

BIOLOGY COMMITTEE MEETING
July 10-11, 2001
Denver, Colorado

Biology Committee: Paul Dey, Tom Chart, Matthew Andersen/Mike Hudson, Bill Davis, Tom Pitts, Tom Nesler, John Hayse (for WAPA), Tim Modde, John Hawkins.

Other participants: Frank Pfeifer, Pat Nelson, Gerry Roehm, Angela Kantola, Tom Czapla, Bob Muth, Keith Rose, Michelle Garrison, Carolyn Fritz, and Kevin Bestgen.

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

1. Revisions/Additions to agenda - the agenda was revised as it appears below. >Tom Nesler will post an update on the Colorado River Fishery Management Plan to the listserver.
2. Approval of May 29-30 meeting summary - The summary was approved as written.
3. Update: Revisions to Colorado and Utah Stocking Plans - Tom Nesler distributed Colorado’s revised stocking plan, noting that it is summarized in the table on page 17. Tom Nesler suggested that the Biology Committee provide the peer review on this document. Mike said Utah is revising their plan and will delete irrelevant information such as tagging methods. >Mike will send that revised plan out to the Committee by the end of the month. Utah’s revised razorback stocking numbers will be 8,230 fish per year (split between the middle and lower Green River) for five years. For bonytail, Utah’s plan will propose stocking 6,300 fish (~200 mm) into each of three areas: the middle Green, lower Green, and lower Colorado River. Tom Czapla prepared a rough draft stocking plan that the states are considering as they revise their stocking plans. From those plans, Tom will prepare a revised draft facility needs document by September. Tom Czapla noted that the recovery goals call for two populations of bonytail in the upper basin, but we know the least about this species, so the stocking plans will basically aim at 4 populations. Both Colorado and Utah’s plans will be discussed at the next meeting. Frank said that if the Committee agrees we’re only stocking razorbacks 300 mm and larger, this will dictate what fish are stocked this fall and those overwintered (for which space may be limited). >Tom Czapla will work with Tim and provide a summary of the fish available, numbers to be stocked this year, numbers to be overwintered, how that fits with the new stocking plan, etc. by the end of July so that we can decide what fish to stock this fall. PIT tags will be the logical tagging method for stocking larger fish as proposed, and the FY 02 budget has \$200K for this under CAP-7.
4. CPM Intensive Culture Technique Manual - Tom Nesler said this reference manual is near completion and proposed that it be provided to the Biology Committee for review (to be considered at the next meeting). The Committee agreed (peer review won’t be necessary for this manual).
5. Tusher Wash Screening: The Management Committee requested a recommendation on the need for screening in light of the report by Tim Modde’s office (after a 1-year evaluation of Tusher) which says the canal doesn’t appear to pose a threat to adult endangered fish. Keith Rose outlined the legal and institutional history of the Tusher Wash diversion, noting that it will be 18 months to 2 years before the legal issues are resolved. Since both pikeminnow and razorback go in the canal, this legally constitutes “take” under the ESA. The question is whether the Program is willing to accept a certain level of “take” which we know is occurring because the fish go in the canal and are potentially stranded there. (We don’t know what happens after they get in the canal.) There is no incidental take statement on this facility because FERC exempted the hydro facility from the licensing process. The Service has asked FERC to rescind the

exemption based on new information and go through a full licensing process; however, FERC may argue that there is no ongoing Federal action. The only other Federal action is a BLM right-of-way permit for the canal company (up for review in 2003). Tom Pitts noted that earlier this year the Program decided to build a fish screen for 715 cfs, but the canal company wouldn't approve it (due to their ongoing legal battle with the hydro company over diversions). The Management Committee contemplated an agreement between the Service and the canal company which would then generate a biological opinion with an incidental take statement.

The issue before the Biology Committee is whether a screen is needed at all (assuming the legal issues are resolved). A screen for ~300 cfs would cost about \$500K, whereas a screen for 715 cfs would cost ~\$1.5M. Tim said he'd be interested in knowing the potential impact of this structure on the adult population in the lower Green River. Tom Pitts noted that the Colorado River PBO has an incidental take limit of 1% of the adult population. Frank Pfeifer maintained that screening (or buyout) is needed, recognizing that the Program will have to wait to proceed until the court case is resolved. Bob Muth recommended that Tim delete page 18 of the report and stick to what the data support: were fish found in the canal? Yes. Was there evidence of stranding? No. The Committee agreed that >Tim should delete page 18 and also modify the Executive Summary. The Biology Committee's previous recommendation for screening stands.

