

Biology Committee Meeting
April 23-24, 2003
Grand Junction, Denver, Colorado

Biology Committee: Frank Pfeifer, Tom Nesler, Tom Pitts, John Hawkins, Melissa Trammell, Tom Chart, Mark Wieringa, Kevin Christopherson, Paul Dey, and Bill Davis (Tom Iseman via phone for John Hawkins on Thursday, April 24).

Other participants: John Wullschleger, Chuck McAda, Pat Nelson, Gerry Roehm, Dave Speas, Rob Simmonds, Angela Kantola, Ray Tenney, Rich Valdez, Bob McCue, Doug Osmundson, Ron Brunson, Steve McCall, and Tom Czaplá (via phone).

Assignments are indicated by “>” and at the end of the document.

Wednesday, April 23

1. Review agenda and previous meeting summary - The summary was approved as written. Tom Nesler said Rick Anderson will have his Federal Aid flow report out in mid-June.
2. Native fish response to NNF control (Program Guidance) – Tom Nesler reviewed the draft guidance he prepared. Paul Dey asked the time period Tom would propose to evaluate response by the native fish community and Tom suggested a 3 field seasons should be adequate to show response. Referring to control and treatment reaches being used for both nonnative fish removal and evaluation of native fish response, Frank Pfeifer asked how native fish response would be evaluated in reaches where treatment was deemed effective after one or two years and control reaches abandoned and all reaches treated. Tom replied that he did not believe nonnative fish response could adequately be measured if control reaches were abandoned. Tom Pitts asked if the Committee agrees with the recommendation to use Anderson’s fishery assessment method. The Committee agreed that investigators should *consider* that method (as the guidance indicates), but ultimately, method will depend on species and river reach. The Committee made changes to reflect that. >Angela Kantola will post the revised guidance to the listserver as an addendum to the FY 2004-2005 Program Guidance distributed a few weeks ago.
3. Centrarchid monitoring SOW - Tom Nelsler reviewed Bestgen’s scope of work for a non-field project to develop a centrarchid monitoring protocol (\$12,700 in FY 03 and \$14,900 in FY 04). Frank Pfeifer abstained from voting on this scope of work (as he still believe it’s unnecessary). Tom Pitts said it’s unfortunate the data analysis will take so long, but wants to see the work done. The Committee approved the scope; Angela will distribute the guidance to the Management Committee for approval via e-mail (funds are available).
4. Review reports list – The Committee reviewed the latest list.
5. Hamilton’s Report - Tom Pitts said he hasn’t had time to review Hamilton’s revisions. Pat said he requested responses to the revisions by May 2; if everyone accepts them, then the report would be considered final. The Committee agreed with that approach.
6. Approve Burdick’s report - The Committee approved the report as revised. >Bob Burdick will finalize, print, and distribute the report.
7. Update on NNF public involvement - Kevin said two news releases were done (one for Utah and one for Colorado). In Utah, this is on the Regional Advisory Council agenda May 19 in Vernal and May 20 in Green River. Kevin said they are taking the lead in Utah (the Service is also welcome), and will give a big picture overview of recovery and discuss nonnative fish removal as part of that. A UPI reporter who saw the news release wants to do a report on

nonnative fish removal; Kevin said they suggested a story with a broader context, to which the reporter agreed. The reporter will go on one of Utah's pikeminnow monitoring trips. Frank Pfeifer said public meetings are scheduled for Grand Junction, Steamboat, and Craig next week.

Frank noted that Program partners met in December to discuss implementing a public involvement plan and scopes of work have been revised to include control and treatment reaches at Colorado's request. However, due to the length of time it has taken to implement the public involvement plan, Colorado has still not issued permits for nonnative fish removal; thus, the removal to have been conducted in the Colorado portion of the White River in conjunction with the pikeminnow population estimate won't be done this year. Frank therefore recommends another addendum to Program Guidance for nonnative fish removal from the White River (pikeminnow abundance work ends there this year, and they weren't allowed to remove nonnative fish as a part of that as originally planned). Tom Chart noted that won't afford the pikeminnow a rest from electrofishing. >Frank will draft guidance for the Program Director's office to approve and post to the listserver as an addendum to Program Guidance (the guidance will address the fish stress issue). Frank said they've also had to delay their removal work on the Yampa River. Tom Nesler said Colorado required implementing of an I&E strategy, landowners to be contacted, and scopes of work to be revised. Over 80% of the landowners in the Yampa Basin have indicated they're okay with northern pike removal and John Hawkins has checked with landowners whose property he needed access to for smallmouth bass removal, so Tom sees the landowner part as done. The meetings next week will inform the public of the nonnative fish removal plans, then on May 1, Tom expects to be able to send collection permit amendment letters to Bruce McCloskey for signature approving the nonnative fish removal. Frank said the work also will be delayed because Colorado has asked for a variance to allow some of the removed fish to be translocated to Elkhead and Kenney reservoirs, and Utah and the Service have not yet responded to that request. Tom Nesler said the key question is whether northern pike can be placed in Elkhead. Frank said that the Service will ask what measures will be taken to prevent escapement when Elkhead is enlarged. (Ray Tenney said they have no plans for containment.) Kevin added that Utah also has worked with BLM to include an explanation of the nonnative fish removal work with public permits for Whitewater. John Hawkins lamented the opportunities we're missing to get a pike abundance estimate.

