

Biology Committee Phone/Web Conference Summary
February 1, 2007

Participants: Tim Modde, Bob Muth, Angela Kantola, Dave Speas, Melissa Trammell, Misti Schriener, Kevin Gelwicks, Kevin Bestgen, Rich Valdez, Trina Hedrick, Bill Davis, Krissy Wilson, Pat Nelson, Kirk LaGory, Dave Irving, Tom Chart, and Tom Pitts.

Rich Valdez asked the Committee to provide substantive comments on this call, and follow those up with written and/or editorial comments. Rich said the Ad Hoc Committee has made a few additional changes to better document the prioritization. Rich called attention to the 4 criteria used for prioritizing each hypothesis, which is shown on page 17.

Rich reviewed changes made from earlier drafts and went over the structure of the document.

Dave Speas provided additional comments, but said those are minor. Kevin Bestgen said he provided earlier comments and asked about the changes to the nonnative fish component in project 115.

Tom Chart noted that this latest version of the document incorporates a feedback loop, timeline, and RIPRAP revisions.

Gelwicks, LaGory, and Krissy had no additional comments. Trina said some of her questions have been answered and feels the document is much improved and table 3 on page 36 is a good summary of studies. Trina asked if we shouldn't include priorities for bonytail on page 11; Rich said this just references the 2003 geomorphology report. Page 20 & 25 why are A7 and A10 low priorities? Rich said this is seen as a low priority for hypotheses and study development because how to target temperature at a specific location is a real uncertainty. Speas added that field personnel will be able to note maturity throughout the year as part of other studies. Chart added that this also is monitored indirectly through larval studies. Trina asked about the last sentence of the 3rd paragraph on page 27, and suggested that water quality should be monitored year-round (rather than relying on refreshment to bring up the water quality. Trina asked if the effect of river flows on associated channel geomorphology is expected to come through the entrainment study. Dave Speas said it's not, that this is an outstanding information need. Trina asked about the specificity of the 5th bullet on page 29. Kirk explained it's for a given volume.

Melissa said she has no major concerns with the document at this point. She'd still like to see a more direct link between uncertainties and hypothesis and existing/completed studies, but recognizes this may be overly complex. Rich noted that all studies now identified up-front in Table A-1 and the group found Melissa's recommended framework for the tables very helpful. On page 30, the new start below 22F is almost the same as 22F, so it would seem logical to wrap the whole thing into 22F. Dave said sediment analysis has been added. On page 31, in the 2nd paragraph where Western's backwater

topography studies are mentioned, Melissa asked if there's a report; Kirk said they have a proposal in to provide a report. Page 33 new start, is project 144 on Table A-1? It's on table A-4.

On Table A8, A15 (next to last page), nothing in the recommended studies addresses the need for larval drift information. Rich Valdez said he'll check on this. It may have been that what's needed is synthesis/integration.

Misti Schriener asked about Figure 1, noting that Western would like it to read "physical and biological responses." With regard to the feedback loop, Western would like to see a paragraph explaining that process in the document (specifically with regard to recommended revisions and the trigger mechanism). Rich said this would go at the top of page 2, where the figure is introduced. Misti will provide some recommended language for this. Misti discussed Heather's e-mail, noting Western's concern that the use of lower peak flows seems to have been downplayed since the September 29, 2006 version. Misti referred to language at the bottom of the first page and beginning of the second page of the executive summary of that version. Tom Chart said he believes that U14 captures this. Misti said she's gone through the document and identified numerous studies where lower peak flows can be integrated; if the group agrees, and then she thinks Western can be comfortable with the document. Bob recommended putting this dropped language back in the document: ""The magnitude and duration of spring flows necessary to optimize larval entrainment under the full range of hydrologic conditions (e.g., wet, moderately wet, average, etc.) is an outstanding information need. This includes, but is not limited to, the analysis of possibilities for meeting the goals of the flow recommendations at various peak flows (including peak flows that minimize spillway use and the risk of nonnative fish escapement from Flaming Gorge Reservoir). The synthesis of these studies should be used to assess differences in floodplains that translate to year-to-year variability in configuration and larval entrainment. Understanding annual variability of floodplains will help to better understand timing and magnitude of dam releases that most benefit the endangered fish." Rich said this will be re-inserted as paragraph 2 under description under study 2 under floodplains (page 29). The Committee agreed. Melissa said she doesn't like the language, but can live with it.

