

Management Committee Webinar Summary

January 4th, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

CONVENED: 9:00 AM

1. **Introductions & requests to modify agenda** - Chris Keleher welcomed the MC. No changes were made to the agenda. Lain Leoniak introduced Emily Halverson with the Colorado Attorney General’s Office who will be helping the Program since Katie Duncan took another position.
2. **Review Colorado Pikeminnow Recovery Plan Process**
 - a. **Brief Review Recovery Planning Process** – Kevin McAbee provided an overview of Recovery Plans, the fact that they are required by the ESA and have three required components: site specific management actions, objective and measurable criteria, and estimates of the time and costs required to achieve the criteria. Kevin reiterated that Recovery Plans represent the position of the FWS and do not obligate any public or private party to actions that were not already under legal obligation. Recovery Planning and Implementation is the new process that has been implemented over the last few years, which relies on the Species Status Assessment to document species ecology, status, needs and stressors. A third document, the Recovery Implementation Strategy documents specific actions and is adaptable as needed. The process allows the Recovery Plan to focus on the three required components and remain visionary and fixed. The SSA for Colorado pikeminnow was completed in 2020 but was updated as part of the current Recovery Planning Process. The Recovery Plan has been drafted using guidance from ten species experts from across the species range. In addition, the team used information from the RIPRAP and the San Juan Long Range Plan to draft a list of recovery activities specific to Colorado pikeminnow.
 - b. **Draft Recovery Criteria & Recovery Actions** – Tildon Jones said the full plan will be sent to the MC for review once it is complete and that the goal for today’s meeting is to provide an introduction, so the MC members know what to expect. Tildon reviewed the process taken to date, including reviewing the SSA, developing a vision, criteria, actions, and activities. The list of activities will be used as a starting point for the partners to review and provide input. One change recommended in the SSA was to merge the larval and juvenile stage to simplify the demographic tables. The Team drafted the Recovery Vision: “Long-term survival and conservation of Colorado pikeminnow will be signified by at least three resilient populations distributed as high resiliency in the Green and upper Colorado River subbasins and moderate resiliency in the San Juan River subbasin. These conditions preserve the current genetic, behavioral, and ecological diversity across

suitable habitats within the species' historical range." Components of the vision preserve the wild populations, allow for redundancy of wild stocks in the San Juan and acknowledges the uncertainty around possible population size in that system. The criteria maintain current range and note that any additional populations would add to redundancy. The criteria recognize that Colorado pikeminnow are restricted to about one third of the historical range. Tildon reviewed the specific criteria and timelines included in the plan, including population trends, adult population numbers, recruitment, and reproduction indexes. Regulatory mechanisms/conservation plans and flow management plans are included as threat-based criteria. Recovery Actions include priority 1 and priority 2 actions. Priority 1 actions include managing flows, maintaining range, controlling nonnative fish, and developing captive broodstocks. Priority 2 actions are more diverse and include things like conserving native fish populations to provide forage, managing habitats, operating dams to provide supportive water temperatures, and preventing escapement of introduction of nonnative species. Time and cost estimates have been drafted based on the post-2023 time and cost estimates, but the Team welcomes review and input by the Management Committee and the San Juan's Coordination Committee. A draft of the Recovery Implementation Strategy (RIS) contains more specific information and detail. Tildon thanked all the team members who served with Recovery Program staff over the last year.

A committee member asked about a proposal by FWS-AZ to reintroduce the species into the Grand Canyon and how that population would contribute to recovery. Tildon said the Recovery Plan is a guidance document, which does not require anything. The plan does recognize three population currently on the landscape and acknowledges that additional populations would contribute to the resiliency of the species but are not specifically defined in the plan. A request was made to consider the reintroduction in Grand Canyon as an activity in the Recovery plan, and a comprehensive strategy be discussed by the species experts as a whole within the recovery planning process. Tildon said it would be difficult to incorporate all Grand Canyon scenarios into the Recovery Plan because of the uncertainty surrounding a potential reintroduction but recommended including those discussions in the RIS. Marj said FWS is moving away from a very prescriptive recovery plan because they are so hard to adjust. She agreed that the RIS is the appropriate place to dive into those details as opportunities arise. Kevin said that all individuals present on the landscape "count" towards recovery, which can be seen in the difference between the SSA for humpback chub and the final reclassification rule, which included information known about the new discoveries in Western Grand Canyon. Kevin noted the Recovery Vision refers to three populations and assumes now that the three populations are likely the Green, Colorado, and San Juan, but that locations could change over time and this process is supportive of those changes.

