

Biology Committee Meeting
April 28-29, 2004
Grand Junction, Colorado

Biology Committee: Frank Pfeifer, Tom Nesler, Tom Pitts, Melissa Trammell, Tom Chart, Gary Burton, Kevin Christopherson, and Kevin Gelwicks (Bill Davis and John Hawkins did not attend).

Other participants: Pat Martinez, Bob Muth, Tom Czapla (via phone for the population monitoring workshop agenda item), George Smith, Chuck McAda, Pat Nelson, Angela Kantola, Dave Rees, Mike Harvey, Ray Tenney, Doug Osmundson, Al Pfister, Paul von Guerard, Brent Uilenberg, Mike Hudson, Rich Valdez, Paul Badame, Gerry Roehm, Tim Modde, and Mark Fuller.

Assignments are indicated by “>” and at the end of the document.

Convene: 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday, April 28

1. Review agenda and assign a timekeeper; review previous meeting summaries/action items - The agenda was revised as it appears below. The February 10-11 meeting summary was approved as written. >Tom Nesler will determine if Colorado’s management of Elkhead Reservoir would be the same whether or not the reservoir is completely screened and send out a revised draft lake management plan in May. With regard to the Program Director’s office determining what needs to be done to achieve the numbers and sizes in the stocking plan next year into the future, Frank Pfeifer reported that they caught 600+ 14" razorback suckers from a pond from which they captured only ~25 fish in the fall, so this has helped make up for the short fall in last year’s production and stocking. Frank said he believes they will only need to lease one pond (Rinderknecht) in the Vernal area in the future (the rest of the fish can be produced on station). Pat said he’s been working with Chuck McAda on what ponds will need to be re-released in FY 05 in the Grand Valley. Minor revisions were made to the February 27 conference call summary; >Angela Kantola will post the revised summary to the listserv. Melissa Trammell asked if the Management Committee was aware that the Biology Committee had made a recommendation for screening, and if so, if funds are available. >Gerry Roehm will make sure that some agreement on Elkhead formally acknowledges that the upper or middle outlets will not be used unless they are screened.

2. Pat Martinez, Evaluation of Colorado’s stocking regulations - Pat noted that he thinks the GIS framework developed for this analysis will be useful in the future. The evaluation raised serious questions about our ability to get data from the private sector and to develop a standardized protocol for data collection. With the data available, they couldn’t clearly determine whether or not the stocking regulations are contributing to control of nonnative fish. Pat said he doesn’t believe there is currently significant opposition to the nonnative fish stocking procedures. Pat said there are still gaps in the

procedures that may be allowing escapement of nonnative fishes. Melissa suggested Pat may want to emphasize in the report that seining was not very representative of centrarchids. Tom Nesler said the report's recommendations on how to improve the permitting and regulation process will be shared with CDOW's aquatic section. Frank recommended that the Program Director or coordinator brief the Commission on this report, let them know that based on available data, we can't say whether procedures are working, and that CDOW will need to resolve some of these shortcomings before we can revise the Procedures. Tom Nesler said it would be appropriate for Pat Martinez to make a presentation at a Commission workshop. Frank said that's fine, but we need to get the message back to the Commission that we are not being effective in controlling nonnative fish stocking. >The Committee asked Bob Muth to discuss this with Bruce McCloskey and determine what needs to be done to address this issue with CDOW and the Commission. >The Committee also recommended that Utah and Wyoming review their permitting and regulating processes to be sure they don't have similar gaps. Tom Chart asked about the portion of the final recommendation in the report that says "if the regulations are relaxed or modified..." Pat Martinez said he doesn't believe the regulations should be relaxed, but included that language in recognition that the private sector might *request* that the regulations be relaxed. Pat will change this to read: "as state regulations are reviewed and modified." With reference to the conclusion on pg. 24 that says: "no means to acquire stocking information from out-of-state vendors..." Frank Pfeifer suggested there be a recommendation to resolve that shortcoming. >Pat will add a recommendation along the lines that Colorado should investigate ways to regulate out-of-state vendors shipping fish into Colorado. The Committee approved the report and recommendations as revised. >Pat Martinez will revise and finalize the report (distributing hard copies and also providing an electronic copy for the Program Director's office to post to the Program website). Tom Pitts asked about the GIS data developed for this work, and Pat replied that good groundwork has been laid and they are making the data available to others. Frank Pfeifer recommended that this be part of a larger Committee discussion on database management; the Committee agreed. Perhaps Chuck McAda could brief the Committee on what data he manages, and have someone from the San Juan Program (and perhaps Grand Canyon) give a presentation on their use of GIS. Kevin Gelwicks said Nate Nibbelink has done some work for Wyoming along these lines and suggested that he be part of these discussions. >The Program Director's office will look into scheduling a 3/4-day workshop on this in conjunction with an upcoming Biology Committee meeting.