6. Review overdue reports list - >By September 1 (earlier if possible), Matt Andersen will meet with Todd Crowl to develop a schedule for completing the bonytail reintroduction report and the Green River nonnative fish control report. >By July 20, John Hawkins will provide a revised schedule for completing the Little Snake River Management Plan (Part II) and his two electrofishing reports. >Tom Czaplak will provide the facilities needs report by September 14. >Tom Nesler will provide the Intensive Culture Techniques Manual to the BC by July 23. The program is revising the tracking system and a policy statement concerning overdue reports will be out by the end of the month.

7. Review FY02/03 annual work plan (see also the comments in the budget spreadsheet)

Flaming Gorge (Lodore/Whirlpool) - Bill Davis and John Hayse suggested that the purpose of this study is over-stated; this isn't really an assessment of cumulative effects of implementing the flow recommendations. In fact, flow recommendations have not been fully implemented. The data obtained from this study would merely revise the baseline. Tom Nesler noted that we need to take the opportunity to implement nonnative fish control during this study. Bob Muth encouraged the PI's to consider how this work will help us refine the flow recommendations for the endangered fish (all four) to help achieve recovery. >The PI's will revise the SOW by the end of the month.

Two competing 2002 SOWs were submitted for Gunnison temperature modeling (Hydrosphere SOW had been submitted for 2001-02). The Bureau submitted a separate SOW for 2002-03 to carry out any subsequent modeling that may be required for the Aspinall Unit. Whether this project continues past 2001 depends on the outcome of Hydrosphere's 2001 work. Hydrosphere's Phase I report is expected in September 2001. The Committee agreed to defer consideration of 2002 SOWs until then.

Tom Pitts questioned why the Gunnison PBO process was included under CAP-9. He suggested preparing a separate SOW for it, as well as a task-specific SOW from the NEPA contractor (Ayres Associates) identifying specifically how \$500K would be spent under the CAP-9 umbrella. Gerry agreed that separate SOWs were warranted. >Gerry will write a separate SOW for the Gunnison PBO and contact Tenney/Ayres for a SOW for NEPA activities on the Yampa.

The Committee discussed land acquisition costs and ways of streamlining the process. Tom Pitts pointed out that the umbrella SOW doesn't indicate the status of land acquisition in relationship to the priorities listed; e.g., how much land have we acquired within each of the high priority reaches, how many landowners have been contacted there, how many sites are left to investigate, etc. It's difficult to determine whether annual objectives are being met. Pat said he can package the information we've provided previously to make it more clear. Tom Nesler suggested a matrix showing how far along we are in each priority area. >By September 1, Pat will prepare a summary of land acquisition/floodplain restoration status for the Committee's review based on the foregoing discussion, starting with a couple of priority areas.

The Committee discussed stocking bonytail and razorback sucker in floodplain depressions and decided to reorganize the RZ/OCW and RZ/BT SOWs. Questions were raised about what life stages to stock in the floodplains. >The revised SOWs will be sent to the Biology Committee by July 20 and the Committee will have a conference call at 11:00 a.m. on July 23 to discuss them in advance of the Management Committee meeting. >Angela will arrange the call and post the call-in information to the listserver.

The Committee questioned whether a SOW is needed to develop a Stewart Lake Management Plan or if UDWR and USFWS-ES could just meet one day within the next few months and work out a plan. >Pat will contact Ron Brunson and Bruce Waddell to begin this process.

John Hawkins suggested that the Yampa River pikeminnow entrainment SOWs may be overkill, as there are few structures likely to take fish. Tom Pitts asked if it's wise to do this at the same time we're working with landowners to get permission to remove northern pike. The proposed studies may indicate whether fish go into the diversions, but won't tell us if that's a problem. Also, the PBO would be finished before this study. The PBO will likely include as part of its incidental take statement a recommendation to evaluate entrainment and set limits on incidental take. The Committee recommended deferring this work for a year.

Tom Pitts recommended a placeholder for nonnative fish removal from backwaters, since those studies are ending this year (and we need to see results before we know how we might want to proceed). The Committee agreed.

>Tom Nesler will check on whether funding is limiting the landowner incentive package discussed in CAP 18/19.

>Tom Nesler will revise the Yampa nonnative fish control SOW (#98) by the end of August. >The Program Director's office will prepare a 1-page explanation for every "placeholder" scope of work (prior to the Management Committee meeting).