8. Hawkins electrofishing report – John reviewed the history of the report, the additional analyses he conducted to finish the report, and other analyses which might still be done. Tom Chart noted a correction needed to the x-axis labels on the figure on page 22. Rich Valdez said a study is being proposed in the Grand Canyon of humpback chub handling stress and asked what John would recommend; John recommended that survival rates may be a better measure than recapture rates. The Committee accepted the report as final. >John will finalize, print and distribute the report.
9. Pit tag update – Tom Czapla said the lower basin is testing the new type of PIT-tag reader which is supposed to be able to read both the old and new tags. Tom recommends we track the results of the lower basin work and if they determine that the new readers *will* read both types of tags, then the Program should switch over to the new type of tags and provide new readers that read both types of tags. Frank said they tried the new readers a few years ago, but they failed to read the old tags ~50% of the time; so unless they have a newer reader, he doesn't believe they will work. >Tom Czapla will investigate further as to whether this is a newer version of the reader. Rob Simmonds said the new readers have three settings that read new tags only, old tags only, or both new and old tags. So far, the latter setting is not as sensitive as necessary. The setting that reads old tags only is more sensitive, but it's about a 10-button process to switch from one setting to another. Rich said if BioMark would change this to a toggle switch instead of a 10-step menu reset, the problem would be solved. Frank

and others emphasized the value of the data and our need to be able to read the old tags for many years to come.

10. Stocking update – Tom discussed a summary of 2003 propagation activities and said we're on track for meeting the numbers and sizes of fish called for in the integrated stocking plan. The summary recommends stocking pikeminnow even though the diversions aren't screened yet. Several Committee members disagreed and recommended holding and stocking them after irrigation season. >Chuck McAda will check to make they can hold the fish until fall. Tom Czapla said we requested bonytail and pikeminnow larvae from Dexter for Mumma and bonytail larvae for Wahweap; Dexter said they can meet those requests. Bonytail from Mumma have already been stocked this spring as well as razorback from Ouray. Kevin said the fish stocked from Ouray are showing up in the northern pike sampling.
11. Stock assessment workshop – Tom Czapla provided a handout and said GCMRC has asked upper basin folks to attend a stock assessment workshop either June 10-13 or July 1-3. Chuck McAda said GCMRC put our data in the models last year and this year's data won't be available by the proposed meeting dates. David Speas said he understands the workshop purpose may have changed somewhat. Chuck and Dave said data has to be prepared before it can be run. Dave suggested talking to Lou Coggins. >Tom and Chuck will talk to Steve Gloss and Lou and suggest that the workshop would be better in November or December so that the preliminary work can be done on the data.
12. YOY pikeminnow monitoring - Tom Czapla repeated the Program Director's office perspective that they don't see a need to continue to collect these data. They would prefer that we first attempt to correlate relationships of data already collected with environmental data (e.g. temperature, flow relationships, etc.). Kevin said Utah continued to fund this work on their own, partly to continue the long-term trend data, but he also noted that the work was cited in Osmundson's report and that this kind of data may be helpful in now monitoring native fish response to nonnative fish removal and other management activities. Kevin said he also thinks we could expand the data collected for very little money. Melissa said she supports continuing the work, noting it may help us determine stocking success (e.g., whether stocked bonytail are reproducing). Tom Chart agreed and noted that this data set has been used frequently in various reports we've approved. Tom noted that for the first time, no YOY pikeminnow were found in the upper Green River reach this last year. Melissa added that these kind of data would be very helpful if we pursue the stock assessment methodology. Dave Speas agreed, saying he supports continuing collecting data for this long-term data set. Frank supported continuing the work, but said he doesn't know that it will be helpful in determining bonytail reproduction or that it should be used for detecting response to nonnative fish control. >Kevin will work with Tom and Bob in the Program Director's office to prepare an addendum to Program Guidance (which will subsequently be posted to the listserver).
13. RZ floodplain model update – Pat said the Program Director's office views this as an adaptive management tool that doesn't need a standard report review process since it will be revised and updated regularly. Rich distributed a summary of the model, noting he's tried to simplify the parameters as much as possible. Many of the calculations have been hidden so the whole model can be viewed on one worksheet. Rich said the model shows that the closer the floodplains are to the spawning site, the better survival you'll get. Rich said he does need to add a size-specific survival factor to the model (>Kevin will provide recent data to help with that). Frank asked what we most need to know to make this model more useful. Rich said there are several key questions: how much entrainment do we really get, what survival do we really get in the floodplains, and what kind of mainstem survival do we get. Rich noted that egg production increases significantly in fish when they reach 450mm (as opposed to 400mm), significantly increasing survival due to the increased number of eggs. >Rich will provide a draft report and the model for the Committee to review (after the Program Director's office provides comments), then the Committee will decide if further peer review is needed. Rich added that

