

Information & Education Committee Meeting
February 16, 2006
Denver, Colorado

Convene:

1. Welcome/Introductions. Jim Pokrandt replaced Peter Roessmann with the Colorado River Water Conservation District. Dawn Taylor-Owens left the Colorado Department of Natural Resources.

2. Program Director's Update – Bob Muth gave an update on current Program activities. He distributed the *2005-2006 Program Highlights* document which is produced annually for the partners' annual meetings with members of Congress and their staff in D.C. Bob noted that the document was revised this year to better reflect accomplishments and tie them to the recovery goals. The intent is to provide a better sense of how the Upper Colorado River and San Juan River programs are doing and how they are spending their money. Program activities that are more likely to require additional outreach include: 1. the signing of the Record of Decision for the operation of Flaming Gorge Dam and subsequent changes in dam operations to meet the flow recommendations for the endangered fishes; 2. enlargement of Elkhead Reservoir; 3. completion of the fourth and final fish passage at Price-Stubbs diversion dam on the upper Colorado River (slated for completion in 2007; the facility may or may not include a waterpark); and 4. nonnative fish management, which continues to be the biggest challenge and perhaps the biggest threat to the endangered fishes.

Bob also reviewed the status of the endangered fish which is discussed in detail in the briefing document. He emphasized that there may be some good news stories to announce this year if researchers continue to find evidence of successful spawning and reproduction resulting from the stocking of hatchery-raised fish.

Bob also mentioned that the court ruling for the humpback chub recovery goals lawsuit was issued January 18, 2006. This was in response to a lawsuit filed against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) by the Grand Canyon Trust. Matt Kales assumed the lead for producing a news release from the Service that was distributed on February 13, 2006.

3. Nonnative Fish Management – Nonnative Fish Management Coordinator Pat Nelson gave a comprehensive overview by river reach of the status of last year's nonnative fish management actions and planned changes for this year. The information he provided was a result of data presented at a Nonnative Fish Management Workshop held last December and subsequent Biology Committee meetings. Pat emphasized that smallmouth bass and northern pike remain the priority species of concern. He gave some good news about declines in northern pike populations in the Green and Yampa rivers. There is less good news about smallmouth bass populations in the Colorado River which appear to be increasing at alarming rates. The State of Colorado is working with the Recovery Program to determine the best actions to address this issue.

Pat carried forward a message from researchers who attended the Nonnative Fish Management Workshop re: how they believe we can improve outreach efforts this year. Some of these ideas were: 1.) having more direct communication with stakeholders; 2.) getting a better idea of whether there are more proponents or opponents in the Yampa River Basin; 3.) designating native fish river reaches and promoting them; 4.) identifying and promoting alternative fisheries; 4.) refining our answer to the question, "Why should people care about preventing the extinction of the species;" 5.) getting more news media stories about the increase of smallmouth bass and why this hurts the native fishes.

After Pat's overview, several committee members said that to do a better job of outreach, we need research data that can be used to develop messages that will generate good news stories. To date, agencies involved with nonnative fish management work (including the Recovery Program) have been reluctant to draw any conclusions about the progress being made that would help the Committee generate news stories. This discussion led to the decision to invite members of the I&E Committee to attend the April meeting of the Biology Committee so that both researchers and communicators can discuss the best approach to take to improve outreach and support the research effort. >Pat will contact the Biology Committee chairman to request time on the agenda.

In other nonnative fish management-related discussions, Randy said that a local angling group in the Steamboat Springs area asked the Colorado Division of Wildlife to do more northern pike removal above Steamboat Springs to improve the trout fishery. He said CDOW is beginning to get a sense that mainstream opposition has turned from northern pike to smallmouth bass. He asked if the Recovery Program is comfortable with relocating smallmouth bass to Highline Lake, stating that providing the alternative fishery would help a lot with the community's resistance to removal efforts.

It was also suggested that more positive messages could be developed about the successful work with irrigators to help provide the flow conditions that the fish need. The point of this idea was to try to get more positive stories in the press to balance with some of the negative stories.

4. Washington, D.C., Briefing Trip – John Shields updated the Committee on the upcoming trip to D.C. which will take place March 8-14, 2006. As in the past, representatives from the Upper Colorado River and San Juan River recovery programs' non-Federal partners will meet with members of Congress and their staff to discuss program accomplishments and the status of recovery efforts. John further explained that non-Federal program partners' efforts this past year resulted in legislation being introduced that, if approved, will increase authorization for capital projects by \$15 million and extend the period of time to complete those projects. In effect, this would add three additional years of the same level of Federal appropriations to the Program's capital budget. Senate Bill 1578 was introduced and passed the U.S. Senate on December 16, 2005. The House version of the bill, H.R. 3153, has passed the House Resources Committee and is awaiting final passage. It is hoped this will happen the last week of February. Matt Kales noted that the Mountain-Prairie Region's new regional director, Mitch King, had reviewed and

approved the content of the *Program Highlights* briefing document. Mitch told Matt he is extremely impressed with the history of this program and the partnership relationship.