3. Review reports list - The Committee reviewed the reports due list. >Angela Kantola will post a revised list to the listserv.
4. Presentation: "Ecological and physical processes during spring runoff and summer baseflows in the Colorado River" - Ray Tenney said the report has been provided to the Biology Committee. >The Program Director's office will arrange for peer review by the geomorphology panel. Dave Rhees and Mike Harvey gave a PowerPoint presentation. Questions from Committee members included needed duration of increases in summer baseflows to mobilize fine sediments, where fine sediments re-deposit, and if we can correlate increased macroinvertebrate production with increases in year-1 native fishes.

Frank Pfeifer recommended that the authors tighten up the conclusions section in the report and Tom Pitts suggested that the recommendations section also needs work and should include discussion of how to apply this work in water management.

5. Capital projects PowerPoint presentation - Brent Uilenberg gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Grand Valley Water Management (GVWM) project and other capital projects. Brent pointed out potential for additional water savings in other Grand Valley irrigation systems (this would require very carefully-crafted agreements). The cost of the water saved through GVWM is averaging only ~\$10/acre-foot. Tom Pitts noted that a reservoir to provide this amount of water would have cost 10-20 times the \$7M we've spent on GVWM.
6. Update on 2004 snowpack and runoff forecast - George Smith gave a PowerPoint presentation on current and forecasted conditions. George said there won't be coordinated reservoir operations this year.
7. Update on sediment monitoring studies - George Smith said the scope of work was modified, but the contract isn't in place yet (ideally this and the sediment samplers would have been in place prior to runoff), and Reclamation is questioning whether they can transfer funds to USGS via CRWCD. The other alternative is to transfer the funds directly to USGS (losing the match), or use additional Program funds to replace the match. Reclamation's procurement folks are reviewing the long-term funding legislation to determine if they will consider annual power revenues a non-Federal contribution.
8. Effects of projected flows on projects and discussion of contingency plans for floodplain studies that may not be completed at expected flows - Pat Nelson discussed four Green River floodplain and one nonnative fish study: 1) the Baeser Bend study, which shouldn't be affected because water is pumped there; 2) the Stirrup study, which will be affected since this floodplain it won't connect with the river (so this study will most likely be deferred); 3) Modde's project looking at Johnson Bottom, Leota L10, Old Charley, and Thunder Ranch (razorback larvae stocked at these sites on Monday), which may be affected both by flows and by the fact that construction at Thunder Ranch may not be completed in time; 4) Utah's work to entrain beads and larvae, which may be affected because most larvae were produced early this year and will be too large to evaluate by the time of peak flows (however, Ouray NFH will try to produce some larvae later, spawning the fish on May 4) ; and 5) Duchesne River nonnative fish removal, which can't be conducted unless flows are higher than last year. The Program Director's office has asked Reclamation to shorten the duration of Flaming Gorge releases to achieve 13,000 cfs at Jensen for 3 days, but we don't yet know if this will happen (the Committee learned later in the afternoon that Reclamation has declined this request). Reclamation has said conditions would include that the Yampa peak at or above 6,500 cfs, that levee notches must be in place, and that the entrainment study is feasible. CREDA has opposed this release. Kevin outlined the options he posted to the Committee last week. Kevin said the decision on filling Stewart Lake will be made by May 10. If construction stays on schedule, they will begin to notch levees on May 12. Final flow projections will be published May 8. The Biology Committee will discuss this further on

a conference call 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 12. >The Program Director's office will set up the call.