the amount of floodplain space needed is also related to the size of the fish (and therefore, how long the fish stay in the floodplain).

14. Thunder Ranch (430 acre perpetual easement on the Green River) – Frank Pfeifer said an offer was made, but the landowner believes the appraisal is about 50% too low, and will provide a counter-offer justifying a higher price (based on value of gravel, etc.).

Thursday, April 24

15. Osmundson's NNF control report – The Committee asked >Doug to provide comments on Bestgen's scope of work for a non-field project to develop a centrarchid monitoring protocol. Doug will clarify recommendation #4 of his report (experimentally manipulate *physical* structure...). The Committee approved the report, which >Doug Osmundson will finalize, print, and distribute.
16. Update on peak flow predictions – Tom Chart said Reclamation is still operating Flaming Gorge under the 1992 opinion and this will be another dry year. The Service requested a larger volume on the peak to try to inundate floodplains, and Reclamation has agreed to release up to 6,000 cfs for up to 4 days during the one week release period, and try to match the Yampa peak. If the Yampa peaks at 8,000 cfs (the most probable peak is 9,000 cfs), then Reclamation will release the 6,000 cfs to attain the 14,000 cfs target (if it doesn't appear the Yampa will reach 8,000 cfs, then they will just release 4,000 cfs).
17. Duchesne River larval fish report - Tom Pitts said he thought we'd agreed to wait for Tim's synthesis report before we reviewed these individual reports. Committee members said we agreed to handle the Duchesne reports like the Aspinall reports with a synthesis report and the other reports standing alone. Frank said the synthesis report will be out in about 2 weeks. Tom Pitts said the first paragraph of the introduction focuses on the impacts of CUP, but does not mention other diversions which affect water availability. Tom said neither this report or Tim's contain a basis for the statement in the introduction that says "Captures upstream of critical habitat suggest that the Duchesne River may have a greater role in recovery than previously anticipated." Kevin agreed Ron should provide a citation or remove that (since only one suspected larval razorback was found in this reach). If the statement was meant as justification for why the study was conducted, then that should be clarified. On page 10, the reference to the relationship of nonnative densities to flows should also reference Tyus (who suggested that the impacts of flows on nonnative fish are temporary). Frank said Nelser's work on the Yampa that documented this relationship also should be referenced. Tom Chart asked that the author identify the period of record used to generate the exceedance values referenced on page 5. Tom Chart also noted that the statement about speckled dace density at the end of page 9 doesn't match the CPUE data; it should really reference relative *abundance*, not density. >Kevin or Ron will make the requested changes and post to the listserver. If no comments are received within a week of posting, the report will be considered approved and it will be finalized, printed, and distributed.
18. Set approval protocol and discussion on Gunnison Flow report – The Committee will have a conference call from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 14; comments will be posted to the listserver or Biology Committee by May 9. Mark W. distributed a set of comments from Argonne, and said WAPA will submit additional comments. >The Program Director's office will set up the call. Chuck McAda said the minority voters (from the previous round) asked for the Pitlick recommendations and that's what's now in the report. Tom Pitts asked how the instantaneous peaks are reflected and Chuck described those (from table 4.5 on page 4-12). Chuck said he updated information (final reports instead of draft reports, etc.), but the bulk of the changes are in section 4. The Committee agreed that when they vote on the report, it will be one vote on the report and the recommendations together. Tom Chart expressed frustration

over the process on this report and suggested that it might be good to give some thought and discussion to a better process for how to deal with flow recommendations in the future. Bill Davis noted that a number of the questions raised were ones of hydrology and water availability rather than biology. Chuck said he believes questions of water availability should be dealt with in the EIS process. Frank agreed, noting that water availability has been a separate issue in every other set of flow recommendations. Kevin thought the process was cumbersome, especially when the subcommittee that developed the revised recommendations (with the majority feeling left out of those negotiations). Tom Pitts said we also need to clarify what happens once the flow recommendations are approved – what is the role of flow recommendations (some mistakenly think they become “the law of the river”). ESA compliance is dependent on the subsequent biological opinion, not on the flow recommendations themselves. The Committee agreed a report can go forward with a minority opinion (which doesn’t necessarily represent failure). Tom Pitts said he asked that evaluation of flow recommendations be put in Program Guidance and that those evaluations will be more important than the initial flow recommendations. (This is in the RIPRAP, but not yet in Program Guidance.)

