



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

Implementation Committee Meeting Summary

May 2, 2023 (8:00 – 11:00 am MT)

Anna Muñoz, Chair

CONVENED: 10:00 a.m.

Introductions, modify/review agenda – *Anna Munoz, USFWS R6 Regional Deputy Director*

Anna Muñoz welcomed Joel Ferry as a new representative for Utah, noting that Joel is the new executive director for Utah DNR as of last June. She appreciated Joel's conservation efforts in the Bear River Watershed in Utah and noted that he has been a great partner to the Service. Anna noted the importance of partnerships in conservation. She is inspired to serve as the IC rep and hopes this program serves as a model for more partnerships in the Service. On March 7, the Secretary of the Interior transmitted the Report to Congress on the Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basins Endangered Fish Recovery Programs. A copy of the report and transmittal memo was shared via the Upper Colorado River Recovery Program listserv.

2023 Recovery Program Update – *Staff from the Recovery Program Director's Office*

The following is a synopsis of the [Program update presentation](#) provided by the staff of the PDO. Julie Stahl reviewed the status of the species, bonytail remains endangered with encounters rare on the landscape, Colorado pikeminnow remain endangered despite wild populations because of the decline in the Green River population. Humpback chub has been downlisted to threatened based on stable populations in the Green and upper Colorado along with strong Grand Canyon populations. Razorback sucker is possibly our Program's greatest success, rebuilding most of the life cycle for this species in the last 30 years.

David Graf reviewed the importance of instream flows for fish and noted there are different ways to do that. The Program is working in collaboration with partners to meet flow recommendations as frequently as possible and are in discussions on how to develop additional resources to provide more water for the fish during critical times. David noted how important collaboration is with all partners as we manage water each year. Julie introduced habitat actions, covering canal screens, fish passages, and use of wetlands to improve chances for larval fish to grow and return to the river as young adults. 2022 was a banner year, and we continue to learn how infrastructure is necessary for effective management of both fish and water into – and out of – these off-channel wetlands.

Koreen noted that a few of the species were extirpated from the system at the time of listing, so broodstocks were developed and stocking began. Razorback sucker are a success story, with 80% survival in the wild the first year after stocking. The individuals survive, migrate, expand in range, and produce viable larvae which have then shown success in the wetlands. Bonytail is still a challenge as we have not yet seen populations establish on the landscape. Humpback chub and Colorado pikeminnow populations are still wild, but collections have begun for each species for

different reasons. Several of the facilities we use will be upgraded thanks to Reclamation and BIL funds.

Kevin reviewed the challenges related to nonnative fish, looking at a series of invasions and responsive recovery actions. He walked through a timeline of how the Program has responded to changing circumstances specific to non-native fish occupation of river habitats, noting how dry hydrologies (e.g., 2002) seem to advantage non-native fish, particularly small-mouth bass. The Program has and will continue to evolve its procedures, techniques, and strategies for managing against non-native fish. Two main ‘tiers’ are: (1) non-native fish removal; (2) reservoir management as ‘compatible angling areas’, i.e. screening for fish escapement and removing problematic predators. This does allow angling opportunities to persist, which is important for local communities. These techniques have resulted in meaningful, tangible improvements, specifically there are less northern pike in the Yampa River. SMB continue to be a challenge, especially during dry years. Kevin walked through the ongoing challenges with respect to non-native fish management, recognizing that we are near the limits of our capacity relative to human capital the do the non-native abatement work in rivers. He described ‘bold new steps’ related to non-native suppression via flow management, e.g., smallmouth bass flow spike from Flaming Gorge, or potential genetic manipulations or species-specific piscicides.

Chris Michaud described how research, monitoring and data management add to our toolbox, and can begin to parse out response to Recovery Program actions. Chris also notes how PIT tag technology has added volumes to our knowledge of fish movement which can also be specific to life-stage and habitat type (lotic, backwater-side-channels/ wetlands). He also presented the exponential curve of specific fish encounters (now over 6 million!) since 1990. Data management is adapting to a new ‘data space’, adding up-front coding to improve field data collection efficiency and accuracy. Digital information has also allowed for generation of ‘information’ from the data into a real-time exercise.

