Biology Committee Conference Call (Final Summary, revised 11/27/06)
October 16, 2006

Biology Committee: Tom Pitts, John Hawkins, Melissa Trammell, Tom Chart, Gary Burton, Dave Speas, Krissy Wilson, and Kevin Gelwicks.

Other participants: Trina Hedrick, Bob Muth, Pat Nelson, Tom Czapla, Mike Montagne, Dave Irving, Tim Modde, Craig Walker, and Sam Finney.

Purpose: To determine where best to stock 10,000–17,000 excess hatchery-produced razorback sucker juveniles (~2–3 inches in length).

The Biology Committee generally agreed that the Stirrup would be the best location for conducting a recruitment study. Unfortunately, on October 11 UDWR sampled the site and captured ~3,000 bullheads ranging in length from 65–155 mm, averaging ~120 mm, as well as fathead minnow, red shiner, carp, white sucker, and green sunfish.

The group discussed alternatives to the Stirrup, including:

Stewart Lake - dry, even near the outlet
Bonanza Bridge - nearly dry
Baeser Bend - ~4 inches of water and 6 inches of mud
Above Brennan - shallow; UDWR crews could not sample
Johnson Bottom - UDWR could not access the site because of road conditions
Leota units L3 and L4 (borrow areas) - are currently 2 to 3 feet deep and may be used for growout, but fish would be difficult to harvest.
Leota Bottom L10 - may be a possibility for growout. It has been drained down, but it may be possible to add water. It also has a large expanse of cattails, making it difficult to harvest fish.
Ouray National Fish Hatchery outdoor ponds - fish-predator free, and covered with nets to prevent bird predation. Although overwintering fish has not been successful in the past, may be the best alternative for holding excess razorback sucker temporarily; fish would be easy to harvest.
Old Charlie Wash - dry
Pariette - may be a possibility for use as growout

After a discussion of the alternatives, the Biology Committee agreed that:

1. If we can rotenone the Stirrup within the next 2 or 3 weeks then, prior to treatment, sample the site to determine if any endangered species are present and, after treatment, stock all available excess razorback sucker juveniles into the Stirrup to prepare for a recruitment study.

2. If we cannot rotenone the Stirrup within the next 2 or 3 weeks, then stock ~10,000 of the smaller razorback sucker into the 4 to 6 outdoor Ouray NFH ponds, and stock the larger razorback sucker into the Stirrup on top of the bullheads and hope that some of them survive predation and overwinter conditions.

3. If we cannot rotenone the Stirrup within the next 2 or 3 weeks but we can rotenone in the spring prior to runoff, then salvage the surviving razorbacks from the Stirrup, rotenone the site (and continue salvage of any remaining razorbacks), restock the salvaged razorbacks, and also stock the razorbacks that survived over winter in the Ouray NFH ponds.

The Biology Committee also agreed that it would be a good idea to monitor Green River floodplain wetlands each fall (prior to ice-up) and each spring (after ice-off and prior to runoff) to determine relative reset frequency among sites, and to determine which sites are better able to sustain fish over summer and over winter (i.e., year-round) for up to 3 years.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Pat Nelson will contact BLM (Tim Farecloth) to determine if and when we may use rotenone to reset the Stirrup wetland.

2. Mike Montagne will determine, by October 20, how many excess razorback sucker juveniles are available for stocking.

3. Trina Hedrick will arrange for permission to sample the Thunder Ranch wetlands. If possible, sampling will occur during the week of October 22.

4. A status update and additional discussion (if necessary) will be added to the November BC agenda.

During the call, a question was asked whether easements allowed the use of rotenone. Contract and Grant of Easement item #3e states "Grantor hereby grants to the United States Department of Interior the exclusive right to remove, stock, manage, and control all fishes as deemed necessary...by the representatives of the United States." On the Green River, this language would apply to Thunder Ranch and 5 flooplain terrace easements. Recovery Program activities on BLM wetlands and FWS (Ouray NWR) wetlands, however, require permission from the managing agencies.