

Dated: November 12, 2020

Biology Committee Webinar Summary

Wednesday, November 5, 2020 9:00 am – 12:00 pm MDT

BC: Dave Speas, Derek Fryer, Dale Ryden, Harry Crockett, Melissa Trammell, Tom Pitts, Paul Badame, Pete Cavalli

Attendees: Kevin McAbee, Julie Stahl, Kevin Bestgen, Tom Chart, Matt Breen, Mike Partlow, Keena Elbin, Matt Fry, Chris Smith, Tildon Jones

CONVENED: 9:00 a.m.

1. Review and modify agenda – Dave Speas welcomed all participants. The agenda was modified as reads below. DFC will be posting materials to their website the week of November 16. Dave is providing information about activities in the upper Colorado River basin during 2020. Please send any information about need to know items to him for distribution.
2. Fate of Black Rocks humpback chub at Grand Valley Hatchery – Melissa Trammell said the white paper on Dinosaur National Monument reintroduction currently indicates that fish from Black Rocks should not be the first choice for reintroduction purposes in that area. Melissa said Rich Valdez has just incorporated all comments from the ad hoc committee and she will distribute the white paper to the BC within a few days. She anticipates seeking approval for that report at the December BC meeting. There are 11 fish from Black Rocks that are currently taking up one pond at the Grand Valley Hatchery. Melissa suggests releasing those fish back to Black Rocks to make room for other species at the hatchery. Dale Ryden agreed and noted that we should keep them in the wild until we have a plan for reintroduction and redundancy. Kevin McAbee said the Bohn *et al.* (2019) humpback chub genetics report put the genetics of Black Rocks, Westwater, and Cataract all together so there is redundancy on the landscape. Recent sampling in both Black Rocks and Westwater shows increasing populations in both systems, minimizing the need for refuge populations. Dave asked why we brought these fish in initially. Dale said the fish were collected before we knew a lot about the genetic needs of humpback chub. Black Rocks fish were easily accessible and collectable. Dale said that, if approved, the chubs will be released in the spring when warmer water temperatures support better survival and transport. The hatchery space is not needed now, but will be needed in spring. The fish are PIT-tagged and their release will be documented in STRaMS. Tom Chart brought up the recent fires that threatened the Colorado River and the subsequent burn scars. He asked if having fish in refugia was important in that context. Pete Cavalli said it is worth considering. Dale said if that is the purpose, we should consider bringing in more and ensuring redundancy in the hatchery system, matching actions to a developed plan with a specified purpose. Paul Badame agreed. Dave

recommended continuing on with planning to release, but potentially reevaluating based on if storms manifest in the next few months. Melissa recommended working on that plan over the next few months. The BC noted the hatchery needs group should be part of this discussion and planning efforts. Tom Chart noted the vulnerability of the concentrated humpback chub populations in Black Rocks and Westwater to spills and fire-runoff. Dale said making this decision by next spring was optimal.

3. Plan for 2021 Researcher's Meeting and schedule January BC – Tildon Jones asked the BC to hold the dates of January 12 and 13th for the Researchers Meeting. The GCDAMP annual reporting meeting is the following week. The PDO's proposal is to provide four sessions across the two days focused on upper basin topics, each about 3 hours with a healthy break in the middle. This would allow for 8 talks in each session, with 32 talks over the entirety of the meeting. Tildon recommended the meeting occur online through Teams. Kevin and Dave recommended attending talks outside the basin that are easy to attend this year because they are all virtual. >The PDO will share the TWG announcement on the list-server. Typically the call for papers goes out in early December, after annual reports are submitted. Tildon is accepting suggestions about topics that are of special interest to the BC or recommended that the BC reach out to individual PIs. The January BC meeting will be tentatively scheduled for Friday, January 15th from 9-2. Dave asked that we have a conversation about how to increase our ability to use antenna data to make our monitoring efforts more cost effective. Tildon will work with Dave to brainstorm some talks for that session. He noted we could have a group discussion as well. Dave will write to Mary Conner to ask her to present. Pete asked about a report from the Nonnative Fish Workgroup. Kevin said he is planning three species-specific coordination calls at the end of the year with PIs. They discuss specifics of annual sampling, including biology, access, safety etc. In addition, one of the sessions will be nonnative fish focused which will include discussion time to serve the same purpose as a workshop. Pete supported Kevin's approach.
4. Wetland update – Chris Smith said holding water was difficult in Old Charley, draining only lasted about 1 week. Six razorback sucker were captured and released there. In early August, three razorback sucker were captured in a fyke net, so they anticipated larger numbers would come out of the wetland. So far 46 razorback sucker have been found at Johnson and draining is continuing. Twelve fyke nets in August managed to catch 120 razorback sucker in a few hours, indicating that there are or were many razorback sucker in Johnson Bottom. Both air and water temperatures were high at that time. Chris said some were large enough to tag (>90 mm) and could be released into the river, but he was concerned about survival. Average total length was 104 mm (66-165 mm). Wildlife cameras did pick up on pelicans visiting Johnson Bottom. Many of the fish currently being released are not PIT-tagged because they are too small. Chris has found adult carp that overwintered in the kettle, but they have not been seen in draining. Pete recommended considering when fish are released from the wetland to ensure we are maximizing survival and was surprised about the drop in numbers from August to draining. Chris set antennas at Razorback Bar this summer (delayed by COVID), detecting about 1/10th of the normal number of unique razorback sucker, likely because of delayed sampling. However, one tag documented the presence of a Stewart Lake juvenile appearing at the spawning bar. Mike Partlow said the tag was inserted in 2015. Bob Schelly caught about a