Shannon Nelson then described the Outreach element as it has been used by the Program. Communication, fostering connection, and building relationships are the foundation for effective outreach, using the ‘outreach umbrella’ as an effective metaphor. Shannon described how the Outreach program is expanding and innovating to adapt to new ways we share information.

FWS Recovery Documents

1. Recovery Plan for Colorado Pikeminnow – *Julie Stahli* – Recovery plan is drafted, has been reviewed and commented on and will be submitted as final to the RDs office in coming months.
2. Recovery Plan for Humpback Chub – *Kevin McAbee* – Recovery plan process is ongoing with meetings scheduled periodically over the summer. Draft expected in 2024.
3. Final Downlisting Rule for Razorback Sucker – *Koreen Zelasko* – Final downlisting rule is being drafted and will go through FWS Region 6 review over the next few months. The Species Status Assessment (SSA) from 2018 is being updated with current sampling data.

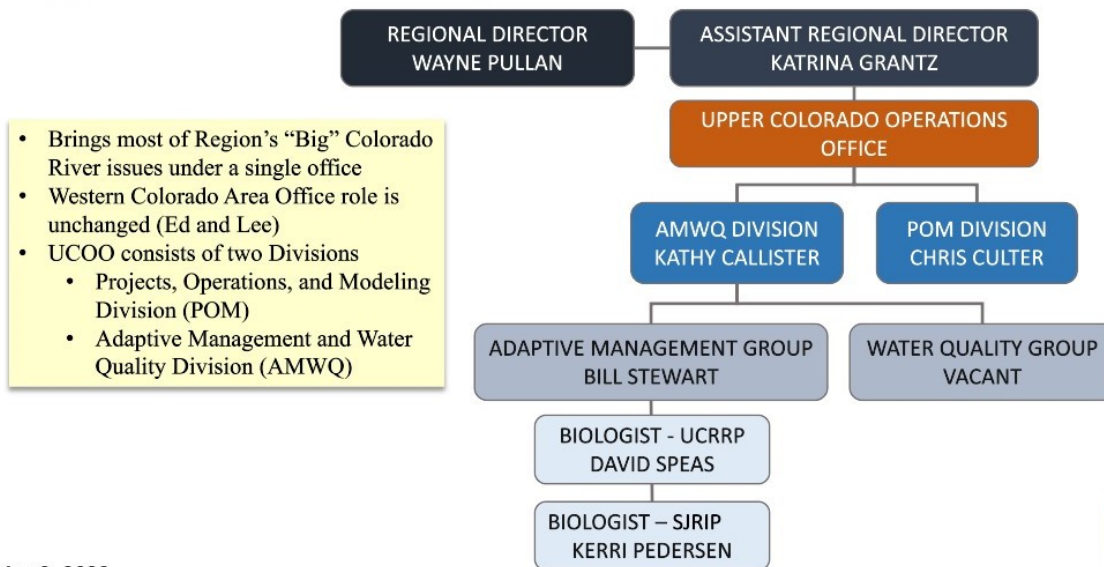
FY24 funding – *Kathy Callister, US Bureau of Reclamation – upper Colorado Operations Office, AMWQ Division Manager*

Kathy provided definitions of authorizations vs appropriations. She reviewed the federal budget calendar which takes three years to get from developed budgets to implementation. Reclamation

is currently in Phase 1 (creating the budget) for FY25. Until the President’s budget is released, Reclamation is not permitted to discuss those budgets. She reiterated the importance of having the authorization passed to include that information in their request. For FY23, \$5.76M has been distributed to the Upper Colorado Program. For FY24, Reclamation requested \$10M total for both the Upper Colorado and San Juan Recovery Programs which would be split 2/3, 1/3 between the UC and the SJ. This provides an additional \$1.26M to be split by the Recovery Programs. These amounts will not be final until they have appropriation language. Should a continuing resolution be in place at the beginning of the fiscal year, funds will be distributed proportionally based on the previous year’s budget. Tom Pitts asked if an additional capital amount was included. Kathy confirmed that a capital budget was also included. Tom noted that approximately 20 organizations supported the increased funding levels through letters to the appropriation committees. Kathy said they will start to work on FY26 budgets soon. Anna thanked Reclamation for their continued financial support for the program and thanked all the entities that submitted letters. Leslie James asked where the Power Office fits in the org chart. Kathy confirmed that it is a third division under Katrina. Leslie noted CREDA also submitted letters of support for appropriations.

