



# Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

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## Implementation Committee Meeting Summary

November 1, 2022 (10:00 – 12:00pm MT)

Matt Hogan, Chair

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### **CONVENED: 10:00 a.m.**

**Introductions, changes in representation** – *Matt Hogan, USFWS R6 Regional Director and Anna Munoz, USFWS R6 Regional Deputy Director*

Matt thanked everyone for attending remotely. He praised Julie for her work in helping negotiate the Program agreement for post-2023. Matt then introduced Anna Munoz, the Deputy Regional Director, who will be the new Implementation Committee (IC) chair moving forward. Anna greeted the group and provided some of her background in the Service. She has a lot of experience with ESA and water issues (e.g., Edwards aquifer).

### **2022 Recovery Program Update** – *Julie Stahli, Recovery Program Director*

Julie reiterated the purpose of the Program – recover the four species while water development proceeds. She then reviewed the six Program elements. She went on to highlight some recent successes. Humpback chub was recently downlisted from endangered to threatened last autumn. This year Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) collected humpback from Desolation Canyon to begin development of a broodstock for this unique population. The Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (GJ-FWCO) sampled DeBeque Canyon and found new occurrences of humpback chub there. We will continue investigating to see if this is a new population. Program partners also successfully added to the Colorado pikeminnow broodstock being developed at the Southwest Native Aquatic Recovery Resource Center (SNARRC). Julie thanked David Graf for his coordination of flows in the Colorado River, and others (i.e., Yampa River). We also saw great success with razorback sucker in the middle reach of the Green River floodplain wetlands. We also plan to build another high school hatchery in Vernal. Bonytail is still our most endangered species, and we continue to stock individuals to repatriate the species. More recently we have seen improved resight rates and survival through age-3. Julie then described the smallmouth bass flow spike from Flaming Gorge dam, which represents a landscape-scale approach to address this predatory threat. Julie introduced the Program Director's Office (PDO) team. Our office is here to facilitate the Program and keep things moving for the collective partnership.

### **Capital Projects Update** – *Lee Traynham – USBR Western Colorado Deputy Area Manager*

Lee reviewed the available funding for capital projects. This includes annual appropriations and the funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The BIL funding has specific language

for recovery programs in the Colorado River basin. Requested BIL funds in FY23 for the upper Colorado and San Juan Programs will total \$12.9M. Lee said to watch out for a press release coming from Reclamation soon. We have about \$25M to spend in the near future that includes appropriations \$5M carry over from FY 22 and \$7.7M for FY 23. Lee then reviewed the FY23 priorities, which include rehabilitating the Grand Valley Irrigation Company (GVIC) fish screen, improving performance and efficiency of our hatcheries at Wahweap and both units of Ouray National Fish Hatchery, improving and expanding our PIT tag arrays, and some fish passage upgrades in the Grand Valley. Lee said with the incoming funds, we have started coordination calls with the PDO and project proponents. She also highlighted a new prioritization tool to evaluate future projects for these funding streams. Lee appreciated the addition of this tool given all the potential projects for consideration. Julie thanked Lee for her project management. Tom Pitts commended Reclamation for success in managing the capital projects program over the long term for both the Upper Colorado and San Juan recovery programs.