9. UDWR Humpback chub sampling - Mike Hudson gave a PowerPoint presentation on sampling and identification needs as related to potential introgression in the Desolation/Gray canyons humpback chub population (with roundtail chub). Bob Muth noted that the humpback chub recovery goals documented the percentage of reported introgrades for all populations. Convergent evolution is another possible explanation for what the biologists are seeing. Mike said they can segregate humpback and roundtail chub using the "art of seeing well" morphometric criteria, but suggested developing the discriminant function to back up these criteria. Bob Muth said he believes that our existing morphometric criteria are quantitative and defensible. Rich Valdez suggested that this situation may not be comparable to westslope cutthroat trout and rainbow trout introgression since these trout species only rarely occurred sympatrically, whereas native humpback and roundtail chubs have always overlapped significantly. Rich asked if this we applied this to Desolation/Gray, would we need to apply it to the other populations, and what additional stress might this place on the fish? Frank said that based on this presentation and our conservative population estimates, he doesn't believe we need to go beyond our current morphometric criteria at this time. The Committee agreed and emphasized that the "art of seeing well" morphometric criteria must be consistently applied to all humpback chub populations.

Adjourn: 5:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 29

Convene: 8:00 a.m.

10. Recommendation for population estimate/monitoring workshop - The meeting was tentatively set for July 7-8 in Grand Junction (8-5 both days). >Tom Czapla will draft a preliminary agenda and hopefully send it out by the end of next week.
11. Update on lower basin concurrent population estimate - Tom Czapla a concurrent 3-pass estimate will be done in both systems in spring 2005. Criteria will be developed to compare the estimates.
12. Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) request for Program review of Rick Anderson's methodology for instream flow needs - Bob Muth said Randy Seaholm has asked this Program and the San Juan Program to consider adopting the 2D model methodology Rick Anderson used as the standard method for determining instream flow recommendations for the endangered fish. Frank suggested it's premature to adopt a method that's never been used for endangered fish. Tom Pitts suggested that we review Anderson's report, but said adopting a methodology is a much bigger issue. CWCB would like to get the report back by July 21-22 meeting in Delta. The report should be reviewed by the Biology and Water Acquisition committees and the geomorphology panel. We'll review the report and provide comments first, then consider the question of

adopting the methodology later. >Chuck McAda will bring this up with the San Juan Biology Committee.

13. Annual Reports update - Bob Muth said these have been posted to the website and hard copies are forthcoming.
14. SWSI update - Gerry Roehm gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Statewide Water Supply Initiative (SWSI). More information is available on the CWCB's website at www.cwcb.state.co.us. Gerry will continue to monitor the process. Tom Pitts said he's been involved, as well, and has provided information about Program flow recommendations, Section 7 process, etc.
15. Yampa Plan and EA - Gerry Roehm said he's still working on the EA, with some water quality and vegetation impacts portions remaining. Margot Zallen has received for her review the draft final EA with those additions outstanding. She should receive these additions soon. The PBO is a bit behind schedule.
16. Flaming Gorge and Aspinall EIS updates - Tom Chart said comments were received from all 8 cooperating agencies by mid-February; Reclamation provided their response to the cooperating agencies and then met with the cooperators early this week. Reclamation is revising the document to be clear and consistent that they will try to balance among all authorized purposes in periods of drought. Clayton Palmer has raised concerns about the cumulative impacts to power over time, stating that reoperation to meet flow recommendations is unacceptable due to those cumulative impacts. Reclamation will address this in the adaptive management section (Clayton and others are drafting language for consideration). Public scoping meetings on Aspinall were held at the end of February. Cooperators are being invited to participate.
17. Good news from San Juan River - Melissa Trammell reported on the larval razorback sucker and age-1 razorback (or possibly razorback x flannelmouth hybrids) being caught on the San Juan River.
18. Congressional staff tour - Tom Pitts said the National Water Resource Association, National Endangered Species Reform Coalition and the Colorado Water Users sponsored a Congressional staff tour (staffers on the committees responsible for re-authorization of the ESA) in the Grand Valley a few weeks ago. Tom said he received very positive feedback about the cooperation and on-the-ground recovery activities of the Program.
19. Criteria for upper Yampa nonnative fish management - Tom Nesler distributed a revised version of his nonnative fish escapement criteria and estimation paper. Frank said Vernal CRFP will complete their tagging of northern pike in the upper reach of the Yampa this week, with a total of >500 pike tagged. Kevin Christopherson said they've caught a number of untagged pike in the middle Green River, indicating young fish are moving down through the system. In the case of Elkhead Reservoir, Melissa Trammell and Tom Chart suggested we look at the total estimated number of smallmouth bass escaping the reservoir (based on Miller's escapement study) and the percentage of the pike population