Kathy provided information on the Upper Colorado Operations Office (UCOO) reorganization within Reclamation.

Upper Colorado Operations Office (UCOO)



May 2, 2023



Drought Response Updates – Kathy Callister

Kathy noted that snowpack is well above average at all upper basin reservoirs. Drought volumes are expected to be recovered at Flaming Gorge and Blue Mesa this year. Reclamation is paying close attention to temperatures and additional precipitation as runoff conditions develop. Focusing on recovery of previously released water (588KAF from FG; 36KAF from Blue Mesa).

Post-2023 Agreement and Next Steps

Cooperative Agreement – *Michelle Garrison* reviewed general terms of the agreement, contributions from both States and Feds and how they change over time. The partners continue to support a 15-year extension. The proposal includes \$100M for capital projects between the two programs, matched on a project-by-project basis by partners. Annual base funding is provided by the Service and Reclamation as well as the states. The states can contribute cash or cash equivalent actions (which directly offsets approved workplan spending). Reclamation pays more in early years, which tapers lower as the states increase their contributions throughout the 15-year time frame. Breakouts between the states are forthcoming.

Legislation updates – *Michelle* noted that legislation is expected to be introduced in coming months, but not likely to pass before the beginning of the fiscal year. She asked how the partners felt around combining annual and capital to make the inflation language clearer. Tom Pitts recommended keeping capital and annual appropriations separate in the request. In previous years, capital caps have been raised independent from annual amounts. He also anticipates the hydropower dynamics could change things in the future affecting only annual funding. Michelle expected a new draft of legislation will be available to partners within the week.

Economic Benefit Analysis – *Michelle* noted that Tom Pitts has a proposal based on a previous analysis that Michelle supports moving forward. That task is still pending. Tom noted the importance of having this analysis in place as soon as possible. Leslie asked for a copy of the previous analysis (Loomis 2012) and asked that Clayton from WAPA be included in the planning team.

Congressional and Administration Briefings – Utah has completed their briefings and noted that the briefings were successful. Colorado has decided to wait to brief until legislation is ready. All the DOI briefings and appropriation committee meetings are currently on hold until more is known about the pending legislation. Anna encouraged people to move forward with briefings as they are able and to talk with the Program as that is helpful.

Committee Actions

The Committee delegated approval of the 2022 RIPRAP assessment to the Management Committee.

The Committee approved the November 2022 meeting summary which included a brief summary of a January 2023 call as well.

Logistics – *Paul Badame, Recovery Program Deputy Director*

Fall In-person IC Field Trip – Tentative dates and activities were agreed to by the Committee members. An RSVP will be sent out following the meeting to secure reservations and start planning.

- **IC 2-Day Field Trip: August 29-30 (Aug 28 travel day)**
- Aug 28 (Mon eve): Arrive in Vernal via flight from Denver ~ 9 pm or drive from SLC, GJ, or Steamboat. **Daily flights arriving from Denver at 2, 3, and 9 pm

- Aug 29 (Tue): Float through Split Mtn in Dinosaur National Monument on the Green River.
- Night Aug 29: Camp at Split Mountain Campground in Dinosaur
- Aug 30 (Wed): Visit managed floodplains on the Green River and depart for home by 3 pm

ADJOURNED: 11:00 am

In Attendance on May 2:

IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Anna Munoz, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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
Leslie James, Colorado River Energy Distributors Association
Jeff Cowley, State of Wyoming
Todd Adams, State of Utah
Julie Stahli, Program Director, (nonvoting)

OTHERS:

Shane Capron, Western Area Power Administration
Michelle Garrison, Colorado Water Conservation Board
Melissa Trammell, National Park Service
Marj Nelson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Julie Stahli, Recovery Program
David Graf, Recovery Program
Chris Michaud, Recovery Program
Paul Badame, Recovery Program
Kevin McAbee, Recovery Program
Shannon Nelson, Recovery Program
Koreen Zelasko, Recovery Program
Harry Crockett, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Emily Halvorsen, Colorado Attorney General Office
Dave Speas, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Derek Fryer, Western Area Power Administration