

# **Revised Summary of the San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program Coordination Committee Meeting-**

**September 15, 1999**

## **Opening Remarks and Introductions: Renne Lohofener**

Renne Lohofener welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members of the Coordination Committee and the audience then introduced themselves. Committee members or their substitutes in attendance were:

<b>Renne Lohofener</b>	<b>U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2</b>
<b>Carol Taylor</b>	<b>U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6</b>
<b>Joe Webster</b>	<b>U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6</b>
<b>Jessica Aberly</b>	<b>Jicarilla Apache Indian Tribe</b>
<b>Dan Israel</b>	<b>Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe</b>
<b>Stanley Pollack</b>	<b>Navajo Nation</b>
<b>Scott McElroy</b>	<b>Southern Ute Indian Tribe</b>
<b>Joel Farrell</b>	<b>U.S. Bureau of Land Management</b>
<b>Christine Karas</b>	<b>U.S. Bureau of Reclamation</b>
<b>Brent Uilenberg</b>	<b>U.S. Bureau of Reclamation</b>
<b>John Whipple</b>	<b>State of New Mexico</b>
<b>Randy Seaholm</b>	<b>State of Colorado</b>
<b>Tom Pitts</b>	<b>Water Development Interests</b>
<b>Bob Krakow</b>	<b>U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs</b>

Biology Committee members in attendance included:

<b>Ron Bliesner</b>	<b>U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs</b>
<b>David Propst</b>	<b>State of New Mexico</b>
<b>Vince LaMarra</b>	<b>Navajo Nation</b>
<b>Paul Holden</b>	<b>Jicarilla Apache Indian Tribe</b>

New members on the Coordination Committee (Committee) were introduced. Christine Karas and Brent Uilenberg are new representatives for the Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau). Ms. Karas will be the lead representative for that agency. Carol Taylor was introduced as the new representative for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) from Region 6.

#### **Review of April 8, 1999, Coordination Committee Minutes:**

Comments from Jessica Aberly and Tom Pitts will be incorporated into the minutes; a revised copy of the minutes will then be sent to all Committee members. The minutes had been revised earlier to include comments from John Whipple. At the next Committee meeting, members will vote on approval of the April 8, 1999, meeting minutes.

#### **Review of Agenda:**

The meeting's agenda was reviewed. Requested modifications to the agenda from Tom Pitts were agreed upon. The following topics were incorporated into the agenda at appropriate discussion points:

- Biology Report: Delineation of the recovery goals for the four Colorado River endangered fish species, including San Juan River populations.
- Additions to responsibilities of the Program Coordinator (letter from Tom Pitts dated April 6, 1999).
- Monitoring Plan Update: Status of monitoring plans.
- Construction Update: Update on the construction activities at Hogback and Cudei Diversion Dams.
- Section 7: Navajo Indian Irrigation Project Biological Assessment and modifications to baseline depletions.
- Navajo Dam Operations: Provision of the Bureau to Ditch Companies with facilities impacted by high flows.

#### **Program Coordination: Renne Lohofener/Shirley Mondy**

Shirley Mondy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2, was introduced as the new Program Coordinator for the Program. She replaces former Program Coordinator Joe Dowhan.

#### **Cooperative Agreement:**

No original of the signature page for the Cooperative Agreement that was signed by San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program (Program) participants has been located. Since all signature pages were faxed individually by the participants, it is thought that the original signature pages were retained by the signatories. Members felt there was no need to have the original signature pages.

### **Coordinator/Outreach Plan:**

The Committee was provided with copies of the draft Public Outreach Plan outline and the Scope of Work for Fiscal Year (FY) 2000 for the Coordinator's duties by

Shirley Mondy. Comments on the outline should be sent to Ms. Mondy by October 15. Previously accepted procedures for Program meetings were reviewed. Ms. Mondy stated that she would implement those procedures in her responsibilities as Coordinator. Additions to the duties of the Coordinator submitted by Tom Pitts (April 6, 1999, letter) were unanimously accepted with the exception of those duties involving the Peer Review group.

