.*
2. PO will prompt BC members to rank new scopes via email and include whether they would replace any of the existing scopes with the new ones. *Completed.*
3. Find out from NPS if getting access from Piute Canyon is possible location for a takeout (where it currently is non-existent). Trammell will follow up. *Will be addressed in today's meeting.*
4. PIs will discuss amongst themselves and PO on whether collaboration is truly feasible, even just logistically for scopes of work New 3, New 5, and New 8. *Addressed.*
5. Platania/ASIR will put together, for another year, a scope of work to quantify larvae that drift below the waterfall that can be further discussed with the BC. *Postponed for a later time.*
6. Brian Westfall will check with Maurice Upshaw on specific equipment that will need to be updated and will coordinate with PO. *Westfall provided Upshaw's cost estimate to Mata and Traynham agreed that the replacement of the Fruitland gage could be considered a capital expenditure. Gilbert will ask New Mexico and Colorado if they are okay to use SJRIP NFWF funds. The next step would be to ask for CC approval of either the SJRIP NFWF or allocated capital funds.*
7. Mata will follow up with Navajo Nation on the status of dataset that is missing from STReaMs. *Will be addressed in today's meeting.*

Discuss second draft of FY2024 Annual Work Plan – BC and PO

Due to funding uncertainty, the PO provided three funding scenarios. In developing this AWP, the PO relied on the Program Document, Long-Range Plan, Recovery Plans, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Sufficient Progress Report, PO's list of prioritized topics, Peer Reviewer input, and past BC and CC discussions. The PO previously asked the BC to comment and rank the new and ongoing SOWs to determine the BC's overall thoughts towards how the Annual Work Plan (AWP) could be adjusted.

Scenario 1 - SJRIP maintains fiscal year 2023 (FY23) funding. No new scopes of work (SOW) would be funded in this scenario without significantly reducing or foregoing some ongoing projects. Although SOWs that were completed this past fiscal year may have freed up some funds, on-going SOWs costs increased, leading this scenario to only maintaining current SOWs. Miller asked if it was possible to make the request for a proposal (RFP) for habitat monitoring (SOW 25) more flexible for FY24 so the data could be collected at other times of the year. He expressed concern about whether the flight or objective needed to change to be the most effective in gathering the most critical information associated with habitat needs and or effects of bottlenecks caused by habitat needs. Chart

and Westfall voiced their agreement with Miller. Mata responded that if the PO were to incorporate changes for the habitat monitoring SOW now, it would delay the advertising a request for proposals (RFP). Chart inquired whether New-2 (Spatial Distribution and Persistence of Low Velocity Habitats Utilized by Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker in the San Juan River) and SOW 25 (Habitat Monitoring) could be merged so the timing of the flight could be more flexible. Durst pointed out there was an impression of importance from the BC that the flight for SOW 25 happen in the fall this year due to assess habitat following the spring peak releases from Navajo Reservoir but future flights can be more flexible in terms of when they occur. Mata added that if the RFP were to include this flexibility, the PO will need a BC member to recommend it and a process would need to be followed to make the changes that are being discussed. A few BC members voiced their support for incorporating changes towards flexibility in the RFP for future AWP. After a vote was proposed but before commencing, Miller referenced the Program Document stating that BC votes are not appropriate for the AWP; and that it is up to the PO to process technical input from the BC and to then make a recommendation for the CC to vote upon.

Miller and Chart brought up concerns about how SOW 53 (Experimental CPM Stocking) conflicts with stocking age-1 CPM and the expense of genetic testing for those that don't have a PIT tag. Diver explained that the fish and larvae that are stocked are produced by Dexter and within the same genetic pool as other stocked fish. The purpose of SOW 53 stocking was to lessen the effects of channel catfish predation by increasing CPM stocking numbers. Genetic testing would determine that untagged fish were from wild recruitment or stocked fish. Gilbert added that SOW 53 was included also because it is an on-the-ground management action. Durst also mentioned that the translocated fish from SOW 41a (Facilitated passage of Razorback Sucker over the Piute Farms Waterfall) contributed to 7% of larval collection, highlighting the benefit of continuing this management action. Miller suggested that the PO inform the CC of the BC dissention and acknowledged that it is too late to be making significant changes to the AWP.

Scenario 2 - SJRIP receives FY23 funding with a 7% increase to account for inflation. In Scenario 2 the PO includes two of the highest ranked SOWs among BC members (New-6 Assessment of Jicarilla Apache Nation Supplemental Flows and New-5 Recruitment Monitoring of Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow in the San Juan Arm of Lake Powell) and a proposed process to identify, prioritize, implement, and evaluate recovery actions (New-7 Structured Decision Making). To allow these three new SOWs to fit in the budget of this AWP scenario, the PO requested reductions in two projects: Sub-adult/adult monitoring (SOW 19) and the San Juan River Basin Hydrology Model Operation and Maintenance (SOW 13). These reductions may result in a slight decrease in the spatial sampling of sub-adult/adult monitoring and will remove at least one yet to be identified task from the hydrology model SOW.

