

SAN JUAN RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING

APRIL 20, 1995

Members of the Committee present:

Lynn Starnes	Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2
Frank Pfeifer	Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6
Rick Gold	Bureau of Reclamation
Joel Farrell	Bureau of Land Management
Leo Soukup	Bureau of Indian Affairs
Peter Evans	State of Colorado
Scott McElroy	Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Dan Israel	Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe
Les Taylor	Jicarilla Apache Indian Tribe
Tom Pitts	Water Users

List of attendees is attached.

No representative has been selected by the State of New Mexico to replace Mr. David Vackar. However, Dr. Jim Bailey of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish was in attendance as a liaison for the State of New Mexico.

Lynn Starnes welcomed the attendees and opened the meeting at 10:40 am. The agenda was reviewed and approved, as was the draft summary of the Committee's November 3, 1994, meeting.

In order of the discussion items on the agenda (attached):

Administration of Biology and Navajo Dam Operating Committees

In an effort to keep the interested publics informed of the Program, it was decided that the Committee Chairpeople would send out notifications of meetings when they are scheduled by the members, agendas for those meetings 2 weeks prior to the meetings, and summaries of the meetings 2 weeks following the meetings. The question raised by members of the Biology Committee was identification of those members of the public to receive the notices, and the circumstances wherein summaries may be delayed past the 2-week window (for efficiency, some biology meetings are held immediately prior to river trips because all the biology members are there to conduct research--those trips can take the entire 2-week period and the summary could not be prepared). Last year's meetings of the Biology Committee were primarily held to formulate the Long Range Implementation Plan and to meet the deadline for the final version of the Plan, therefore, minutes of the meetings were essentially the various versions of the Plan distributed to the Coordination Committee.

Discussion was also held concerning the location of the Biology

Committee meetings. As has been agreed to at previous Coordination Committee meetings, the Biology Committee members have to retain some flexibility in meeting locations in order to ensure the attendance of most or all members, or critical individuals or agencies involved in research efforts. Therefore, it was agreed that there would be no requirement for all Biology Committee meetings to be held in the Basin, but, meetings would be held in the Basin unless there was a good reason not to.

An important consideration made during this discussion was that the Biology Committee is fully responsible for the vast majority of Program assignments and required products. The Coordination Committee has generally performed in an oversight role without direct responsibility for production of deliverables. Thus, it is important that the Biology Committee members not be overly constrained by an inflexible administrative structure.

Status of Razorback Sucker Experimental Stocking Project

Jim Brooks opened this discussion by reviewing the administrative history of this project within the Program. This included review and approval by the Coordination Committee of FY 1994 and 1995 Workplans. Additionally, identification of research related to augmentation and the potential for initiation of augmentation programs was included in the original Program document, as well as the finalized Long Range Plan. Both of these documents were circulated widely to cooperating agencies and the general public for review and comment.

Frank Pfiefer updated the Committee: On the monitoring trip conducted the first week of April from Mexican Hat to Clay Hills, 4 of the 15 radio implanted fish were contacted. Habitat utilization data were collected. Also, the National Biological Service recovered one of the radioed fish stocked in the river near Bluff, Utah, in the San Juan Arm of Lake Powell. The fish was transported back up to Bluff. The upper portion of the river will be sampled May 8 - 17. Bill Miller (Southern Utes) informed the Committee that during his Colorado squawfish habitat utilization trip in the upper river, during the first week of January, he also contacted a radioed fish. It was noted that all stockings had occurred within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation and downstream in Utah.

Questions were raised by the Committee concerning additional stockings of razorback sucker. There are no plans to add additional fish to the experimental stocking program this fiscal year. Questions were raised concerning plans to rear and stock Colorado squawfish. Although the State of Utah has proposed the idea of stocking in association with a habitat use study, there are no plans at this time to augment through stocking of Colorado squawfish in the San Juan River.

Dr. Jim Bailey (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish) provided copies of an unsigned, undated document entitled "New Mexico

Committee with a summary of the progress of developing CREDA-related funding for submission to Congress for the Upper Basin and the San Juan Recovery Implementation Programs (as two separate efforts, not one recovery implementation program).

Research Flow Requests and 1995-96 Winter Low Flow Request
Jim Brooks opened the discussion by reviewing the basic process, as outlined in the Program document, for identifying and recommending research-related flow requests by the Biology Committee.

The Biology Committee provided a brief summary of the its request for low flows in the San Juan from November 1995 through February 1996. This request was made in an effort to determine impacts to the aquatic community of the San Juan River if and when full development of the water resources occurs and flows are subsequently diminished. It was noted that the request was made within the identified guidelines provided in the Program document.