19. Duchesne River Reports on Adult Fish and Base Flow – Mark Wieringa said he wasn’t able to print the second report. Adult fish report: Melissa Trammell suggested running the document through a spell-checker and technical editing. >Tim Modde and the Program Director’s office will take care of that. Tom Pitts said conclusion #1 should say “and *this use* seems to be confined...” for clarification. In the recommendations, “flows sufficient to protect” should be “flows sufficient to support.” At the top of page 11 that discusses pikeminnow use in Lodore Canyon, Tom Chart said Chris Kitcheyan reported some fish are now overwintering there. Tim will reference that. Tim said he’s only making a comparison about seasonal use. Tim will clarify the statement. >Tim will make the necessary revisions (including technical editing) and finalize the report. Base flow report: Kevin Christopherson complemented Bruce Haines for his continuing work on this (and other projects) after his retirement. Tim will clarify the percent flow reduction in the sentence in the introduction that says “the result has been an estimated reduction...” >Paul Dey will provide qualifying language for Tim to include regarding the potential problem with the curve-break analysis. “Chapter” in the first paragraph of the Executive Summary should be changed to “report.” Melissa said report’s conclusions seem to contradict the adult use report (which says the forage base is reduced from historic levels and may be why pikeminnow don’t use the river as much now as they may have historically). Tim said he’s trying to suggest that the river is supporting fish at a lower level over the last 25 years, and if we want to maintain that, these are the required flows. Melissa said she’d like to see what the synthesis document says in this regard. Tim will clarify the language. Tim said the curve break was never meant to be a minimum flow. Some of the discussion about historic flow perhaps should be deleted from this report and just included in the synthesis report. Melissa that the “lasting negative effects” portion of the Executive Summary isn’t part of the conclusions. >Tim will carefully edit out the portions of concern using redline/strikeout (e.g., discussion of historic flows and transgressions of the curve-break flow) in this report and post the affected text to the listserver. If no changes are requested after that, then the report will be considered approved. This report will just focus on the curve-break (the discussion of frequency of flows below 115 cfs can remain in the report, but the recommendation regarding whether or not such flows are acceptable will be deleted).
20. Schedule next meeting – The Committee will meet July 14-15 in Grand Junction at the Bureau of Reclamation office; starting at 1:00 p.m. on the 14th and going through ~3:00 p.m. (possibly later) on the 15th. If the Committee needs to address anything prior to that meeting, they will schedule a conference call.

Adjourn 11:15 a.m.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Angela Kantola will add David Speas to the Biology Committee interested parties list.
2. Bob Burdick will finalize, print, and distribute his pikeminnow translocation report.
3. Angela Kantola will post the native fish response to nonnative fish control guidance to the listserv as an addendum to the FY 2004-2005 Program Guidance.
4. Frank Pfeifer will draft guidance nonnative fish removal from the White River (pikeminnow abundance work ends there this year, and they weren't allowed to remove nonnative fish as a part of that as originally planned) for the Program Director's office to approve and post to the listserv as an addendum to Program Guidance.
5. John Hawkins will finalize, print and distribute his electrofishing report.
6. Tom Czapla will investigate further as to whether this is a newer version of the PIT tag reader that reads both the new and old tags.
7. Chuck McAda will check to make they can pikeminnow for stocking until after the irrigation season since the diversions aren't screened yet.
8. Tom Czapla and Chuck McAda will talk to Steve Gloss and Lou and suggest that the stock assessment workshop would be better in November or December so that the preliminary work can be done on the data.
9. Kevin Christopherson will work with Tom and Bob in the Program Director's office to prepare an addendum to Program Guidance for YOY pikeminnow monitoring (which will subsequently be posted to the listserv).
10. Kevin Christopherson will provide recent data to Rich to help add a size-specific survival factor to the floodplain model.
11. Rich Valdez will provide a draft report and the floodplain model for the Biology Committee to review (after the Program Director's office provides comments), then the Committee will decide if further peer review is needed.
12. Doug Osmundson will provide comments on Bestgen's scope of work for a non-field project to develop a centrarchid monitoring protocol.
13. Doug will finalize, print, and distribute the nonnative fish control by electrofishing report
14. Kevin Christopherson or Ron Brunson will make the requested changes to the Duchesne early life stages report and post it to the listserv. If no comments are received within a week of posting, the report will be considered approved and will be finalized.
15. The Program Director's office will set up a Biology Committee conference call from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 14 (Gunnison River flow recommendations).
16. Tim will make the necessary revisions (including technical editing) and finalize the Duchesne adult fish report.