A question was raised as to whether the pikeminnow in the San Juan arm of Lake Powell count towards the demographic criteria. Tildon said that all pikeminnow on the landscape count towards recovery, but based on how the plan is written, he is not certain how those specific fish will be assessed in the future. He reiterated the importance of the Recovery Plan as guidelines which provide context to how the species will be evaluated in future SSAs and 5-year reviews. A question was asked regarding assessing the risk of Colorado pikeminnow to humpback chub. Tildon deferred to experts in the Grand Canyon. Kevin agreed but noted that we do not consider predation from Colorado pikeminnow a risk to humpback chub in the upper basin. Melissa Trammell noted that flannelmouth and bluehead suckers are abundant as prey in the Grand Canyon. A question was raised as to how these numbers compare to previous goals. Tildon said the Green River number is higher than the original goals based on numbers they have seen in the past. In the 2002 goals, the Colorado and San Juan systems were tied together, the current numbers are slightly lower in the Colorado and lower in the San Juan. Tildon noted the other things like trajectory and recruitment are similar to the 2002 goals. Tildon plans to get the document to the Recovery Team soon and will get a draft to the Management Committee and the Coordination Committee likely in February. A question was asked if there are specific demographic criteria for the subbasins. Tildon said there are not, but some specific activities for those subbasins may be included in the RIS. News release on public input process for recovery plans:

<https://www.fws.gov/news/ShowNews.cfm?ref=%0Aservice-announces-new-process-for-notifying-the-public-of-draft-recovery-& ID=37078>

- 3. Update on Flow Request Letter Process** – Tildon committed to bringing a discussion to the Biology Committee to drive the flow request letter this year. We started that discussion in December, but the BC requested additional time to discuss those priorities. Tildon asked the MC to talk to their Biology Committee members about priorities before Thursday if they have specific input. The flow request letter is due to Reclamation on February 28th. WAPA will be submitting a flow request as well. They have requested scenarios include both a with and without experiments to assess the impacts on hydropower. They are looking for information from Reclamation to consider during the Flaming Gorge Technical Work Group (FGTWG) and Flaming Gorge Working Group (FGWG) process. Tildon noted that drought releases are under discussion and is recommending to the BC that they prioritize the biological outcomes based on different flow conditions. Drought operations would then allow us to get further down our priority lists rather than to change priorities in the discussion. Tildon noted we will not know whether drought operations will occur until after the flow request letter has been submitted. He reiterated the importance of the FGTWG and FGWG process in working through implementation based on flow conditions and biological triggers. FGWG meetings have been scheduled for March 17th and April 14th. Tildon said the flow request goes in by Feb 28th, the FGTWG puts together recommendations for the operations

plan based on that, which are then presented to the FGWG. Reclamation takes input from the FGWG in March and presents a plan in the April meeting. A question was asked regarding any potential response of the Green River stakeholders. Tildon has not seen any indications of what might be coming. No comments were received during the August meeting regarding the flow-spike.

4. **White River Planning Update** – David Graf introduced himself to the Committee and thanked all the members of the Committee who are also helping out with the White River Management Plan. David reviewed why the Program is working on a White River Plan and subsequent PBO to provide certainty to water users in the basin. The Plan will identify management actions in the White to support endangered species, specifically Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. The Plan will inform NEPA compliance on the action, which will provide the basis for the PBO. Implementation will help water users in the basin plan for and develop future water projects in the basin. Discussions about a White River Management Plan have been occurring for decades. The White River was noted as an important tributary in the Green River system. Efforts at the State of Colorado (CO Water Plan process) were providing information regarding water needs in the basin. Project 168 (ongoing) has provided additional information on flows and listed fish species. Kenney Reservoir is an area of concern as well as it is about 2/3 full of sediment, which is preventing water storage. Concerns about storage produced the concept of a Wolf Creek Reservoir. Don Anderson took the lead to try to describe the activities and possibilities in the basin and a then contractor was engaged to write the plan. In summer of 2021, a phased approach was developed and accepted by the development team. Phase 1 will end at 10 years or 6150 acre-feet of depletions (plus 3500 acres of new agriculture), Phase 2 will proceed through 2050. Development of the phased approach delayed the process a bit and required more conversations than initially anticipated. The phased approach is needed due to a current lack of sources of water to augment flows. The Management Plan is expected to be complete by March 2022. NEPA compliance and public meetings will follow. David reviewed the specifics of the plan and next steps. A question was asked about any conditional water rights considered in the basin. David reviewed that there are quite a few outstanding water rights in the system that are limited by water supply. In practice, many of the energy companies are buying agricultural rights to firm up their supplies.
5. **Post-2023 Updates** – Julie updated the committee on developments related to Post-2023 planning. The non-federal partners have requested the federal agencies involved in the programs to funding proposals, particularly regarding funding related to tribal trust responsibilities and proposals for annual funding. The federal agencies have been meeting to discuss these (and other) issues. Julie committed to reporting back to the partners as the meetings progress.

