



# Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

## Biology Committee Summary December 11, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm (MST)

Revised: 2/01/2024

**BC Members:** Dale Ryden (chair), Pete Cavalli, Jenn Logan, AJ Keith, Tom Pitts, Derek Fryer, Randy Oplinger, Dave Speas, Melissa Trammell

**Participants:** Russ Franklin, Chris Smith, Blake Hansen, Mark Fuller, Ladd Bunting, Kara Scheel, Katie Creighton, Jared Smith, Travis Francis, Cat Adams, Mike Partlow, Brian Scheer, Saidee Hyder, Ed Kluender, Kerri Pedersen, Colleen Cunningham

**Program Director's Office:** Paul Badame, Julie Stahli, Tildon Jones, Koreen Zelasko, David Graf, Shannon Nelson, Chris Michaud

---

### CONVENE: 10:00 AM

#### Review/modify agenda

To Consent Agenda: Adding introduction of Randy Oplinger from UT – new BC Rep; Asst. Director native aquatics, UT.

#### Consent Agenda – Badame

#### Assignments List as of October 25, 2023

- a. **Carried from July 12:** The PDO will provide the Committee with an updated sampling schedule for Colorado pikeminnow and humpback chub with the current assumption that pikeminnow sampling on the Colorado River will return to a 3-on 2-off schedule following the FY24 delay. **ACTIONS:** *The PDO will review a Gantt calendar for all listed species monitoring at the Dec 11 meeting and post a copy on the website. A few updates were made to the table during this meeting. Tildon noted that RZ abundance sampling in the Colorado R occurs during CPM sampling there and should be added to this schedule.*
- b. **October 25: Tildon** will draft a letter of Program support to UDWR for USU's smallmouth bass diet study and send it to the MC for approval. **ACTIONS:** *The letter of support was approved by the MC via email. The letter was then signed by Julie Stahli and sent to Drew Cushing (UDWR Aquatics Chief). This effort was not selected for advancement but may be added to the list again in 2024.*
- c. **October 25: Tildon** will convene a "wrap up" meeting for this year's pikeminnow brood collecting efforts and determine if collections will occur in 2024. **ACTIONS:** *A meeting will occur in conjunction with the Researchers' meeting to allow incorporation of genetics analysis into the decision.*

Select 2024 BC Chair – Melissa Trammell with National Park Service has agreed to chair the Committee for 2024 and Randy Oplinger with Utah Division of Wildlife has agreed to be the vice chair this year and chair the Committee in 2025.

Approve Oct 25 meeting summary – The Committee accepted the October summary as final, and it will be posted on the Program website.

**Review Flaming Gorge flow request** – Tildon reminded the BC of the process, the letter is drafted in conjunction with the BC in December, approved by the MC in Jan/Feb for approval before March 1. That letter goes into the Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group (FGTWG) meeting in early March, which sets Reclamation up for writing an operations plan that will go out for public review in April. The current letter has the same framework as last year, with priorities based on different hydrologic categories. AJ asked if there were any issues that likely need to be addressed from 2023. Tildon noted that requested ranges are quite wide and if we want more specific recommendations within those ranges, we should include that in the letter. It is very hard to add things we might want after the flow request letter is provided to Reclamation. Pete asked if DROA was likely to be triggered in 2024. The current 24-month study suggests that Lake Powell elevations are not likely to trigger DROA in 2024, however things have developed quickly in the past. Melissa commented that NPS continues to advocate for maximum interannual variability in base flows within the Bestgen recommendations. Melissa added that they are just trying to avoid base flows that are similar from year to year because that tends to encourage vegetation establishment and channel narrowing, but they do not mean to change the Bestgen recommendations. >**Tildon** will distribute a copy of the flow request letter to the MC and BC for review and encouraged the BC to discuss it with their MC rep for any additional comments after today.

**CPW update** – Regarding zebra mussel eradication efforts, Jenn Logan relayed that sentinel mussels all died after most recent treatment of Highline Lake. They will begin dropping reservoir levels ~20-30' below full pool now and into early 2024 and then fully drain in fall 2024 (after irrigation season) and allow the remaining water to freeze over the winter of 24/25. They expect to be back to full operations in 2025. Julie added that GVWU requested \$150K to improve the SCADA system in the Highline Canal while reservoir is lowered. The system will improve efficiency of water delivery. Dave Speas asked if CPW has looked for mussels further upstream in the canal. Yes, both eDNA and physical surveys found none at several upstream sites. Travis asked if there is concern leaving the fish barrier net in Highline Reservoir dry for that long of a time. >**Jenn** will investigate and follow up with the Committee. Tom asked for confirmation that Highline is the only location known with zebra mussels in Colorado (yes) and if the finding has prompted further/increased surveying. Jenn relayed that CO has a robust AIS survey program for detection.

See Appendix A for a complete description of the Colorado Wildlife Commission's decision on red swamp crayfish importation and possession. Melissa asked if there are consequences for violations. Jenn said that front range wardens deal with this issue the most. They will receive training and can write citations. Melissa asked if possession was allowed for other species. Jenn

said that 5 species are allowed east of the Continental Divide (i. Virile crayfish ii. Waternymph crayfish iii. Calico crayfish iv. Ringed crayfish v. Southern plains crayfish).

