

**Management Committee Summary****December 9, 2023****9:30 AM – 1:30 pm (MST)**

See Attachment 1 for meeting attendance

**CONVENE: 9:30 AM (MST)**

**Introductions & requests to modify agenda** – The attendance of committee members was noted, and introductions were skipped for sake of time. Several adjustments and additions to the agenda were proposed and accepted. Paul welcomed the committee members. Bill Stewart introduced himself as the new UC Region Adaptive Management Group Chief for Reclamation.

**Flaming Gorge flow request discussion** – Tildon Jones reviewed the priority tables for experiment implementation at Flaming Gorge. He reviewed the process to gain MC approval on the letter before it is submitted to Reclamation on or before February 28th. Tildon's intention is to shorten the letter, based on a request from Reclamation. In that shortening, his goal is to include more references and less detail on implementation, not to change the intent or scope of the letter. Tildon noted this table has four columns instead of the three that were presented last year. The four categories focus on where the changes in priorities would occur, with the smallmouth bass flow spike being the priority in drier years, and LTSP in wetter categories. In very wet years, the priority would shift to channel maintenance and matching the Yampa peak to achieve that. Tildon asked for confirmation that these priorities were representative of the Committee's views. The Committee did not express concerns. Chris Keleher asked if this year was the first year that we conducted all the experiments requested in the letter. Tildon said yes, thanks to the DROA flows and an extraordinary amount of coordination from Reclamation and other interested partners.

**Floodplain Razorback Production Success in 2022** – Tildon recounted the numerous coordination efforts required to implement LTSP (and other) flows from Flaming Gorge. The shape of the hydrograph (increasing Yampa flows combined with Flaming Gorge LTSP releases) enabled good entrainment of water and larvae. Tildon described how management of flow and screening, while mindful of stage/ flow in the river, hydraulically functions to get water and larvae into the wetlands. A longer duration of fill allows more entrainment. Tildon reported on the retention, growth, and release of wild-spawned razorback suckers from floodplains in the Green River wetlands, and highlighted 2022 growth/ production/ release relative to the Program history propagating new RZB recruits in managed wetlands. These results were also shared via the Colorado Program list server. The flow year started with a moderately dry hydrologic condition which determined the implementation of our 2022 flow request. Tildon reviewed the timing of the natural hydrology and experimental releases requested with a detailed focus on the LTSP releases. Tildon next discussed the capture details for all the Green River wetlands.

Stewart Lake released 3,294 young of year razorback sucker, with new records set for mean and maximum length and in number for that site. Johnson Bottom released 117 young of year

razorback sucker. Old Charley released 615 young of year razorback sucker, another new record. Stirrup released 551 young of year razorback sucker. This is a newly managed wetland, so there is no record for numbers yet, however the fish released from this wetland are the largest average length (250 mm) ever observed in a single growing season for any natural wetland in the upper basin! At Matheson Wetland (CO River), no razorbacks were captured, which could have been caused by strong green sunfish numbers.

In one year, we have essentially doubled all the wild razorback sucker that have been released from Green River wetlands in the last 10 years combined. Tildon noted that all the wetlands were dry in 2021, so no nonnatives were present. The timing and implementation worked well. As another example of how habitat improvement work from the previous two years has changed some wetlands, Stewart Lake has increased in size from 5 acres of open water to about 100 acres after a burn and drying reset. It was noted in Biology Committee discussions that preliminary larval captures indicate normal production rates, meaning the reset conditions, screening to exclude large nonnatives, and timing of the flows were the likely drivers of razorback success this year.

Chris Keleher asked why this year was likely so successful. Tildon indicated that there were quite a few things that helped. First, all wetlands were dry last year so there were no nonnatives in there to start. The cattail control at Stewart resulted in much more open water. There were also fewer nonnative larvae that got entrained, which put less pressure on razorbacks in the wetland.

**Colorado Pikeminnow RIS revisions** – Tildon said he presented at the San Juan BC on 12/8 and received feedback that they wanted more time to review. Tildon will work with them to incorporate comments and will bring it back to the MC when it is ready. Tildon noted that we are seeking to formalize the RIS with the Recovery Plan but noted that it is a less formal document that can be adjusted over time.

