



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

Dated: April 29, 2016

March 7, 2016 Final Management Committee Conference Call Summary

Participants: See Attachment 1

CONVENE: 12:00 p.m.

Topic: Comments from the Bureau of Reclamation and Colorado River Energy Distributors Association on the Recovery Program's 2016 Green River Flow Request.

Tom Chart thanked those who helped with the first draft of the letter. The draft sent to the MC has been revised to incorporate comments from the Technical Committees with the exceptions of more in-depth comments provided by Dave Speas with Reclamation and Leslie James asked about a hydropower cost analysis.

1. Reclamation's Comments

- *Program Flow Request 1 - Larval Trigger - Reclamation supports continuation of the Larval Trigger Study Plan (LTSP) experiment provided that:*

*1) USFWS recognizes LTSP operations comply with the Biological Opinion even if 2006 Record of Decision (ROD) targets are not met; 2) the Program considers securing, restoring, and managing more floodplain habitats in the long term; and
3) that the Program should revise the LTSP to account for changes in levee breach elevations.*

PDO response / suggested path forward - 1) we believe USFWS provided blanket ES coverage to Reclamation for LTSP operations in their letter last year, but we will seek a clear position on this from USFWS prior to the call; 2&3) we will work with the technical committees on these requests.

- *Program Flow Request 2 - Elevated Base Flows –*
 - 1) Reclamation suggests that the Program postpone the request for an elevated base flow experiment (as described in the draft flow letter) until at least 2017 so that they can identify impacts of the proposed base flows from a NEPA perspective, seek NEPA compliance where necessary, conduct more public outreach, and to provide time for the Program to develop an elevated base flow study plan;*
 - 2) As an alternative, in 2016, Reclamation proposes that Flaming Gorge Technical Work Group continue to exercise the seasonal flow variability recognized in the ROD to elevate the base flows in Reach 2 as much as possible - with recognition that this alternative would not likely achieve the Bestgen and Hill (2015a; in review) proposed base flows should 2016 be classified as a dry year; and*
 - 3) Reclamation reiterates that the ROD obligates their base flow operations at the dam to target flows in Reach 2. And, this assumes (but not requires) that Reach 3 targets will be met most of the time.*

PDO response / suggested path forward – 1&2) the PDO defers to Reclamation's interpretation of how our experimental elevated base flow request (and other experimental flow requests) complies with their

2006 ROD. However, we would like to discuss the latitude of these 'experimental' flow requests within the context of the ROD and in light of the Program's ongoing review and possible revision of Muth et al. 2000, which we believe would be the formal revision of the Recovery Program's flow recommendations. We agree that a study plan for this flow experiment should be developed and that it should likely be integrated with the existing LTSP and the pending Smallmouth Bass Spike Flow Study Plans. 3) We agree with Reclamation's position regarding flow targets in Reaches 2 and 3, i.e., under the ROD, the focus should be on achieving endangered fish flow targets in Reach 2.

- *Program Flow Request 3 - Smallmouth Bass Spike Flow – Reclamation comments are focused on the need for public outreach and again, concerns of how this flow experiment would comply with the 2006 ROD.*

PDO response / suggested path forward – we commit to assisting Reclamation with this important public outreach in any way we can.

MC discussion: Tom Pitts noted Reclamation apparently is questioning whether they can meet some of these recommendations without re-visiting NEPA. Tom Chart said Reclamation recognizes flexibility in the ROD related to larval trigger, but does have questions about NEPA compliance as related to elevated base flows and spike flows. Brent Uilenberg agreed. Dave Speas said Reclamation management has asked the question as to whether NEPA would be required on base flows and spike flows. Brent noted that the flexibility will depend, in part, on snowpack.

Henry Maddux said Utah has concerns about what conditions under which there would enough water for a larval flow trigger in addition to elevated base flows, and perhaps spike flows, and have suggested some modeling would be helpful. Henry liked the option Reclamation suggested to do what they can to elevate base flows to the extent possible within the ROD. Tom Chart said he knew requests #2 and #3 were pushing into new areas and perhaps testing the notion of experimentation. Reclamation's comments clarify that they are not comfortable categorizing requests 2 and 3 "experimental", at least until they have time to more fully explore flexibility in the ROD. Tom said he thinks we can work from the language that Dave provided: "We would be pleased, however, to work within the FGTWG in 2016 in an attempt to increase base flows within our existing authority under the 2006 Record of Decision" for this year.