**Report out on rankings of new starts** – Julie said 7 people responded (3 BC members; 4 non-BC members) to the new starts list of proposals. The results were similar between BC and non-BC members. Julie reviewed the top projects, which largely centered around the 15-MR PBO study plan. Dave commented that it was difficult to rank projects without more detail(s) being provided and asked if the BC would be looking at the new starts more closely before the next meeting, and whether we would receive updated, more detailed SOWs.

Julie reviewed the other proposals, with BT studies, HBC estimates in Deso, RZ surveys in Lake Powell, adding WE removal in the CO River, and canal salvage in Grand Valley rounding out the list. For next steps, Julie thinks the PDO should keep a running list of our most important questions (versus projects) and what work we need to answer those. These questions should address bottlenecks to recovery. Then we would direct resources to those questions if more became available. Dave expressed concern about not having a chance to look at the 15-MR Study plan yet, and he wanted to look more at the background for these proposals before approving them. Tom Pitts asked about the fund source for CPW to conduct canal salvage. Julie confirmed that CPW currently covers the cost of that work, and the intent of this proposal is to direct Program funds to CPW. Tom then highlighted the FWS concerns and PBO compliance as the impetus for the 15-MR study plan. He indicated the water users place a high priority on those studies and compliance with the PBO. Pete echoed sentiments about the importance of the 15-MR studies, but agreed he would like more background on those. He asked about other studies that were not on the list. Dale also felt that he needs more information to adequately assess new projects.

**Purpose of Feb 1 BC meeting** – Paul acknowledged a need to reset the new starts and work planning process to better identify areas of importance for the Program.

For the year in front of us, we currently have four sources for recommended changes to the FY 25 workplan including the new start list just discussed, ad hoc group recommendations (15-MR, broodstocks, etc.), annual report recommendations, and possibly suggestions from the Researchers' Meeting. The PDO will compile and prioritize all the recommendations and parse them into categories of importance to recovery (essential, high, med) and "when to implement". Paul also noted that in some cases, recommended actions may result in (budget neutral) changes to our current FY 24 work plan.

The Committee will be provided a curated list of recommendations prior to the February meeting. During the meeting we will work through any of the recommendations that would affect the FY 24 work plan and with input from the PI's, determine which changes can be instituted this year (2024). Next, the BC will assist the PDO with starting the process of developing guidance for the FY 25 work plan. We will determine if enough information exists for each recommendation to be considered and if not, discuss with the PI's or proponent how the action will address recovery needs. The PDO will send PI's guidance for revising FY 25 scopes in late April after the MC and PDO have updated the RIPRAP for FY24-28.

Dale asked if there was an update about the Audubon wetland project. Tildon noted the 90% design from Audubon should be done by end of 2023; he will provide an update at the February BC meeting. He does not anticipate any construction at the pond site happening in water year 2024. Infrastructure (pipes, water delivery system), yes, but no ability to put and rear fish in the wetland.

#### **Next Meetings – Badame**

Jan 30-31: Researchers Meeting at Grand Junction Double Tree

Feb 1: BC Meeting at Grand Junction Double Tree

Mid-March – Early April Paul will send a scheduling poll to the group to find a date for the RIPRAP assessment meeting.

**ADJOURN: by 11: 18 a.m.**

---

#### **Assignments List as of December 11, 2023**

Previous tasks completed are described in the opening section of the meeting summary. Only remaining and new assignments are recorded below.

1. **Tildon Jones** will distribute a copy of the flow request letter to the MC and BC for review and encourages the BC to discuss it with their MC rep for any additional comments.

*ACTIONS:*

2. **Jenn Logan** will investigate if there is a concern leaving the fish barrier net in Highline Reservoir dry for an extended period of time and report back to the Committee.

*ACTIONS:*

## Appendix A – Message from CPW regarding Red Swamp Crayfish Importation dated 12/11/23

All,

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission recently approved regulation changes to allow for the importation, transportation, and possession of live red swamp crayfish in Colorado for the purpose of human consumption. The changes go into effect on January 1, 2024.

The release of the species into the wild remains illegal and the new and amended rules impose safeguards to protect against the species being released into the wild.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife now allows the importation, transportation, and possession of live red swamp crayfish in Colorado for human consumption, provided the following conditions are met:

- No person may possess an individual of the species alive for more than 72 hours.
- Any person who possesses the species alive must have:
- a **copy** of an importation license that authorizes the importation of the crayfish in the person's possession; and
- a receipt or delivery confirmation reflecting the date the person took possession of the crayfish.

This regulation change will primarily impact businesses that import crayfish into Colorado and should have minimal impact on the average consumer. In most cases, the business importing live crayfish will apply for the importation license and a copy of the approved license must accompany the shipment of crayfish. **Consumers buying live crayfish from an in-state vendor will receive a copy of the importation license along with the required receipt.** Consumers buying cooked crayfish from a restaurant will be unaffected.

Specific changes to Chapter W-0 can be found on page 8 with additional info on page 29 of this document: [https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Commission/2023/November/Item.11-W-0\\_Final.pdf](https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Commission/2023/November/Item.11-W-0_Final.pdf)

**Jenn Logan**  
**Assistant Native Aquatic Species Coordinator**