Ms. Mondy is hoping to have a fully developed Public Outreach Plan ready for the next meeting. Some ideas she hopes to work on soon include plans on updating the general mailing list, developing the website as an informational tool, developing a brochure on the Program similar to that used in the Upper Colorado River Basin, and possibly the development of a newsletter.

Christine Karas requested that the Coordinator actively participate in the Bureau's preparation of its annual briefing book for funding requests for the Upper Colorado and San Juan River Programs. The Committee approved that request. Joe Webster, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6, will provide Ms. Mondy with a copy of Region 6's briefing book for use on the San Juan contributions.

Renne Lohofener felt it would be beneficial to have a separate briefing book that could stand alone or be added to other briefing books. Tom Pitts approved of that idea. Such a book could be used to gain State support for the Program. It was suggested that different members of the Program meet to discuss the development of a briefing book. Ron Bliesner and Shirley Mondy agreed to work with the Biology Committee on the briefing book and present it to the Coordination Committee for review. Ms. Mondy will have the lead in putting this initiative together. Brent Uilenberg also wants to work with Ms. Mondy so that the book will support the Bureau's budget submissions for FYs 2000, 2001, and 2002.

The Committee discussed funding for the Coordinator position. In the past, the majority of the \$126,5000 received from the Service by the Program was dedicated to research. It is now anticipated that about half of the funding would be used to support the Coordinator's position through the inclusion of the scope of work for yearly activities. That amount should fund half of a fulltime position. It is expected that Coordination duties should only require that amount of time.

## **Biology Committee Activities: Ron Bliesner**

### **Endangered Colorado River Fish Recovery Goals: David Propst**

David Propst briefed the Committee on the ongoing effort by the Colorado Fishes Recovery Team and the Service to delineate recovery goals for the four endangered fish species in the Colorado River Basin. The Service has hired Rich Valdez of SWCA, a consulting firm, to identify recovery goals for each species. There will be a great deal of interaction in November as drafts and products are developed. This effort is still in the formative stage and will require the discussion of the species by all upper and lower basin experts. A draft final report is due to the Service in April 2000. Specific recovery plans will be officially revised to reflect these goals and public input will be sought. In response to a question from the audience, Joe Webster agreed to find out the procedures for public notification for Recovery Team meetings and will provide Tom Pitts with that information.

Some Committee members expressed concern that resources were being used on recovery of species without goals being developed under the Colorado River Fishes Recovery Team of the Upper Basin.

It was felt that at this stage, the Program should be working on recovery goals for the San Juan River. Eventually, the Program could work with other groups. Numbers developed by the Program might be better than those of the Upper Basin. Randy Seaholm wanted to know when the Biology Committee would have recovery goal numbers available. Both Ron Bliesner and Vince LaMarra are working on "carrying capacity" numbers and hope to have that information available before April 2000.

David Propst indicated that you cannot find absolute numbers for each group. Researchers are trying to identify viable populations. Questions researchers still need to consider include:

Do you break populations out by geographic boundaries?

Where are those boundaries?

What can be done to improve carrying capacities?

What should the populations of each species look like?

Researchers are trying to find commonality for boundaries/units. Recovery goals are extremely important to the State of Colorado. The State wants the opportunity to incorporate the information so recovery goals can be accomplished.

The end product will be a revised recovery plan for four species. It will deal with habitat as well as information on the species. Whatever is developed in the recovery plan will apply to the San Juan Basin so the Program's Biology Committee will need to be involved.

### **Research Updates:**

Doing research on the San Juan River has been difficult this year. Runoff in the basin has been about 400 percent of normal. Flows have exceeded 9000 cfs in the habitat range at least three times this year.

Colorado pikeminnow larvae were released in mid to late July. However, high flows occurred immediately thereafter; sampling efforts 2 weeks later did not find any larval fish. It is not known if the larval fish were lost to the system or if the high flows occurring during the sampling hampered efforts to find the fish. Were the fish flushed out of the system by the 9000 cfs? The study will need to be repeated in a normal year. It may be October or November of 1999 before another survey can be done due to high runoff.