**Post-2023 Funding Proposal** – *Michelle Garrison, Colorado Water Conservation Board*

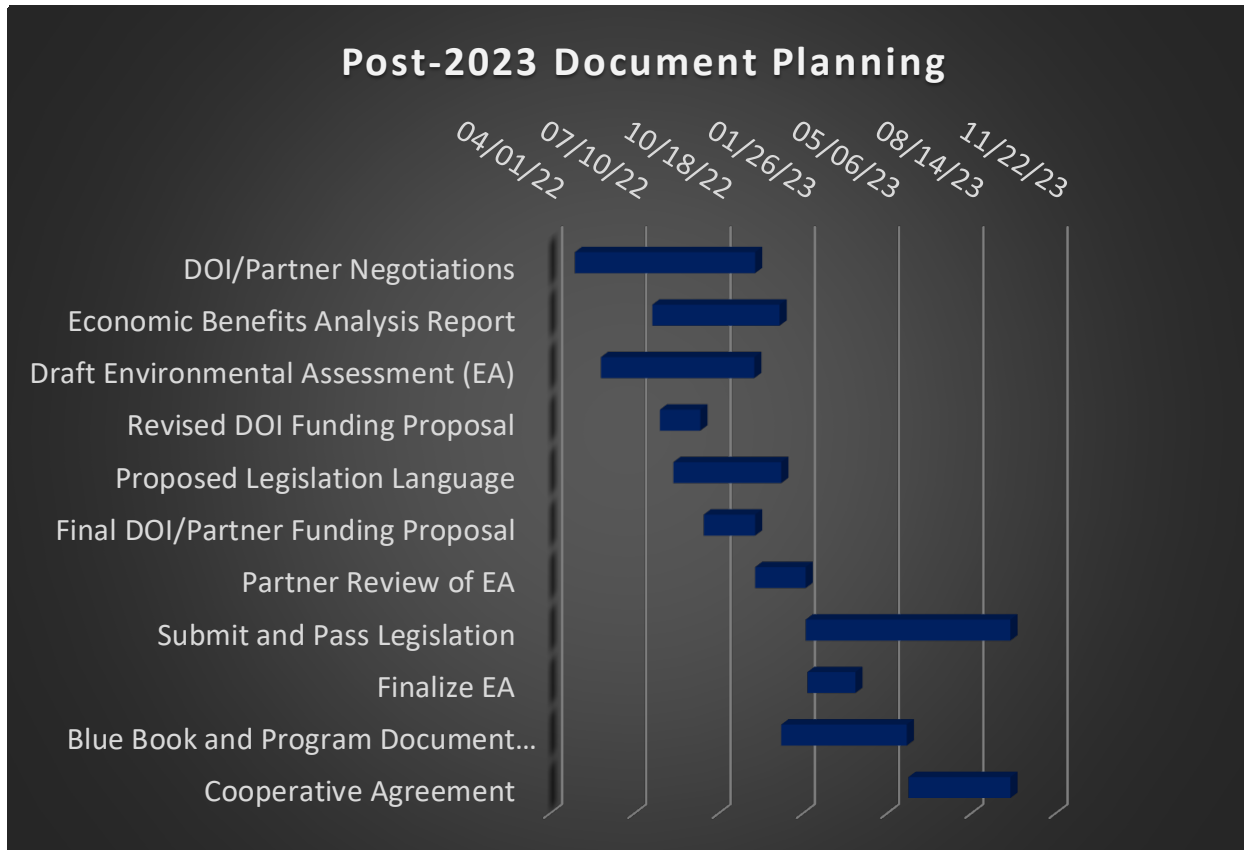
Michelle Garrison summarized the proposal currently being finalized by the Funding Group and represents a joint proposal from the federal and state partners. The proposal recognizes the importance of the ongoing work and the need to reauthorize the programs. This proposal fully funds the program for 15 years with contributions from the Service, Reclamation, and the States. This will include a capital funding ceiling of \$100M for both programs to construct projects and rehab and repair of existing structures to be provided by appropriations to Reclamation. The proposal includes annual funding of \$9.7M in cash for the Upper Colorado Program (\$15.7M total which includes non-cash contributions from non-federal partners) and \$4.2M for the San Juan Program beginning in FY24 with annual increases for inflation. Michelle described details of contributions by different partners. The federal funding sources will decrease over time as state contributions increase. The proposal also recognizes non-federal water contributions, cash equivalent actions, and in-kind contributions that are over and above the annual funding amounts discussed above. Next steps include finalizing the proposal and circulating it for review. This proposal will need to be approved by the MC and IC and the San Juan Coordination Committee before we can put it into legislation (hence the scheduling of the January IC meeting). Cooperative Agreements will need to be developed to extend the programs beyond FY 23.

Michelle mentioned that the 2022 legislation to extend the Program through FY23 and due date for the report to congress (along with other technical amendments) passed the House and moved through the Senate Natural Resources Committee but has not yet passed the Senate. In response to a question about the Tribal Trust funding, Tom Pitts said it would be appropriated to Reclamation.

Michelle explained that during the 2022 Congressional briefings, Congressional staffers recommended development of an economic benefits analysis to show the benefits of the Program. A committee of Upper Colorado and San Juan recovery programs participants has been convened and they expect to have the analysis ready early next year. Anna thanked Michelle and the Funding Group team for all their work over the past 3 years.