Misti noted concern regarding continued use of the spillway (with regard to dam stability), but also with regard to nonnative fish escapement. In light of that, she asked how the Committee envisions using the spillway. Dave said this is in the EIS, but doesn't think anyone knows how this will go, but likely would include increased use of the spillway during wet years. Clearly, we will need to look at the tradeoffs between habitat/floodplain entrainment and bass escapement over the spillway.

Tom Pitts asked about identifying data needed and then reviewing the ongoing studies to see if they will provide that data. Bob Muth said they reviewed the objectives in all the scopes of work as a way of making sure the needed data would be provided. Tom suggested the integration start date should be 2009, with a completion date of 2010 (these are the dates that should be in the RIPRAP).

Bill Davis raised 4 comments not addressed:

- 1) plan doesn't look at (from a biological standpoint) ways to reduce peak flows; would propose language for the bottom of page 1, dealing with how we set up studies. Bill suggests this language: "Power generation at Flaming Gorge Dam is a valuable resource that can be impacted by water releases in excess of generation capacity; therefore, inherent within the Study Plan is an objective of allowing water projects to proceed, which includes power generation, by attempting to identify and recommend monitoring and research projects that could demonstrate how we may lower peak flows and simultaneously assist in meeting goals of the flow and temperature recommendations." Dave Speas said he thinks this is largely addressed, but believes this insertion as written would not be scientifically impartial. Bill said he thinks we should encourage low peak flows if there's a way to achieve those AND the flow and temperature recommendations. Dave said the Service and Reclamation have worked hard to get the document where it is and that this point is adequately addressed. Tom Chart agreed with Dave and suggested this is an issue that is more appropriate at the Management Committee level.
- 2) Need to distinguish between the term bypass and the term spillway (two different avenues of entrainment). E.g., pg. 24, U1.
- 3) pg 29, second sentence, concern re this approach because the data will be so highly variable (larvae coming down), it would be difficult to base dam operational strategies on this kind of data. This goes back to his argument re: the need to get sufficient larvae in the system to determine their habitat needs. Kevin Bestgen said they're getting more fish all the time as hatchery fish are reproducing and discussed how these data are being and can be used. Dave Speas agreed, noting how they're using this real-time larval drift information in dam operations. Kirk LaGory noted the need for synthesis of these data in understanding best operational strategies. Tim - real time is coordinating.
- 4) Page 34, believe we need to determine which nonnative fishes are the most problematic. Rich Valdez said the ad hoc discussed this and based on the decline of native fish in the Yampa with smallmouth bass expansion makes a pretty compelling case. Bob Muth said some of this may come out in the research framework project, so that might be mentioned in this document (probably at the end where it refers to Figure 4, just before section 3.5).

Written comments should be submitted directly to Rich. Misti said Western will be submitting written comments.

Bob said he would like to bring the recommendations section to the Management Committee for their approval on February 8. The Committee agreed. Bob Muth said the comments received today will be incorporated in the final document.

Misti said Western is considering a 2007 peak flow study plan for Flaming Gorge. Misti will e-mail this to the BC if there's not time to discuss it today.

Floodplain umbrella: Pat Nelson said he and Bob discussed that it might be good to either have Tim revise the scope of work or have the BC submit comments on the current version, then follow that with BC discussion of those comments. Tim reviewed the purpose of the plan. Tom Pitts said he likes it. Pat Nelson said he likes the way it's organized; he sees this as a scope of work to develop a plan. Bill Davis asked about the

difficulties that the preponderance of nonnative fish in these floodplains may present. Krissy said she'd like to look at long-term maintenance/suitability of these habitats. The Committee was comfortable with Tim developing this plan (\$5K) Tim would get the plan done by mid-to-late summer (Tasks 1 & 2), but will e-mail by the end of March a rough draft of the umbrella plan for BC review and comment (and discussion at the following BC meeting). Tim noted that the Stirrup floodplain is the only place we plan to do a study this year (Dave Irving will follow up with BLM tomorrow). The Green River Study Plan and Tim's umbrella plan will guide future monitoring efforts, so we won't pursue anything else this year.