dozen age-1 fish in the wetland that likely jumped over the weir to enter the wetland after being released at the end of the season in 2014. The fish was tagged at 281 mm when it was captured during midsummer sampling in the wetland. The fish grew to 312 mm by the end of the summer. It was detected again in 2017 and then captured in the Stewart Lake drain. The fish was detected again in 2019 on an antenna. ***Now the fish is 6 years old and is present at the spawning bar, documenting the first true wild recruit from Stewart Lake.*** Mike said a number of the fish that reentered the wetland in 2015 have shown up multiple times on antennas. It suggests that there may be a need to hold fish longer in the wetlands. In addition, Mike is hopeful that 2016 fish will begin appearing at the spawning bar in coming years. Mike added that numbers from Stewart have been lower than in previous years, with 32 fish captured at the trap in 2020. The sizes were also smaller than expected given warm temps and the long growing season (86mm average TL; 55-101mm, with a 156 mm outlier). Most were 70-100mm.

Stewart was filled nearly to capacity this year which is similar to 2019, when larger fish were seen in the wetland. Chris Smith did stock a few classroom fish into the wetland and one age-1 razorback sucker was moved back into the wetland when it was found in the drain early in the season. None of those fish were captured during draining. Pete asked if water temperatures likely got too warm this year. Mike said continuous temperatures and DO probes were not installed in the wetlands. Spot checks indicated that DO was still good during mid-summer. He noted that in the past, the loggers have documented long periods of very low DO and very high temperatures, so he is not convinced that is the problem. Pete asked if a higher number of predators were seen. Mike said he did not see any additional fish predators in the wetland, but did see additional cormorants during draining. Pete recommended considering whether hazing the birds is appropriate to decrease predation. Dave asked how much monitoring occurred over the summer. Mike said he set fyke nets over two nights, but did not document any fish. Currently, they still have one open channel that splits into a Y which is where the net is set. He is not sure where additional nets could be set. Pete asked if the marsh-master treatment had an effect. Mike said the marsh-master treatment was not successful, which may have been because water was not available to ensure that rhizomes went anoxic after the treatment. Construction on the canal did not allow for timely delivery of supplemental water. Mike did use a diesel pump to push water from the river into the wetland, but they were not able to fill the wetland completely. Mike does not recommend repeating the treatment as he does not think it is possible to get enough water into the wetland to cover the stalks deeply enough. Through Utah's Water Restoration Initiative, UDWR treated the wetland with Rodeo herbicide+ last summer. Results of that treatment will be visible next spring. Open water remains as limited as it was. Matt Breen asked if anyone had an update on the gate seal repair. Tildon said Ryan Proctor is working on scheduling. >Tildon will check with Ryan again.

5. FY22 and FY23 Budgets – Julie introduced the topic as one discussion in many meetings to determine work plan guidance for the next round of scopes of work. We are currently over budget with the expected expenses from ongoing projects by about \$1.1M in each year. About \$600K of that can be carried by USFWS carryover, but we need to resolve the remaining \$500K per year. The goal of this meeting is to look at possible options for dealing with this issue, and start a dialogue between the PDO and BC on Program Guidance. Julie sent a table to the BC for considering budget

amounts and areas that might be adjusted. Julie explained what was in the table. The “22 base numbers” is the starting point, and came from FY2022 budget estimates in the last round of SOWs. Melissa asked if the 5% cuts from previous years were incorporated. Julie noted that the answer is likely a mixed bag and she promised to look into the issue further. The program coordinators explained the potential cuts put forth, which are summarized in a separate memo. Julie asked that the BC spend some time with the various scenarios on the table and return to the December meeting with recommendations on how they would like to move forward (most specifically with a set of targeted cuts or an across the board cut that affects all programs equally). The BC thanked the PDO for their hard work on this topic.

6. Consent agenda –Approval of August 2020 Biology Committee summary – *The Committee approved the summary.*