Adult pikeminnow appear to be surviving in the river without difficulty and juveniles, as well as young-of-the-year, are thriving. However, no larval fish have been found. The reasons for their absence are unknown. This research was designed to answer some of these questions. It is not a stocking program. The questions of carrying capacity of the river must be addressed prior to the creation of an augmentation program of stocking for the pikeminnow or the determination of whether stocking pikeminnow is a necessary element of recovery. Experts within the Biology Committee are still reviewing possible reasons for the conditions observed in the river and alternatives for potential stocking efforts. It may be that there are sufficient numbers of fish, at young stages, in the river, and these may survive to reproduce. However, because it is not known what is limiting the numbers of larval pikeminnow, further research is needed before any stocking plan can be recommended.

#### **Bridge Document/Long-Range Plan:**

The last meeting of the Biology Committee was canceled because of the inability of all but one of the Peer Review Panel to attend. The meeting has been rescheduled for November 9 and 10, 1999. Final research reports are due by September 24, 1999.

No dates have been provided by the authors of the following reports as to when their drafts of final reports will be provided:

- Fish health ( Pinetop Health Center, Pinetop, Arizona).
- Young-of-the-year nursery habitat (State of Utah)
- Biological effects (U.S. Geological Survey).

Renne Lohofener will contact the Fish Health Center in Pinetop, Arizona, to find out when the Fish Health report will be ready. Ron Bliesner will contact both the State of Utah and the U.S. Geological Survey. If the problem cannot be resolved, he will contact Joe Webster for assistance. Researchers will need a minimum of 30 days to review the reports.

Based on the delays in finalizing the summaries of individual research efforts, the Biology Committee anticipates there will be delays in the formulation of the *Bridge Report*, which is now titled the *Program Evaluation Report* (to May 15, 2000); the Monitoring Plan (March 2000); and the Annual Reports for 1998 and 1999 (March 2000). The Biology Committee will discuss reporting progress in a September 24, 1999, conference call.

Christine Karas expressed concern that delays in reporting on research are resulting in delays on the Work Plan for FY 2000. The Bureau is waiting for justifications of work in order to determine potential funding with construction funds appropriated for the agency. Ron Bliesner will contact Ms. Karas following the September 24, 1999, conference call to discuss the FY 2000 Work Plan. Biology Committee members noted that the Work Plan for FY 2000 document would have few changes from the 1999 version. Ms. Karas also requested that the Biology Committee identify near-term capital projects that could be funded by the Bureau in FY 2000. It would also benefit the Bureau if they had a list of projects looking 3-4 years into the future that would help the Program. Ron Bliesner indicated that the challenge is to identify projects based on the research.

Several members of the Committee were concerned about the delay in completing necessary research documents since the Program cannot move forward without them. The issue of completing documents in timely fashion needs to be resolved. Completion of the Program Evaluation Report is critical to the overall Long-Range Plan. Paul Holden stated that the Program has changed since its inception in 1992. The Long-Range Plan needs to reflect the realities of today. It was suggested by Ron Bliesner that

Paul Holden be given primary responsibility for completion of the Program Evaluation Report so researchers can concentrate on other reports and efforts. He further felt that the work needs to be redirected and given to those researchers who will get it done. The Biology Committee cannot stay on schedule at this point. Researchers/contractors are at the maximum work level. The Flow Recommendation Report held up work on other areas. Members stated that the technical work being done is excellent-just too few people to accomplish too many tasks. Some wondered if unrealistic goals had been set for the Biology Committee and if the Bureau, the Service, and the Biology Committee need to meet to come up with more realistic time frames.

### **Navajo Dam Operations: Christine Karas/Brent Uilenberg**

#### **EIS Status: Brent Uilenberg**

A schedule for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on Navajo Dam operations was distributed by Ken Beck, Team Leader, Animas-La Plata Project. Mr. Beck stated that a draft Notice of Intent was in Washington, D.C., for review. Scoping meetings will begin in November 1999 in Farmington and Albuquerque, New Mexico, as well as Durango, Colorado. October 2000 is the target date to release the draft EIS with May 2001 the target date for release of the final EIS on Navajo Dam operations. The Navajo Dam Operations EIS is a connected action with the Animas-La Plata EIS. Information on the area below the dam has already been gathered, but more information is

needed on the area above the dam. It is estimated that it will take 24 months to do the work. There never was an original EIS for Navajo Dam. The EIS will deal strictly with the change of dam operations based on the flow recommendations. (The question of baseline determination has not been made yet.) The Bureau of Reclamation will need to work with the Biology Committee in the EIS process. Ken Beck mentioned that close coordination with respect to the EIS on the operation of the dam will be needed to support the flow recommendations.