Tom Chart said the next step would be to revise the letter and send it back to the Committee for e-mail approval. Steve Wolff added that if any changes result in large amounts of water being moved downstream, we also will need to consider impacts on Lake Powell and the Interim Guidelines. Others agreed. Patrick McCarthy said he supports the recommendation to test elevated baseflows, but avoiding triggering NEPA while Reclamation considers the flexibility it has within existing authority this year.

Henry asked if we have the components to evaluate an elevated base flow. Tom Chart said the ongoing larval sampling (Project 22f) and fall young-of-year monitoring (Project 138) served as the basis of Bestgen and Hill's recommendation for elevated baseflows and therefore should suffice as an evaluation of such an experiment. However, we also commit to develop a base flow study plan over the next year (as we would for a spike flow study plan as described in the letter). Tom said we need to consider how to integrate all these flow study plans to provide a way for the FGTWG to think about potentially competing flow requests. Dave noted that Beverly Heffernan has suggested such a plan also be actionable so could be evaluated from a NEPA perspective.

Shane Capron asked Tom Chart how this fits in with FG flow recommendation process. Tom Chart said the team looking at revising the flow recommendations is considering what we've learned from the larval trigger as well as Bestgen and Hill's work on base flows and spike flows. Tom asked if a revised set of

flow recommendations is what Reclamation will need to explore supplemental or new NEPA. Henry and Melissa suggested that perhaps some lesser, interim NEPA compliance be considered to more fully implement the request next year. Reclamation thought this was possible; however formal internal discussions to this end haven't yet occurred. Melissa asked if experimental approach would include the flow spike, as well; and Committee members responded that it should.

>Tom Chart will incorporate the Committee's discussion/conclusions here into a revised draft flow request letter and send it to the Committee for quick e-mail review.

Tom Chart noted that Reach 2 ROD targets may be missed in meeting larval trigger flows, but it seems like that's been part of the process for several years. Larry Crist said the Service has been supportive of these requests and don't see an issue with the potential missed Reach 2 ROD targets.

2. *CREDA's request for a cost / impact assessment (see above) - PDO questions: a) Would Argonne National Labs (or another entity) conduct that assessment? b) Who would pay for the assessment? c) PDO assumes such an analysis would occur after the experimental flow has occurred so that Reclamation can provide a baseline scenario?; d) What do we do with the results of this analysis (e.g., include this in our accounting of 'estimated hydropower replacement costs' and / or factor into the MC's approval of future flow requests?). Leslie e-mail to Tom Chart: "What I was looking for was an estimated impact (by WAPA) of the flow request at the time the request is being considered. The post-mortem analysis would need to be done anyway by WAPA for their internal bookkeeping, so my interest was to ensure that hydropower impacts are considered along with all other considerations related to the flow request."*

MC discussion: Shane Capron said he doesn't think a hydropower cost analysis would be needed this year, because operations would be covered by the existing ROD and could be addressed through any supplemental NEPA. >Henry Maddux will talk with Leslie.

ADJOURN: 12:26 p.m.

Assignments:

1. Tom Chart will incorporate the Committee's discussion/conclusions here into a revised draft flow request letter and send it to the Committee for quick e-mail review.
2. Henry Maddux will talk with Leslie James about a hydropower cost analysis being done as part of NEPA.

Attachment 1: Participants

Colorado River Management Committee Conference Call, March 7, 2016

Management Committee Voting Members:

Brent Uilenberg	Bureau of Reclamation
Michelle Garrison	State of Colorado
Tom Pitts	Upper Basin Water Users
Steve Wolff	State of Wyoming
Tom Chart for Seth Willey	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Melissa Trammell	National Park Service
Patrick McCarthy	The Nature Conservancy
Shane Capron	Western Area Power Administration
Not represented	Colorado River Energy Distributors Association
Henry Maddux	State of Utah

Nonvoting Member:

Tom Chart	Recovery Program Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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Recovery Program Staff:

Kevin McAbee	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Angela Kantola	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Others

Larry Crist and Paul Abate	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Kevin Bestgen	Colorado State University, Larval Fish Lab
Dave Speas	Bureau of Reclamation
Jana Mohrman	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service