Results of Public Scoping Meetings and Bureau of Reclamation Response

The Bureau of Reclamation discussed the three scoping meetings held in the Basin and the comments received on the proposal to date (40 total; 38 against; 2 for --- from the Interstate Stream Commission and the Navajo Nation). Opposition to the proposed low-flow was based upon potential impacts to the tailwater trout fishery, hydroelectric facility generation, and diversion of water by various users. Based on the public opposition, the Bureau of Reclamation, as the action agency, has decided that reduction of flows from Navajo Dam to 250 cfs would require an EIS and would take approximately 2 years and an unknown amount of funding that the agency would seek from the San Juan Recovery Implementation Program. There were two major areas of discussion, 1) whether NEPA was necessary, since this would be within the normal operations of the Dam; and 2) whether an alternative could be implemented whereby effects would be minimal and a FONSI could be prepared. The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission representative noted that there are no existing legal uses or rights to water released from Navajo Dam that would be interrupted by reducing winter flows to 250 cfs. The Navajo Nation representative indicated that full development of NIIP, which has legal water rights, would cause the need for reduced winter flows to ensure delivery of stored water.

Questions concerning the necessity of dropping the flows during winter versus sampling during periods in the late summer when flows were already at low levels were discussed. However, differing environmental and demographic factors in the river and the fish would require extrapolation that actual low winter releases would not. Questions concerning the feasibility of modeling through the creation of an artificial stream (if the conditions of the San Juan could be duplicated) were also raised

for consideration.

It was determined that the Biology Committee would meet with Bureau of Reclamation to discuss and identify other operational or research means by which the information could be gathered. Bureau of Reclamation representatives also stated that they would provide the Committee with an estimate of the costs of preparing an EIS if it was determined to be necessary.

The Committee also agreed that any future requests for research flows (major modifications in operations) would be submitted by the Biology Committee to the Coordination Committee. Upon review and approval, the Coordination Committee would then formally submit the request to the Bureau of Reclamation. This is a modification of the procedure outlined in the Program document and should be so noted.

Water Development Interests Activities

Tom Pitts, Water User Representative, provided a summary of the meetings of the water interests. An agreement has been drawn up for each entity wishing to participate in the Program through funding Mr. Pitts representation. Officers of the group have been selected: Cindy Murray, President; and Janice Sheftel, Treasurer.

The representation of the Water Users on the Biology Committee was discussed. To date, the credentials of the nominated representative have been accepted by the Biology Committee but his attendance at the meetings is awaiting completion of a contractual agreement with the water development interests.

Integration Report

The report will be provided to the Coordination Committee two weeks prior to the September meeting. The Coordination Committee will then distribute the report to the public.

Meeting Schedules

The Coordination Committee will meet June 28 from 9:00 to 4:00 in Farmington, New Mexico, to discuss long term budget projections and the low flow research.

The Coordination Committee will meet September 29 in Farmington to discuss the FY1996 Work Plan, Integration Report, Long Range Budget, and Low Flow Research.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 pm.

Attachment

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF GAME & FISH

POSITION STATEMENT ON RELEASE OF RAZORBACK SUCKER IN SAN JUAN

The Game and Fish Department views the razorback suckers stocked in the San Juan as an experimental population put into a real-world situation for research purposes only. We do not anticipate any activities with adverse effects to other users, and will oppose any such actions if they are proposed on behalf of this population. We would not support, for instance, any proposals that would have negative impacts on existing water uses, angling and sport fish stocking, wildlife viewing or hunting, boating or other recreation.

This agency's position has been consistent and clear in that regard. We supported recovery efforts on behalf of this species as far back as 1981, when we signed a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding its stocking and recovery. We will continue to support its recovery, but feel that the species' prospects are best if it can fit into existing contexts.

While stocking razorbacks had been agreed to in broad terms and discussed during several public meetings in the Farmington area, I am not pleased with how the actual physical stockings took place in 1993 and 1994. Based on my conversations with former director Bill Montoya, I learned that the administration in this agency was not properly informed of the actual transplants of the fish and did not have the opportunity to agree or disagree to the stockings. I also believe other interested groups were not fully apprised of or involved in the decision to take the action; the State Game and Fish Commission and various Department Divisions such as Fisheries, Conservation Services, and the Northwest Area. In fairness to the technical staff, those involved believe the stocking was done under full authority of the agencies' cooperative agreement and with sufficient public discussion, input and agreement. I am investigating this matter and expect to take whatever actions necessary to preclude repetition of this type of action.

Fortunately, we have good reason to believe there will be no adverse effects to other users: the existing Colorado squawfish population and the downstream razorback sucker populations in other states already exist, and whatever effects they may have remain in place. Again, we support the idea of planting the razorback and tracking them via radio

implants to determine their survival, migration, and any reproduction -- in a real-world situation in existing contexts.

Water and endangered species politics go far beyond biological issues, and we have some very clear messages from the United States Congress and the New Mexico Legislature that many aspects of the endangered species listing and recovery be examined. If the research on this experimental population shows a good prospect for the fish's recovery in the San Juan, we would proceed with caution and take full public input before agreeing to any additional stocking, with all implications being examined. If the research shows poor prospects for recovery, it would be time to consider dropping any plans for future stockings.

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