Ron Bliesner mentioned that there were ways to operate the dam to meet flow recommendations. Those should be the alternatives. Christine Karas mentioned that flexibility will help define other alternatives.

### **Navajo Dam Operating Subcommittee/Hydrology Modeling Oversight Committee:**

Brent Uilenberg informed the Committee that releases of 4500 cfs had been made to draw down Navajo Reservoir 5 vertical feet. Releases of 3000 cfs are underway to gain another 3 vertical feet of freeboard. After that goal is reached, Bureau of Reclamation plans to match outflows to inflows until December when a meeting is scheduled to review operations. Ron Bliesner noted that this scenario does not follow the flow recommendations if releases go above the 500-1000 cfs target in the habitat range.

Brent Uilenberg will contact operations personnel to determine the reasons for the departure from the flow recommendations and relay that information to Ron Bliesner.

Both Ron Bliesner, Biology Committee, and Randy Seaholm, State of Colorado, presented separate proposals to the Coordination Committee on the formation of a Hydrology Committee.

The State of New Mexico has several concerns/disagreements over the model on the flow recommendations. John Whipple indicated that the State of New Mexico wants to work with the Bureau to resolve those disagreements.

Ron Bliesner briefly discussed the model used in determining the flow recommendations. The model piggybacks on efforts to duplicate natural flows. A release pattern has been determined for dam releases. To protect downstream users, modifications may need to be made in the model to allow for anomalous conditions.

Mr. Bliesner further stated that he wanted the baseline question answered so that the model accurately represents the baseline and is in concert with section 7.

Operations for Navajo Dam could be refined once rules are set for releases based on the flow recommendations and the Bureau decides what it will do. This could result in fewer meetings.

Tom Pitts stated that the Hydrology Committee meetings should be held in the Basin. However, Ron Bliesner said it would be better to only have one meeting in April in the Basin. The rest of the time, it would be easier to meet in Salt Lake City, Utah, or Denver, Colorado, since the Committee has access to the model and data at those locations.

### **Construction Updates: Christine Karas**

Christine Karas stated the need to identify near-term capital projects. The Bureau of Reclamation will provide technical assistance to the ditch associations experiencing impacts from high releases at Navajo Dam.

### **PNM Weir: Brent Uilenberg**

Selective fish passage has been recommended by the Biology Committee to remove the impediment caused by the PNM weir. The Bureau anticipates letting the construction contract by late FY 2000 with actual construction in FY 2001. This project is considered a component of the \$18 million long-term funding for the Program.

### **Other Capital Projects:**

**Hogback and Cudei Diversion Dams:** The Bureau of Indian Affairs anticipates that the draft Environmental Assessment will be available by September 24 with construction during the winter of 2000-2001.

### **Section 7 Updates:**

#### **Minor Depletion Account: Jennifer Fowler-Propst**

Jennifer Fowler-Propst distributed the minor depletions table for the San Juan River. Changes have been recommended by the State of New Mexico. Copies of correspondence from the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission's Office and the New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office concerning New Mexico's requested modifications to the depletion account were also distributed.

Randy Seaholm stated that the State of Colorado had reviewed the minor depletion biological opinions on file at the Grand Junction Ecological Services Field Office. From a modeling standpoint, Colorado feels that 50 percent of the depletions are correct. On 25 percent of the consultations, there is not enough information to determine if the depletions are correctly addressed in the table. And, the State of Colorado feels that 25 percent of the depletions should not have been added and should be moved out of the minor depletion account. In the future, the State of Colorado Engineer's Office will be recommending whether the depletions consulted on are new or part of the existing baseline for the State. It was stated that information to be used for minor depletions should be verified through the State of Colorado's Engineer's Office. Proposals for the Hydrology Committee and minor depletions from the State of Colorado and the Biology Committee are attached to these minutes.