- a. **Report to Congress update** – Julie described that the report will move forward with the components required by the 2019 legislation. Julie sent the draft report out before the holidays and reminded the Committee that comments are requested by January 10th. The current draft is condensed into the most essential components, which Julie reviewed. Much of the information is the same as what is included in the Briefing Book and will be updated as needed. The draft also includes projections for cost estimates in the Post-2023 period. Julie will draft a conclusions and recommendations section once she has received feedback on the current draft from the partners.
 - b. **Federal family meeting** – A meeting is scheduled for Jan. 5 in place of the IC meeting. These are planned to occur regularly into the future.
 - c. Julie reviewed the meeting schedule for various Post-2023 discussions and asked if the committee had input to offer at this time.
 - d. Tom Pitts offered an update on the pending authorization legislation currently in Congress. Rep. Neguse introduced the legislation, and it was approved by the House Resources Committee and sent to the House floor for action. Senator Hickenlooper has indicated an intent to introduce the legislation in the Senate.
 - e. **FY2022 funding** – a question was asked regarding certainty of FY22 and whether Reclamation needs any help in maintaining funding in the current year. Reclamation indicated that they would get back to the Committee if problems were expected.
6. **Program Director’s Update**
- a. Julie acknowledged Melanie Fischer’s retirement at the end of December and thanked Melanie for her contributions. Mike Gross from FWS in Grand Junction has agreed to serve in a detail to fill Melanie’s vacancy in the short term.
 - b. Briefing book-Julie expressed an interest in keeping this document as simple as possible with minimal changes this year due to the I&E coordinator vacancy. The Committee supported this concept. Julie committed to providing needed materials to partners, including printed or digital versions as desired by the DC Trip participants.
 - c. Sufficient Progress Memo—Julie thanked the Committee for their comments and reviews on this document. Julie has sent the revised document to the ES offices for their review. Julie will distribute their revisions to the group once we have worked with those ES offices.
 - d. 15 MR PBO Review—The review has been sent to the ES office in Grand Junction. Julie explained that the PDO is waiting for comments from that office. The PDO will bring it back to the MC once we have incorporated the ES comments. The PDO will strive to include this PBO review with the Sufficient Progress memo if the timelines allow for a combined package.
 - e. Staffing updates—Julie said we continue to fill vacancies in the PDO, and she will update the partners as those progress.
7. **Meeting summary approvals, schedule next meeting** – Julie asked the Committee to approve the Nov. 10 meeting summary. The Committee approved the summary.

- a. Flaming Gorge Flow Request Letter – Julie requested a 2-hr. meeting sometime the week of February 7th to discuss the flow request letter. February 8 9-11 am
- b. RIPRAP meeting – Julie requested input on the regular RIPRAP meeting after BC review. A virtual meeting is scheduled April 19th, 8:30-4:30

ADJOURNED: 11:25 AM MT

Attachment 1: Meeting Attendees

Management Committee Members In Attendance:

Chris Keleher	MC Chair, State of Utah
Mike Robertson	State of Wyoming
Michelle Garrison	State of Colorado
Tom Pitts	Water Users
Joseph Trungale	The Nature Conservancy
Leslie James	Colorado River Energy Distributors Assoc.
Shane Capron	Western Area Power Administration
Melissa Trammell	National Park Service
Ryan Christianson	Bureau of Reclamation
Marj Nelson	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Julie Stahli (non-voting)	Program Director

Upper Colorado Program Office Staff:

Kevin McAbee	Nonnative Fish Coordinator
Tildon Jones	Habitat Coordinator
David Graf	Instream Flow Coordinator

Interested Parties:

Dave Speas	Bureau of Reclamation
Derek Fryer	Western Area Power Administration
Colleen Cunningham	State of New Mexico
Paul Badame	State of Utah
Rob Billerbeck	National Park Service
Gene Seagle	National Park Service
Kathy Callister	Bureau of Reclamation
Chris Breidenbach	Colorado Attorney's General Office
Harry Crockett	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Dale Ryden	FWS
Emily Halvorsen	Colorado Attorney's General Office
Todd Adams	State of Utah, Water Resources
Lain Leoniak	Colorado Attorney's General Office
Lee Traynham	Bureau of Reclamation
Andrew Schultz	Fish and Wildlife Service