The Committee discussed the new SOW #111 and noted the absence of the prerequisite monitoring plan due April 30th, 2001. >Tim Modde and other authors will work together to get a draft monitoring stocked fish plan to the Committee by October 15 so that the plan can begin to be implemented before next spring.

The Committee discussed evaluating nonnative fish escapement from various reservoirs versus going ahead and screening reservoirs which are known sources of nonnatives or removing nonnative fishes from the rivers. With regard to Bottle Hollow, the Committee questioned whether the Program should provide a screen on the Tribe's proposed Elder's Pond. >The Program Director's office will review this SOW and the EA and provide recommendations to the Management Committee.

=====
=====
Frank Pfeifer recommended that the costs in Ouray NFH O&M be carefully reviewed (costs seem high compared to Grand Valley, for example). >Tim Modde will do that.

=====
=====
Tom Pitts asked that all scopes of work be revised and the budget broken out by task and category (see Pitts' memo). >The PD's office will prepare a draft table for PI's to use to provide this information. Report due dates should reflect: 1) date to be sent to peer review; 2) anticipated date to be sent to the Biology Committee; and 3) anticipated date to be finalized.

8. Conference call at 11:00 a.m. on July 23 to discuss revised bonytail and razorback floodplain SOWs in advance of the Management Committee meeting. The next meeting will be September 26-27 in Cheyenne, starting at 10 a.m. on the 26th and concluding at 2 p.m. on the 27th. Agenda items will include: review of the revised stocking plans; review/approval of the Colorado pikeminnow intensive culture technique manual; review of Pat's floodplain restoration matrix, possibly review results of phase I of Gunnison River temperature study (if the Committee receives a report at an early enough date).
9. Researcher's meeting: To be held in Moab around the middle of January (>hosted by Utah).

ACTION ITEMS

Tom Nesler will post an update on the Colorado River Fishery Management Plan to the listserv.

Mike Hudson will send Utah's revised stocking plan out to the Committee by the end of July.

Tom Czapla will work with Tim and provide a summary of the fish available, numbers to be stocked this year, numbers to be overwintered, how that fits with the new stocking plan, etc. by the end of July so that we can decide what fish to stock this fall.

Tim should delete page 18 of his Tusher Wash evaluation report and modify the executive summary accordingly.

By September 1 (earlier if possible) Matt Andersen will meet with Todd Crowl to develop a schedule for completing the bonytail reintroduction and Green River nonnative fish control reports.

By July 20, John Hawkins will provide a revised schedule for completing the Little Snake River Management Plan (Part II) and his two electrofishing reports.

Kevin Bestgen, Tom Chart, and Tim Modde will revise the Flaming Gorge (Lodore/Whirlpool) SOW by the end of the month.

By September 1, Gerry will write a separate SOW for the Gunnison PBO and submit a task-specific SOW for NEPA activities on the Yampa.

By September 1, Pat will prepare a summary of land acquisition/floodplain restoration status for the Committee's review, starting with a couple of priority areas.

The revised bonytail and razorback floodplain SOWs will be sent to the Biology Committee by July 20 and the Committee will have a conference call at 11:00 a.m. on July 23 to discuss them in advance of the Management Committee meeting. Angela will arrange the call and post the call-in information to the listserv.

Pat will contact Ron Brunson and Bruce Waddell to see if UDWR and USFWS--ES could meet one day within the next few months and work out a Stewart Lake Management Plan.

Tom Nesler will determine if funding is limiting the CAP 18/19 landowner incentive package.

Tom Nesler will revise the Yampa nonnative fish control SOW (#98) by the end of August.

Tim Modde and other authors will work together to get a draft monitoring stocked fish plan to the Committee by October 15 so that the plan can begin to be implemented before next spring.

The Program Director's office will prepare a 1-page explanation for every "placeholder" scope of work (prior to the Management Committee meeting).

The Program Director's office will review the Bottle Hollow screening SOW and the EA and provide recommendations to the Management Committee.

Tim Modde will review costs for Ouray NFH O&M (which seem high compared to Grand Valley).

The PD's office will prepare a draft table for PI's to use for breaking out SOW budgets by task. FY 02/03 SOW's will then be revised to provide this information.

The PD's office will have all FY 02/03 SOW's revised so that report due dates reflect: 1) date to be sent to peer review; 2) anticipated date to be sent to the Biology Committee; and 3) anticipated date to be finalized.

Utah will host the 2002 Researcher's Meeting in Moab.