#### **Ad Hoc Committee Status: Tom Pitts**

Tom Pitts will be setting a date for the next meeting since it was difficult in July to get all members together. There are many important issues to discuss. Hopefully, by the end of the year, the Committee will have information to

present to the Coordination Committee. Issues to discuss include:

-What should be in a section 7 agreement using the Program as a Reasonable and Prudent Alternative? Jennifer Fowler-Propst clarified that it is not an agreement but suggested guidelines.

-Should the Program cover "incidental take" of endangered species?

Randy Seaholm and Ron Bliesner will submit a revised proposal for a formal Hydrology subcommittee at the next meeting.

### **Navajo Indian Irrigation Project Biological Assessment:**

Tom Pitts asked for clarification on Biological Assessments and the concurrence of the Service. On the NIIP Biological Assessment, the Service concurred with the BIA Assessment. There is a 121,000 acre-feet depletion and it will not adversely affect the fish as the flow recommendations will be met. Does that mean that a Biological Opinion on the Animas-La Plata Project reach the same conclusion? According to

Jennifer Fowler-Propst, the answer was no. A project can go forward only if it meets the flow recommendations for the fish. Was the Red Mesa depletion of 1,000 acre-feet considered? Yes it was. It was not however in the baseline for the model.

Randy Seaholm will provide Ron Bliesner with a copy of the Biological Assessment on Red Mesa so that the hydrology information can be included in the model.

Consultations for the Red Mesa Irrigation Reservoir and the City of Durango may be reinitiated to address the new information on the flow recommendations. Because these are included in the depletion baseline figures and are already accommodated in the Hydrology Model, there would not be adverse effects attributable to the depletions. Red Mesa's depletions (1,100 acre-feet) were not included in the baseline; the City of Durango's depletions (14,000 acre-feet) were included as components of the Animas-La Plata (57,000 acre-feet). Ron Bliesner will review the model's baseline figures. (Needed copy of the Biological Assessment on Red Mesa for inclusion in model.)

Stanley Pollack felt that the Biological Opinion for NIIP shows that the Program is working. There is progress in both fish recovery and water development.

### **Glen Canyon Dam - National Park Service Request for Coordination: John Ritenour**

#### **Committee Membership:**

John Ritenour presented the request of the National Park Service (NPS) for inclusion in the Program as a voting member. Critical habitat segments for several of the endangered fishes of the Colorado River are in the Glen Canyon

National Recreational Area. The NPS has an active role in and is responsible for issuing permits for endangered species work for that area. In an effort to gain funding, it is important that the NPS be a viable member of the Program with voting rights. Mr. Ritenour felt that the NPS would be able to request funding for further research and monitoring. However, before the NPS can gain funding, they must be actively involved with the Program. Mr. Ritenour felt that it was important for the NPS to at least be represented on the Biology Committee.

Randy Seaholm presented copies of a September 13, 1999, letter to Renne Lohofener (attached) wherein voting membership by additional Federal agencies in the program was opposed by the State of Colorado. There is concern that the addition of other Federal agencies will change the voting balance that was in place when the agreement was signed and will weaken the States position. He felt that changes should be made in the agreement to cover membership in the future.

Jennifer Fowler-Propst stated that the Program Document addresses the conditions under which Federal agencies could either seek to join the Program or be required by the Service through the acceptance of a Reasonable and Prudent Alternative to jeopardy to participate in the program. The document also states that each participant would be allowed one vote on the Coordination Committee and other committees upon which it was represented. The Program Document did not provide for limitations wherein a Federal agency would be either required or allowed participation in the Program but denied a vote. Under the Program Document, if a participant is on the Biology Committee, they would also have to be on the Coordination Committee. Originally, the Program was to be set up with participants from four Federal agencies, four Tribes, three states (Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah), and the conservationist/water development interests. However, the State of Utah did not participate and there was never a conservationist participant.

