

Biology Committee Conference Call
February 27, 2004

Biology Committee: Frank Pfeifer, Tom Pitts, John Hawkins, Melissa Trammell, Tom Chart, Gary Burton, Kevin Christopherson, John Wullschleger, Tom Nesler and Kevin Gelwicks.

Other participants: Dave Speas, Bob Muth, Pat Nelson, Ray Tenney, Tim Modde, and Tom Czaplá.

1. Criteria for Screening the Enlarged Elkhead Reservoir.—The Committee discussed the PD's proposal and written comments from Melissa Trammell. Bob Muth introduced the PD's proposal by saying that the proposal was designed to screen controlled releases of water up to 540 cfs through the bottom tower (450 cfs) and service outlets (90 cfs) to minimize the potential risk of nonnative fish escapement to a reasonable degree, and plan for future contingencies to expand screening if results of the nonnative fish management efforts in the river and results of spillway escapement monitoring indicate a need. Questions were asked about the 5,000 acre-foot draw-down during the base-flow period, and whether that water was the fish augmentation water and therefore impacts to the peak were analyzed in the Yampa River Management Plan/EA. Muth responded that it was the fish augmentation water and impacts to the peak were analyzed. The intent of mentioning the draw-down in the screening proposal was to demonstrate that spills would be further reduced. Kevin Christopherson noted that fish escapement over spillways in other reservoirs often occurs later in the year as water temperatures increase, suggesting the need for a spillway screen. Frank Pfeifer said that historically most fish escaped from Elkhead during major draw downs; he is comfortable with screening the full 540 cfs controlled release, and monitoring for spillway escapement of fish. Melissa said that the translocation of smallmouth bass may exceed the carrying capacity of Elkhead, thereby increasing the potential for escapement because fish may try move out of reservoir due to overcrowding. Pfeifer commented that the translocated fish will be tagged. Tom Chart mentioned Colorado's desire to have a warm-water fishery in Elkhead, and agreed that there is a need to monitor escapement of fish from the reservoir. Pfeifer and Tim Modde said they would rather not see largemouth bass stocked into Elkhead as mentioned in the Lake Management Plan. Tom Nesler said largemouth bass will be removed from the plan, and that stocking/translocation of smallmouth bass will cease if it is determined that carrying capacity has been reached. Nesler believes it is important to build for all the contingency options in case results of nonnative management and monitoring activities indicate that we need to ramp-up screening activities. If excessive escapement is identified, then further translocation will not be supported. Chart asked if that meant that screening of the spillway will come into play at the same time? Nesler responded by saying that is when new information is presented to the committee, and consideration of lethal removal could result. John Hawkins asked why not screen the upper and middle tower intakes during construction? Muth responded by saying that, currently, their use is uncertain but we would install the hardware necessary for future installation of screens, if needed. Ray Tenney explained that the upper and middle intakes are included in construction in case of future needs to mitigate water quality. Pfeifer recommended that the position of committee should be that all controlled releases of water up to 540 cfs be

screened (i.e., during construction, install screens on the bottom tower intake and service outlet, and install the hardware to screen the upper and middle intakes in the future, if needed; no release of unscreened water from the tower outlet). Tenney recommended screening all the tower intakes during construction and bill the Recovery Program accordingly; he expressed concern about future financial responsibilities if the Program ends before the need for screens on the upper and middle intakes is determined. Tom Pitts stressed that these discussions are premature; build what is currently identified/needed and not prognosticate what may be needed in the future. Nesler believes that the commitment to screen the upper and middle intakes, in the future, before they are used for any purpose (i.e., they would never be used unless they were screened) can be handled in the appropriate Elkhead agreements. Tenney said, rather than put it in the agreements, he would prefer to make the appropriate people aware that if the upper two intakes are needed for use, then those that have interest can come forward to get the work needed done. Gary Burton and Melissa agreed with Nesler's approach (i.e., an agreement needs to in place that the upper and middle intakes would never be used unless they are screened). **Committee's Recommendation: all water that leaves via the outlet works will be screened; agreements in place that the upper and middle intakes will not be used unless they are screened; install the anchors for a spillway net; and reconsider future installation of a spillway net (or some other screening) based on fish data.** The Biology Committee will develop criteria for an escapement threshold at a future meeting. > *Bob Muth will revise the PD's proposal based on the Biology Committee discussion and e-mail the revised proposal for committee concurrence.* Melissa asked if we can dispense with the translocation of smallmouth bass. Nesler said that the answer is no. Pitts agreed that translocation of smallmouth bass is part of the deal with Colorado. Burton asked if there other things that can be done to increase the mortality of the fish going over the spillway? Tenney responded that a suite of fish containment options were considered for the spillway, but none appeared feasible.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Bob Muth will revise the PD's proposal based on the Biology Committee discussion and e-mail the revised proposal for committee concurrence.