estimate emigrating from the upper Yampa River (rather than just looking at marked fish movement). Kevin Christopherson pointed out that at some point we'll have to determine what nonnative fish population level is acceptable. (E.g., on the Green River, they initially removed 300-400 northern pike per year, but now they remove <50/year, and that number seems to have stabilized. The question is, is that level acceptable?) Tom Nesler emphasized we'll use these criteria this year, then examine how it's worked out at the workshop after the end of the season. The 10% level is not set in stone and that our ultimate criteria is native fish response. Melissa said she will provide written comments to Tom on the criteria. The Committee discussed using a number of fish/mile as the criteria, noting the need to consider the target number of pikeminnow in setting this level.

20. Next meeting - Conference call May 12 from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m to discuss plans for floodplain and nonnative fish projects affected by low flows. Meeting June 23 in Salt Lake City from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. >Kevin Christopherson will arrange a meeting room. Reports for review will include: the Modde and Christopherson report on the Stirrup wetland; Chris Hill's Yampa River pike exclusion report; the 15-Mile Reach "bug report;" and a report by Kitcheyan on pikeminnow movement in and out of Lodore Canyon (funded by CUPCA); and Rick Anderson's flow investigations report. Other agenda items may include: FY 05 work plan modifications; and Yampa nonnative fish management. Updates that don't require Committee response should be made via the listserv, rather than scheduling them as a part of the meeting.

Adjourn 11:00 a.m.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Tom Nesler will determine if Colorado's management of Elkhead Reservoir would be the same whether or not the reservoir is completely screened and send out a revised draft lake management plan in May.
2. Angela Kantola will post the revised February 27 conference call summary to the listserv.
3. Gerry Roehm will make sure that some agreement on Elkhead formally acknowledges that the upper or middle outlets will not be used unless they are screened.
4. Bob Muth will discuss the outcome of the nonnative fish stocking regulations evaluation with Bruce McCloskey and determine what needs to be done to address this issue with CDOW and the Commission.
5. The Committee asked Utah and Wyoming to review their nonnative fish stocking permitting and regulating processes to be sure they don't have gaps similar to those discovered in Colorado.
6. Pat Martinez will revise and finalize the nonnative fish stocking regulations evaluation report (distributing hard copies and also providing an electronic copy for the Program Director's office to post to the Program website).
7. The Program Director's office will look into scheduling a 3/4-day workshop on GIS in conjunction with an upcoming Biology Committee meeting.
8. Angela Kantola will post a revised reports list to the listserv.
9. The Program Director's office will arrange for the "Ecological and physical processes during spring runoff and summer baseflows in the Colorado River" report to be peer reviewed by the geomorphology panel.
10. The Program Director's office will set up a conference call for Wednesday, May 12, 9-11 a.m. to make decisions on how to proceed with the studies affected by low flows this year.
11. Tom Czapla will draft a preliminary agenda for the population estimate/monitoring workshop (tentatively set for July 7-8 in Grand Junction), and hopefully send it out by the end of next week.
12. Chuck McAda will alert the San Juan Biology Committee to CWCB's request that they review Rick Anderson's report.
13. Kevin Christopherson will arrange a meeting room for the meeting June 23 in Salt Lake City.