Mazzone voiced concerns that this AWP scenario seemed disconnected from BC rankings. Schleicher noted that New-7 (SDM) proposal has changed from the comment and review process and suggested to remove it from this year's AWP and resubmit next year. Crockett added that in his experience regarding SDM, the participants needed to invest themselves and abide by the process and is skeptical due to the dissention among the BC that this is the right year for New-7 to be implemented. Some other BC members added that they see the value of New-7 but that FY24 may not be the right time to implement it. Mata reiterated that New-7 was developed because the nonnative subgroup struggled with decision-making, and the PO sought experts to discuss and resolve this issue. When the PO put together presentations and provided New-7 SOW for review three BC members were in favor of it as is, five were in support if comments were addressed, and two were opposed. The current New-7 incorporates the feedback from the BC, but it still ranked lowest on the proposed new SOWs. The PO had a general impression that New-7 would be acceptable if the comments were addressed, and the

other SOWs were not significantly impacted. Chart and Miller both mentioned a phased approach to New-7, such as only implementing task 1 as an intermediate solution. The PO will have a discussion with Dr. Lawson about whether New-7 can be adjusted to solely focus on task 1, if that is not feasible for Dr. Lawson and we can't find an intermediate step for SDM this fiscal year, then the excess funds would go towards "pre-funding" SOW 25, after replenishing the other SOWs that were reduced.

Scenario 3 - The SJRIP receives FY24 funding as proposed by the President's budget. In scenario 3 the PO includes the BC's third highest ranked new SOW (New-4 Using mobile PIT tag antennas to evaluate movement, passage, population demographics, and aggregations of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker) along with the new SOWs identified in Scenario 2 (New-6, New-5, and New-7).

Westfall mentioned being intrigued by the incorporation of fish population data with habitat data (task 3, New-2) and wondered if there was a way to substitute New-2 for New-4 in this scenario. Zeigler said he would like to see a revised SOW and responses to comments for New-2 before giving it further consideration. Mata responded that if New-7 is not funded, those funds would support an RFP for SOW 25 that incorporates flexibility in the timing of the flight. Miller asked if New-7 can be funded for only task 1. Mata responded that there would need to be a new SOW write-up, budget, and review. The PO has looked at other alternatives to New-7, but the budget averages to \$130,000. Chart acknowledged the complications that separating New-7 might present for a post-doctorate project. The PO said they can continue looking into alternatives. Gilbert said that the PO could tell the CC that the BC and PO are working on a revised New-7 and would like to present it later. Mazzone suggested leaving New-7 in Scenarios 2 and 3 for the CC to consider.

SJRIP updates

2023 Navajo Reservoir operations and SJRIP flow targets – Traynham

Observed snowpack was well above average in 2023. A lot of that snow did not melt quickly, creating a longer duration peak. Spring Operations started ramping up mid-May to 4,600 cfs before going back down to 4,300 cfs where they stayed for the duration of the peak before ramping down from Navajo in mid-June. Peak flow was 8,740 cfs on June 2, 2023. $\frac{3}{4}$ flow targets were met – 2,500 cfs 74 days, 5,000 cfs 38 days, and 8,000 cfs 12 days. No days of the 10,000 cfs flow target were met this year.

Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) has started discussions with some landowners downstream of Navajo Reservoir about flow release impacts on their property, there is concern that releasing 5,000 cfs would flood their property. BOR is considering various operations such as alternative ramping opportunities and the landowners are motivated to pursue groundwork to improve the situation.

Status of funding – Pedersen

The draft funding bill includes \$10 million for both recovery programs. This funding is higher than the \$8.64 million that we've seen in previous years, but less than the draft funding proposal of \$11.85 million. Nothing is finalized until the appropriations bill is signed into law. If there is a continuing resolution, funding will remain at current levels of \$8.64 million. If the continuing resolution is temporary, then the budget will reflect what ends up in the appropriations bill if it is signed into law sometime within FY24. If we do get the \$10 million, then our funding options will most closely align with Scenario 3, however if we do not receive the \$10 million then Scenario 1 is more likely.

TNC habitat project planning – Trungale

The notice of the proposal/grant application has not been posted yet. TNC has continued having conversations with Navajo Nation about being a potential partner on this project and continue to pursue opportunity for match-funding. TNC and Nate Caswell discussed the technical aspects of the proposal and hopes to confer with the small habitat group soon. TNC reached out to the BC about two grant options of pursuing habitat planning projects: 1) an expansive multi-project grant, or 2) single-project focused grant. There seemed to be consensus with the BC to try the expansive multi-project grant, however, there were some capacity and funding challenges. Currently TNC is focusing on the single-project grant and has started their proposal that they will submit.

TSC scopes of work for 30% design on fish passage at Piute Farms waterfall and improvements at PNM weir and fish passage – Gilbert

BOR reached out to TSC and started discussing the development of a SOW to refine the two alternatives from the final report. The improvements at PNM weir and the fish passage have been dropped off the priority list. This is in part to see how PNM functions when left open. However, after we put together a SOW for the Waterfall, we can then discuss prioritizing PNM and fish passage improvements again.