### **Post-2023 Timeline and Tasks**

- a. Draft post-2023 reauthorizing legislation – Tom Pitts has distributed the draft and held a meeting to discuss the legislation. The IC, MC, and CC from the San Juan were all present on the phone call. Tom received several comments and suggested changes on the legislation. One significant suggestion was to scrap the amendments to the current legislation and start with a completely new bill. Tom will discuss this approach with authorizing committee staff to see if that path would work. The legislation is meant to represent the agreements that Reclamation and the states have been discussing. The legislation includes power replacement costs as a non-federal contribution. Tom proposes to include water users' contributions beyond the two reservoirs currently included. A discussion remains around how to define voluntary contributions that are ongoing. All references to CRSP (CO River Storage Project, i.e. Federal) power revenue have been removed as it is no longer a viable source for funding. An estimate for power replacement costs being developed by WAPA. The discussion is continuing, and comments are welcome. Leslie James thanked Tom for all the work he has done on this effort. She has a request out to her DC folks as well regarding amendments versus a clean start. The goal is to get the legislation introduced early (late January 2023) in the next session of Congress.

- b. Economic Benefit Analysis status update – Michelle is planning to send an email and doodle poll to start this process in early January. Michelle has names of who has agreed to serve on that sub-committee to develop a scope of work. Her goal is to finish that process before the spring briefings. Melissa asked if she was focusing just on the state and water user contributions or whether the goal was to incorporate the effects from a federal perspective as well. Michelle suggested that the intent was to capture specific non-federal contributions, as well as those less specific such as benefits of coordination of activities amongst the partners and minimizing other bureaucratic hurdles.
- c. Final Funding Proposal for Consideration – Michelle presented a draft funding proposal as it currently sits. She believes all the important pieces are finalized for the Upper Colorado and will not be changing. Defining Tribal Trust for the first time has been exceptionally complicated which is what is holding up the final agreement. The proposal includes a 15-year reauthorization period coupled with an acknowledgement that actions will likely need to be continued even post recovery. The proposal includes a \$100M capital authorization through Reclamation funding across the two programs with annual increases based on inflation. Michelle presented summary tables for both the UC and SJ annual funding contributions. Inflation has been included in this process as well but will be calculated based on previous year values to allow for Reclamation funding requests. She noted that the USFWS contributions remain stable. Tribal trust calculations continue to be challenging. Michelle reviewed the remaining contributions as outlined in the table, pertaining to Reclamation and the states. She outlined the importance of water contributions that provide a lot of value to the program and noted that they would not replace the cash contributions. The goal is to note how important these contributions are in making the programs work and document the dedication of non-federal partners to the programs. Marj asked if the Committee thought we would be able to get this approved before the IC on January 4<sup>th</sup>. Michelle said the Tribal numbers don't really impact the Upper Colorado portions. She noted it is the states' intention to get a final version out to all the partners for an email vote before January 4<sup>th</sup>. Chris reiterated the need to have committee approval before legislation is introduced. Tom noted the Tribal Trust discussion does not affect the amount of money available to the program, just the amount designated as Tribal Trust as part of the Reclamation contributions. >**Michelle** will distribute a final agreement to the UCRRP MC and SJRIP CC to be approved by email prior to January 4<sup>th</sup>. Leslie noted her board will have to approve the legislation. Her next board meeting will be the first week in February. Chris acknowledged all the effort that has gone into this process and noted how much Michelle has been working on drafting funding proposals.
- d. NEPA – Julie Stahli reported that Melissa Mata and she have completed a draft for the NEPA document, which looks at the comparison between having the Programs versus no Programs in existence. Julie and Melissa will be routing it through NEPA specialists within FWS and Reclamation before it will be open for review by the Programs. Chris Keleher asked how the timing of NEPA fits into the approval of the other elements of the Program. Julie noted that the EA is needed before the Secretary can sign the cooperative agreement. She asked the partners if it was needed for any other steps. No one noted that a faster deadline was needed.

- e. Blue Book Revisions – Julie thanked Emily Berchem, the PDO’s administrative assistant for scanning the Blue Book. Once the NEPA has been reviewed, Julie will be seeking input on recommended changes to the Blue Book for the reauthorization. Chris asked about the timeline. Julie thought the NEPA needed to be complete before cooperative agreements can be signed, but that DRAFT revisions to the Blue Book could come before the MC this spring.

**Maybell Diversion: Funding Approval** – Julie Stahl introduced Jennifer Wellman (TNC) and Mike Camblin (Maybell Irrigation District) and informed the committee that following this review and discussion of the project there would be a request to approve capital funding of this project. The request is for up to \$2.8M to cover a gap that resulted from inflationary increases.