Joel Farrell stated that he would look into the Bureau of Land Management sharing a vote with the NPS. However, to do that, the Program Document would have to be amended. The motion was tabled until the next Coordination Committee meeting.

### **Funding Legislation Update: Tom Pitts**

Bills for the Upper Colorado River Basin/San Juan River Basin have been introduced in Washington, D.C., in both the House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. Some issues on the bills have been resolved and Congressional staff involved have been advised of the issues. Hearings on the bills will be held in both the House and the Senate roughly around October 7 or October 21 of this year. There are questions on whether the bills will get through Congress this year. It is important for people to support these bills. Members need to ask the States, Tribes, and water users for their support.

The bills are receiving the most support from the states of Colorado and Utah. Tom Udall of the State of New Mexico is also a co-sponsor. Senate support should increase now that several issues have been resolved. Water users and power users need to work together in building a consensus.

**Other Business:** There was no other business.

**Summary of Action Items: Shirley Mondy**

- The minutes of the April 8, 1999, Coordination Committee will be revised to incorporate comments from Tom Pitts and Jessica Aberly. Comments from John Whipple have already been incorporated. The revised minutes will then be distributed.
- Comments on the draft Public Outreach Plan outline are due to Shirley Mondy by October 15
- Shirley Mondy will take the lead on developing a briefing book for the San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program. Joe Webster will provide her with a copy of Region 6's Briefing Book on the Upper Colorado River Basin to help her with San Juan contributions.
- Joe Webster will provide information to Tom Pitts on the public notification procedures for Recovery Team meetings, as well as the date of the next Colorado River Fishes Recovery Team meeting.
- Renne Lohofener will contact the Pinetop Fish Health Center on the status of their research report on fish health.
- Ron Bliesner will contact the State of Utah and the U.S. Geological Survey on the status of their research reports. If needed, Joe Webster will assist.
- Ron Bliesner will contact Christine Karas after a September 24 conference call to review the FY 2000 work plan to identify Bureau funding.
- Ron Bliesner will work with the Biology Committee to re-sort and re-prioritize all pending reports and actions to develop a revised plan for completion.
- Brent Uilenberg will contact the Bureau of Reclamation's operations personnel to determine reasons for the departure from the flow recommendations and relay the information to Ron Bliesner.
- Randy Seaholm and Ron Bliesner will submit a revised proposal for a formal Hydrology subcommittee at the next meeting.
- Randy Seaholm will provide information on Red Mesa to Ron Bliesner and the modeling committee for inclusion in baseline information.
- Ron Bliesner will review the Hydrology Model's baseline figures with respect to the inclusion of Red Mesa and the City of Durango.
- Joel Farrell will review the possibility of sharing a vote with the National Park Service.

**Date for Next Coordination Committee Meeting:** The next meeting of the Coordination Committee is scheduled for November 8, 1999, in Farmington, New Mexico. The meeting will be held from 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. Ron Bliesner will check on the availability of the Bureau of Reclamation conference room.

Attachments:

- Meeting Attendee List
- Corrections to Minutes of April 8, 1999, Submitted by Tom Pitts
- Corrections to Minutes of April 8, 1999, Submitted by Jessica Aberly
- April 6, 1999, Memorandum From Tom Pitts Regarding Program Coordinator Duties
- Draft Public Outreach Plan
- Scope of Work for Fiscal Year 2000/Program Coordinator
- Navajo Dam Environmental Impact Statement Schedule
- Minor Depletion Table-San Juan River
- August 4, 1999, Memorandum From New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission/Minor Depletion Account
- August 18, 1999, Memorandum Regarding Corrections to Minor Depletion Account-San Juan River
- September 13, 1999, San Juan Recovery Program Section 7 Agreement Minor Depletion Accounting Process Recommendations
- State of Colorado September 13, 1999, Recommendation for the Hydrology Committee
- Biology Committee (Ron Bliesner) Proposal for the Hydrology Committee
- State of Colorado Memorandum of September 13, 1999, Regarding New Federal Agency Participation in the Program