**Reauthorization Timeline and Necessary Tasks – Tom Pitts, Water Users Representative**

Tom showed a Gantt chart that summarized the next steps for the re-authorization and new program development. This includes the funding proposal and concurrence from the programs. Julie and Melissa Mata are working on a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and hope to have that out for review before the end of the year. Tom described some of the complexities in drafting the proposed legislation. Tom will have a draft of the legislation for consideration by the end of November, which could be introduced as early as possible in the next session of Congress (~January 20<sup>th</sup>). The legislation will have to be approved by all the federal and nonfederal participants in both programs before being sent to Congress.



**Recovery Planning and Implementation**

Colorado Pikeminnow – Tildon Jones – Program Habitat Coordinator and Colorado pikeminnow species lead

Tildon relayed that the draft Recovery Plan has been signed by Anna Munoz at the Service’s Regional Director level. We expect External Affairs to address some minor suggestions and put it out for public review very soon. Anna thanked Tildon for his efforts and the process that was developed for the pikeminnow plan.

Humpback Chub – *Kevin McAbee – Program Nonnative coordinator and humpback chub species lead.*

Kevin shared that as recommended in the five-year review and the reclassification decision, we are beginning the process to revise the recovery plan for the humpback chub. The process will mirror that of Colorado pikeminnow. We are currently convening the recovery team, which is made up of species experts and state & tribal representatives from both the upper and lower basin. We expect that the team will begin meeting shortly after the new year. We expect this process to take 18-24 months, as we will need to revise the SSA before drafting a recovery plan; there is much new information concerning humpback chub which we will need to incorporate. We are working closely with FWS Region 2, both the AZ Ecological Services (ES) and AZ-FWCO offices, to ensure full consideration of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Plan and lower basin topics. As with Colorado pikeminnow, after the recovery team finalizes a draft recovery plan, we expect to seek stakeholder input on the plan, including assistance with time and cost estimates. We expect this will not be likely before 2024.

Razorback sucker success through Drought Operations at Flaming Gorge – *Tildon Jones*

Tildon shared the good news of razorback sucker recruitment from middle Green River floodplains (managed wetlands). He acknowledged the efforts by partners and the Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group (FGTWG) that allowed these successes. Tildon described the Drought Response Operation (DRO) flows compared to those expected without DRO releases, and how they related to larval razorback sucker presence. Tildon explained how the combination of magnitude of flows (17,000 cfs at the Jensen gage) and the duration of those flows allowed connection of four floodplain wetlands this year and maximized the number of drifting larvae entrained into the wetlands. Those connections and subsequent management resulted in a total of 4,579 juvenile razorback suckers produced among the four wetlands, which essentially doubled the total from 2012-2021. Records were also set for the size of juveniles produced. Leslie James asked if collection efforts were consistent among years. Tildon explained that floodplains were renovated over time to allow management beginning in different years. In a few years like 2021, wetlands were available, but hydrologic conditions did not allow for experimental flows and connections. Anna thanked Tildon for sharing the presentation and for the efforts, along with all the partners, to make these results possible. Tildon will continue to share the news at the Desert Fishes Council meeting this fall and elsewhere.

**Logistics** – *Paul Badame, Recovery Program Deputy Director*

April Summary Approval – Paul asked if there were additional comments or edits for the April IC meeting summary. There were none and the April summary was accepted as final.

January 2022 meeting – we will need a short meeting for the IC to approve the deal before it is turned into legislation. >**Paul Badame** will send out a Doodle to look for available times. He also requested any additional contact information for people who might have assistants who help with schedules. Tom Pitts advocated for a meeting as soon as possible in January.

Spring In-person IC Meeting – Paul asked for the group’s input for the spring meeting to determine if there was interest in holding the meeting in-person and to get in a few boats and float a section of the river or to go on a tour of some interesting habitats. Julie noted that it used to be fairly common to organize float trips to let the IC see the rivers firsthand. Anna thought this was a good idea. Leslie agreed that this has been helpful in the past. Jeff Cowley agreed that decisions are best made with wet boots. Brian Sadler advocated for visits to the wetland projects we discussed today. Ed Warner, Todd Adams, and Kelly Romero-Heaney all agreed that a field trip would be appreciated. >**Paul Badame** committed to drafting a set of times and locations with options for a field trip/site visit next spring.

Anna thanked everyone for welcoming her to the group and expressed excitement to work with this group in the future.