Jennifer Wellman introduced Diana Lane from TNC who was available to answer more technical questions. Jennifer started by showing a brief introduction video, and then provided an overview of the existing funding sources that have been secured. Jennifer said TNC has been working on the project with MID over the last 7 years. Funding partners included CWCB, Friends of the Yampa, USBR Water Smart, NRCS, NFWF (applied for), and private funding. During the design phase they discussed improving both fish and recreation passage at the diversion. The redesign will improve fish passage and allow remote operation of the headgate, which will improve matching actual diversions to irrigation needs. The designs are final, NEPA is in the final stages, and they are ready for construction to commence in 2023. The project is scheduled for completion in December 2023. Jennifer mentioned their partners have worked with Tildon and David Graf on fish passage needs and design features. The redesign will eliminate the need to put bulldozers in the river to bolster the “push up” dam that makes up the diversion; remote operation of diversions will allow real-time adjustment in diversion rates to better reflect demand by irrigators, improving the efficiency of delivering Recovery Program water released from Elkhead to the reach below the diversion. The original plan was to move in from the north side, which is not feasible because of the slope of the hill and the cultural resources present (mainly, the Maybell Ditch itself). The project will resolve both fish and boat passage issues, as well as fixing significant diversion infrastructure. Jennifer reviewed the funding obtained to date by TNC, which totals \$4.95M and includes both CWCB, CRWCD, and Bureau of Reclamation. They are continuing to seek funding from additional sources. The total price of the project has been ‘conservatively’ estimated at \$7.8M, but that may change once bids are obtained.

Julie clarified the request being considered. We are looking for approval from the MC to provide a backstop to ensure the project can proceed. The request is to approve up to \$2.8M, but the entire amount may not be needed. TNC has tried to find funding outside the Program, and they continue to do so. Tom Pitts asked about which year the money is needed. Jennifer said this year or FY24. Tom asked Lee if funds are available. Lee said yes. Diana Lane added that this is intended to be a backstop, and they are working diligently to control costs for the project. Chris K. asked how the water savings would work to benefit the fish. Mike Camblin said this is the last management piece for the irrigation system. The canal currently cannot be shut down completely. The remoteness of the headgates requires 3-4 hours of walking to adjust it. The remote headgate system will allow MID to adjust more quickly and frequently to fine tune the amount of water being diverted; this is especially helpful when flows are being managed tightly during base flows. Mike Camblin confirmed the improvements would help keep water in the river.

**MC MOTION:** Tom Pitts motioned, and Michelle Garrison seconded the expenditure of up to \$2.8M of capital funds to be provided to TNC to ensure complete implementation of the Maybell Diversion and headgate rehabilitation project. **DISCUSSION:** Melissa Trammell added that another advantage might be a new ability to get boat access in that reach to allow for smallmouth bass control since the diversion has been a barrier to boats to date. Motion Approved.

**Audubon Phase II: Funding Approval** – Tildon introduced a funding request for \$150k from the Audubon project in the Grand Valley. Tildon explained that phase II is completion of the water delivery system and phase III will entail the renovation and reconnection of the future fish pond. Tildon used an aerial view map to describe the location of the work and which segments of piping would be funded by the Program. The phase II funding request is a 50:50 cost share for the section of piping between the supply and the junction between the bird ponds and the future fish pond plus the full cost of the piping from that junction to the future fish pond.

**MC MOTION:** Melissa Trammell made a motion, and Chris Keleher seconded to approve the expenditure of up to \$150,000 of capital funds for phase II of the Audubon project. **DISCUSSION:** Lee Traynham asked what the specific timeline and dollar amount of the request is. The total amount is just shy of \$150,000 and the timeline is late 2023 or early 2024. Motion Approved. Abby Burk of the Audubon Society thanked the committee for their contribution and thanked Tildon for his support for the project.

**Capital Projects Update and Discussion** – Lee Traynham explained that the requested \$5.4M in 2022, \$7.7M in FY23 and FY24 appropriations are forthcoming. In addition, FY23, BIL funding is \$13.0M and \$13.2M has been requested for FY24. These numbers incorporate both Upper Colorado and San Juan funding. Lee pointed to the priority tool for identifying projects, which also provides flexibility in requesting funds and balancing capital and BIL funds as project timelines change. FY23 capital projects will include GVIC screen rehab (\$6.4M, BIL), hatchery improvements (\$2.8M, BIL), improving and expanding fish monitoring capabilities (\$0.8M, BIL), and fish passage upgrades at Redlands and GVWU (\$0.18M, appropriations in capital funds). The recently approved Maybell and Audubon projects will add to this list. FY24 will include Audubon Phase 3 from capital funds, Wahweap State hatchery (\$2.1M), Catamount Reservoir screening (\$4.0M, BIL), Grand Valley (\$1.0M, BIL) and Old Charley (\$1.0M, BIL). Some of these projects may not be ready for implementation until FY25. An additional \$5.2M was requested for the APS passage in the San Juan. The full BIL fund allotment to be fully expended after the FY24 distributions. Leslie asked how the \$50M in funds were broken out between the four Colorado River programs. Lee noted that \$26.2M has been allocated to the two upper programs combined, with the remainder mostly going to LCR-MSCP.