5. Interactive Map Project – Jim Pokrandt distributed copies of four-color maps that were developed for this project. There is a map of the Colorado River Basin and state-specific maps for Colorado and Utah (maps can be viewed on the River District’s website at: http://www.crwua.org/map_project/project_map.html). Jim is new to this project and after learning that the project has stalled for many years, he recommended that we simplify what we are trying to do and limit ourselves to about five priority items that should be included on these maps. Once those are finished and the map is online, we can add additional features. The Committee agreed to this plan and identified the following features as top priority: location of participating reservoirs, hatchery facilities, fish passages/screens, and current occupied and critical habitat. The Committee further suggested that links be put in place to existing websites that can provide more detail, such as Bureau of Reclamation sites for specific reservoirs. Once completed, these maps can be a link on the Recovery Program’s public website. >Jim will work with the Program Director’s Office to get the information to include on these maps. He will find out if the person who developed the initial maps is available to add these features and confirm the cost. Once this information is obtained, the scope of work will be revised to provide clearer guidance and timelines for this project. >Kara and Justyn will check to see what resources the Bureau of Reclamation has available to support a template on Bureau web sites.
6. I&E Update -- Debbie announced that she received word that the Bureau of Reclamation executed the Record of Decision for the operation of Flaming Gorge Dam while the committee was meeting. The Bureau planned to issue a news release to announce this action. The Nature Conservancy was also prepared to issue its own release to support the Bureau and the Recovery Program.

Debbie distributed an updated list of I & E Committee members. She also gave out copies of a book chapter printed in the *American Fisheries Society Symposium* 45:157-204, 2005 about the Upper Colorado River and San Juan River recovery programs. Bob Muth and researcher Rich Valdez authored the chapter. She said it provides good information that committee members can use in providing information about these programs.

Debbie, Quent Bradwisch, and Joann Perea-Richmann will staff the Recovery Program’s exhibit at the Utah Water Users’ Workshop in St. George on March 6-8. This will be the second exhibit that promotes both the Upper Colorado and San Juan River recovery programs.

Installation of the aquarium at the Carl Hayden Visitor Center at Glen Canyon Dam is underway. The exhibit is still on target for completion this spring.

Debbie and Pat Nelson are preparing key messages and questions/answers related to flooding of the Green River that will likely occur this spring in the Vernal, Utah, area due

to normal runoff and reoperation of Flaming Gorge Dam to provide spring peak flows. She distributed a recent article from the *Vernal Express* that expressed public concern about the flooding and the belief that this will result in increased mosquito populations. Matt noted that the article mentions that a letter expressing concern was sent to Sen. Orin Hatch. He advised that the program contact Hatch's staff in Salt Lake City to explain the Recovery Program's position on this issue before the partners' visit to D.C. Mark Hadley advised that Kevin Christopherson and Ron Stewart (with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources in Vernal, Utah), be included in preparing the messages and Q&As. >Debbie and Pat will prepare draft messages and Q&As to the I & E Committee.

7. San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program Overview – Mike Buntjer with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 2 (and chairman of the San Juan Program's Coordination Committee) gave a powerpoint presentation about the San Juan River program. The presentation was designed to give the committee a better understanding of this program and how it is both similar and different than the Upper Colorado River program. Mike also highlighted numerous accomplishments the program has made since its inception. Many of these are included in this year's *Program Highlights* publication.
8. Integration of Specific I&E Projects for the Upper Colorado River and San Juan River recovery programs. John Shields provided background information about why the two programs have decided to integrate certain outreach efforts. He explained that the decision was sort of made for the programs because funding for capital projects is tied together in Federal legislation. In addition, many of the partner organizations for both programs are the same. He explained that in many instances the partners talk to the same audiences about both programs. The *Program Highlights* document has been produced for many years to describe accomplishments, fish status and funding issues for both programs. It seemed logical that the next step would be to further integrate other outreach efforts.

Debbie summarized the information detailed in a plan approved by the Upper Colorado River program's Management Committee and the San Juan River program's Coordination Committee. The plan calls for continued co-production of the Program Highlights document. It further calls for integrating other publications including the *Swimming Upstream* newsletter and a four-color brochure to include content about both programs. In addition, a new, freestanding exhibit will be produced to represent both programs at water user conferences and other appropriate events. A new, more portable exhibit was set up at the I&E meeting to show committee members. This was developed last November for the San Juan River program's use until the integrated exhibit is available. The San Juan River program has agreed to pay 50 percent of the expenses of producing these integrated outreach products in FY 2006 and 2007. The committee briefly discussed bidding procedures for graphic design services.

9. Next meeting – Members of the I & E Committee will be invited to attend the April 6-7 meeting of the Biology Committee to discuss outreach for nonnative fish management. >Program Director's staff will ask the Biology Committee chairman for time on the agenda and will notify the I&E Committee. Committee members supported the concept

of meeting in person once each year and via conference call as needed during the rest of the year. John asked if the conference calls could include technology through Windows XP so that members can view artwork, etc., at the same time. >Program Director's staff will research this to learn what is available.

Attendees

1. **Mark Hadley**, I&E Committee Chairman, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
2. **Bob Muth**, Program Director, Recovery Program
3. **Pat Nelson**, Nonnative Fish Coordinator, Recovery Program
4. **Debbie Felker**, I&E Coordinator, Recovery Program
5. **Matt Kales**, Fish & Wildlife Service External Affairs
6. **Justyn Hock**, Bureau of Reclamation, Grand Junction
7. **John Shields**, Management Committee Chairman, representing State of Wyoming
8. **Kara Lamb**, Bureau of Reclamation, Loveland
9. **Randy Hampton**, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Grand Junction
10. **Jim Pokrandt**, Colorado River Water Conservation District
11. **Mike Buntjer**, San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program
12. **Joann Perea-Richmann**, San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program