**ADJOURNED: 11:34am**

**In Attendance on Nov 1:**

IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Matt Hogan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Anna Munoz, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Ed Warner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Kathy Callister for Ed Warner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Rob Billerbeck, National Park Service  
Kelly Romero-Heaney, State of Colorado  
Tom Pitts, Upper Basin Water Users  
Brian Sadler, Western Area Power Administration  
Chris Keleher, State of Utah  
Leslie James, Colorado River Energy Distributors Association  
Jeff Cowley, State of Wyoming  
Bart Miller, Western Resource Advocates  
Todd Adams, State of Utah  
Julie Stahli, Program Director, (nonvoting)

OTHERS:

Wayne Pullan, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Shane Capron, Western Area Power Administration  
Michelle Garrison, Colorado Water Conservation Board  
Lee Traynham, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Kara Scheel, Colorado Water Conservation Board  
Julie Stahli, Recovery Program  
David Graf, Recovery Program  
Chris Michaud, Recovery Program

Paul Badame, Recovery Program  
Tildon Jones, Recovery Program  
Kevin McAbee, Recovery Program  
Erik Skeie, Colorado Water Conservation Board  
Dan Leavitt, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Melissa Mata, SJRIP Program Coordinator  
Mark McKinstry, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Rodney Bailey, Western Area Power Administration  
Adriana Zorilla, R6 External Affairs  
Colleen Cunningham, State of New Mexico

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## **Supplemental Implementation Committee Conference Call Summary**

**January 4, 2023 (11:00 – 12:00pm MT)**

**Anna Munoz, Chair**

**CONVENED: 11:00 a.m.**

**Post-2023 Funding Proposal:** *Julie Stahli, Program Director & All*

The intent of this call was for partners from both the upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and the San Juan River Basin Implementation Program to discuss the details of the post-2023 funding proposal and to determine support. The proposal was still under revision among the non-federal partners and the Committee was unable complete this task, but the hour was spent narrowing down the areas in need of further attention.

Julie asked for an appropriate deadline to address two lingering topics. **Wayne Pullan committed Reclamation** to leading conversations and drafting language to clarify the water contribution and hydropower funding topics. Julie suggested having the revisions completed for review in two weeks at the beginning of the Jan. 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Support for the funding proposal was later voiced via email.

**ADJOURNED: 12:08 pm**

**In Attendance on January 4:**

### IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Anna Munoz, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Ed Warner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Rob Billerbeck, National Park Service  
Kelly Romero-Heaney, State of Colorado  
Tom Pitts, Upper Basin Water Users

Shane Capron for Brian Sadler, Western Area Power Administration  
Todd Adams for Joel Ferry, State of Utah  
Leslie James, Colorado River Energy Distributors Association  
Jeff Cowley, State of Wyoming  
Bart Miller, Western Resource Advocates

Julie Stahl, Program Director, (nonvoting)

OTHERS:

Wayne Pullan, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Kathy Callister, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Colleen Cunningham, State of New Mexico  
Emily Halverson  
Dave Speas, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Harry Crockett  
Lisa Yellow Eagle  
Marj Nelson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Daniel Picard  
Steve Wolff  
Chris Kitcheyan  
Chris Keleher, State of Utah  
Michelle Garrison, Colorado Water Conservation Board  
Lee Traynham, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Kara Scheel, Colorado Water Conservation Board  
Julie Stahl, Recovery Program  
David Graf, Recovery Program  
Chris Michaud, Recovery Program  
Paul Badame, Recovery Program  
Tildon Jones, Recovery Program  
Kevin McAbee, Recovery Program  
Erik Skeie, Colorado Water Conservation Board  
Dan Leavitt, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Melissa Mata, SJRIP Program Coordinator  
Mark McKinstry, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Rodney Bailey, Western Area Power Administration  
Adriana Zorilla, R6 External Affairs  
Jared Smith, State of Utah, Wahweap State Fish Hatchery  
Shannon Nelson, Recovery Program  
Peter Nylander  
Peter Ortego  
Bill Stewart  
Melissa Trammell, National Park Service

Dated November 3, 2022

Raphaela Ware

Koreen Zelasko, Recovery Program

Rudy Keedah

Chris Breidenbach

Jason Davis, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Scott Durst, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Dale Ryden, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service