**Work Planning Post 2023** – Julie Stahl presented some ideas from the PDO for designing the Post-2023 Program, based on input from the meetings held in 2019 for future directions. She presented the “Wheel of Change” concept and illustrated examples of how that might apply to this process of designing a new Program. The goal is to create better documents and opportunities for biologists to focus on big ideas, preserve the positive elements like trust and partnerships, eliminate burdensome reporting and paperwork assignments (no longer needed based on current trust and focus on results) and to accept parts that cannot be changed such as Reclamation contracting requirements. Julie then showed some brief examples of where we have been working, including work planning, reporting, and the RIPRAP; incorporating the Post-2023

exercises from our meetings in 2019; new styles for Recovery Plans consistent with RPI and making linkages between the Program and those documents; and leveraging advances in technology. Michele Garrison thanked Julie and the PDO for following through on commitments to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Program and its processes.

**Program Director's Update** – Julie Stahli introduced Shannon Nelson, the new Outreach Coordinator. Shannon shared some background from her career. She would like to use outreach to better achieve the goals of the Program.

Julie continued that we are rebooting the Water Acquisition Committee (WAC) and Outreach Committees (OC) in preparation for implementing the information we received in the Post-2023 process. The WAC is discussing how to move forward, and the OC will be meeting soon. The WAC is looking at processes to review the PBOs, and how to fund water, potentially to pay for leases with annual funds rather than the NFWF account.

The Outreach Committee will be working on a new concerted effort to create and amplify Program success stories starting in February with this year's boom of razorback sucker coming out of the Green River wetlands. The plan is to share a new story each month over the next 9-12 months, with the goal of providing positive information during this ongoing period of Program reauthorization.

Julie reminded the MC that they approved a scope for Tom Chart and Don Anderson to work on the evaluation plan for 15-MR PBO and flow recommendations review at their last meeting. As a status update, that process has commenced with a meeting with ES staff, and discussions with WAC and BC members are forthcoming.

The 2021-2022 Sufficient Progress memo will be provided to the MC for review today with a likely due date in mid-January. The review by the Ecological Services field offices of WY, UT, and CO as well as the Fisheries Aquatic Conservation offices will begin concurrently and hopefully be completed a week or so after the MC. Following those reviews the memo will be sent to FWS Regional Director Matt Hogan for final approval.

**Administrative Tasks** – Paul Badame provided calendar updates and reminders below:

Upcoming Meeting Reminders

- Jan 4: IC Meeting to review and approve Funding Agreement and Program authorizing legislative language
- Jan 31-Feb 1: Researcher's Meeting in Grand Junction
- Feb 2: BC Meeting in Grand Junction
- Schedule February MC virtual meeting – February 13<sup>th</sup> 9:00 am - 1:00 pm (MST)

Consent Agenda: The Committee approved the October 11 summary as final. Paul will post it to the Program website.

**ADJOURNED: 12:43 PM MST**

## Assignments and Tasks

- **Michelle Garrison** will send an email and doodle poll to regarding the development of a scope of work to write a Program Benefit Analysis in early January. Michelle has the names of those who agreed to serve on that sub-committee. Her goal is to have the completed analysis before the spring D.C. briefings.
- **Michelle Garrison** will distribute a final funding agreement to the UCRRP MC and SJRIP CC to be approved by email prior to the January 4<sup>th</sup> Implementation Committee meeting.
- **Paul Badame** will provide the draft 2021-2022 Sufficient Progress memo and supporting documents to the MC by COB December 9, 2022 so they can begin their review and comment process. *Complete 12/9/22*

## Attachment 1: Meeting Attendees

### Management Committee Members in Attendance:

Chris Keleher	MC Chair, State of Utah
Jed Rockweiler	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
Lee Traynham	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
Paul Badame	Program Deputy Director
Koreen Zelasko	Propagation Coordinator
Chris Michaud	Data Coordinator
Shannon Nelson	Outreach Coordinator

### Interested Parties:

Dave Speas	Bureau of Reclamation
Kathy Callister	Bureau of Reclamation
Emily Halvorsen	Colorado Attorney's General Office
Kara Scheel	State of Colorado
Jennifer Wellman	The Nature Conservancy
Diana Lane	The Nature Conservancy
Tyler Swarr	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Dale Ryden	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bill Stewart	Bureau of Reclamation
Chris Breidenbach	Colorado Attorney's General Office
Harry Crockett	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Sarah Seegert	Utah Division of Wildlife
Mike Camblin	Maybell Irrigation District
Andrew Schultz	Fish and Wildlife Service
Melissa Mata	San Juan Recovery Implementation Program
Abby Burke	Audubon Society