30% design for fish passage at APS weir – Gilbert

BOR started the data collection phase, which consists of two trips. BOR will then process the data and produce a digital hydrology model of that facility. All the survey data gathering is scheduled to be captured and processed by the end of August.

Possibility of takeout at Piute Canyon – Trammell

NPS would not be opposed to improving access at Piute Canyon if the Program was willing to do the design, compliance, and funding. NPS expressed not having the capacity or prioritization to pursue a project that involves roadwork and boat ramp development. However, if the BC wanted to discuss a boat ramp solution that did not involve roadwork, Trammell would be willing to go back to NPS and see if that would make a difference. The PO will reach out to Schleicher to see if that would be preferable, since he initiated this conversation.

Navajo Nation data for STReaMS – Durst/Gilbert

Navajo Nation has now provided all the data to Durst. Data is collected electronically, and Durst is working through some errors associated with duplicates, tag errors, and some missing data before uploading to STReaMS.

Wrap up - Gilbert

Schedule meetings out 3 years in advance

We have four regularly meetings (fall, winter, spring, and summer) and the PO's suggestion is to schedule those meetings three-years in advance. PO wanted to make sure the BC wasn't opposed to trying to set dates 3 years in advance. The BC did not voice any opposition to this idea.

Next meetings – Gilbert

The CC meeting is 1 August 2023, and the purpose of that meeting is to approve an AWP. The PO has scheduled next BC meeting for 28-30 November 2023.

Action Items:

- The PO will reach out to Schleicher to clarify if his suggestion of improved accessibility at Piute Canyon could just be a boat ramp or whether roadwork development is also necessary.

Appendix: Scopes of Work

SOW	Title	Responsible Party
7	Rearing endangered fish at the Horsethief Canyon Native Fish Facility Ponds	GJFWCO
11	Razorback Sucker Augmentation at NAPI Grow-Out Ponds	NN, NMFWCO
12	SJRIP PIT TAGS and EQUIPMENT	BOR
53	Experimental CPM Stocking (yr 2 of 6)	NMFWCO, SNARRC
9 & 10	Colorado Pikeminnow Production and Razorback Sucker Rearing at Southwestern ARRC	SNARRC
13	San Juan River Basin Hydrology Model Operation and Maintenance	BOR
14	Improve Stream Gaging and Flow Measurements	BOR
15	Operation of Public Service Company of New Mexico Fish Passage Structure	NN
16	SJRIP San Juan and Animas Rivers Temperature Gauges	BOR
C-1	Capital Projects Management	BOR
51	Data synthesis to inform nonnative fish management in the San Juan (yr 2 of 3)	OSU, USU
52	Evaluating temporal and spatial spawning patterns of Channel Catfish to provide alternatives for nonnative fish control in the San Juan River (yr 2 of 2)	KSU, NMFWCO, ASIR
2	Molecular Techniques to Determine Effective Number of Breeders (Nb) for Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow in the San Juan River	SNARRC
18	Development of a Centralized PIT Tag Database for the SJRIP	CSU
19	Sub-adult and adult large-bodied fish community monitoring	GJFWCO
20	Small-bodied Fishes Monitoring in the San Juan River	NMDGF
21	San Juan River Larval Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow Monitoring	ASIR
21a	Larval Endangered Fish Monitoring RM 180.6 – 168.4	ASIR
22	MSB Curation of Colorado River Basin Larval Fish Collections and Digital Files	UNM
25	San Juan River Annual Habitat Monitoring	RFP
32	SJRIP O&M of Existing PIT Tag Antennas	BOR
41a	Facilitated passage of Razorback Sucker over the Piute Farms Waterfall	GJFWCO, UDWR, NMFWCO
41b	Estimating reproductive contribution of translocated Razorback Sucker	SNARRC
35	Reclamation Program Management	BOR
36	Peer Review for 2024	BOR, PO
37	San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program	NMESFO
38	Remote Biologist for San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program	NMFWCO
FCPP	SJRRIP Biologist (FCPP/NMEP)	NMESFO
39	SJRIP Communication and Public Involvement Plan	NMESFO
New-1	Implementation of the Trojan Sex Chromosome Approach in the San Juan River: Investigation and Validation of Feminization Methods for Channel Catfish	UA, NMDGF, NMFWCO

New-2	Spatial Distribution and Persistence of Low Velocity Habitats Utilized by Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker in the San Juan River	ERI, MEC Inc
New-3	Early Life History of and Potential Spawning Areas for Endangered Fishes in the San Juan River – Lake Powell Inflow Area	OSU
New-4	Using mobile PIT tag antennas to evaluate movement, passage, population demographics, and aggregations of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker	NMDGF, ASIR
New-5	Recruitment Monitoring of Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow in San Juan Arm of Lake Powell	GHFWCO, NMFWCO
New-6	Assessment of Jicarilla Apache Nation Supplemental Flows	NMISC, TNC, ASIR
New-7	Adaptive management plan development to increase efficiency of native fish recovery action implementation (yr 1 of 3)	NMSU
New-8	Endangered Larval Fish Monitoring Downstream of the Piute Waterfall	ASIR