

San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program

Biology Committee Meeting

Farmington, New Mexico

11-12 April 2000

A meeting of the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program Biology Committee was held on 11-12 April 2000 in Farmington, New Mexico. The following Biology Committee members were present: Jim Brooks, Tom Wesche, David Propst, Larry Crist, Bill Miller, Ron Bliesner, Frank Pfeifer, Vince Lamarra, Tom Nesler, Paul Holden. Paul Sawyer was absent. A list of all attendees and the agenda are attached.

Review/Revision of Agenda

Discussion items were added for selective fish passage at PNM Weir, Recovery Goal development and relationship to SJRIP, Section 7 Agreement, and Program Coordination activities. The discussion times for the Recapture Reservoir fisheries management proposal (delayed to early am 12 April) and for the Ridges Basin letter (move up to last subject before adjournment on 11 April) were changed.

Draft Meeting Summary for 15-16 February Meeting

The draft meeting summary was briefly reviewed since initial transmittal. With a few minor changes, the summary was approved for finalization.

Runoff Forecast and 2000 Water Operations

The current forecast for runoff was 56% of normal. Under the existing reservoir operating rules in the flow recommendation report, no spring release above base operations was to be made this year. However, BOR has identified needed work to Navajo Dam gates and needs to lower the reservoir surface elevation to 6072 and it will be necessary to release 82K acre feet to accomplish the repair work. BOR's preference is to release a constant 1200 cfs. The Biology Committee discussed a release from Navajo Dam that fits with the release shape defined in the flow recommendation report. That is, the recommended release is one week ramp up, one week at 5,000 cfs, and one week ramp down, with the peak release occurring near 4 June to coincide with predicted Animas River peak flow. Ron Bliesner will drafted a letter to BOR from the Biology Committee regarding the requested release pattern with subsequent approval of the letter by the Committee and transmittal to BOR.

1998-1999 Reporting Status

Interim reports are being finalized and several have been transmitted already. Remaining reports should be completed and transmitted within one month. The interim reports should contain a disclaimer at the beginning of the document citing the preliminary nature of the analyses and that reports containing detailed analyses using these data will be prepared on a three year basis. Steve Platania offered to draft the disclaimer wording.

Review of Draft Program Evaluation Report

Generally, all considered the second draft to be a large improvement. Two members of the Peer Review Panel were present for this review (Dave Galat, Ron Ryel). Galat thought the draft to be informative and made specific comments as follows: 1) use of statements like “sufficient” need to be clarified to better describe relationships between recovery actions and species/habitat responses, 2) summer rainstorm and flooding frequency and magnitude differences between the SJR and other Colorado River streams should be better described to show that fish community and habitat responses may be different than elsewhere in the Basin, and 3) wording that demonstrates an apparent inflexible reliance on Navajo Dam operations to provide for the “flow” habitat variable without closing without an adequate description of the flow/habitat relationship and its relationship to endangered fish recovery. Ryel felt that the SJRIP, through the Program Evaluation Report, needs to link in more with what is going on for big river fish recovery elsewhere in the Colorado River Basin. In particular, the current process to develop recovery goals for the endangered fishes should include how the SJR fits into overall recovery goals. Also, the use of the term “recovery” is used extensively and it is not clear how the SJRIP fits into basin-wide recovery efforts and an alternate term, restoration, should be considered. Wording will be placed in Chapter One to address the development of recovery goals and the contribution of the SJRIP.

Chapter 1 - Comments provided during the discussion included a need for more verbiage on what is known of the fish in the SJR vs. the rest of the Upper Basin and more verbiage to better convey the regulatory process (from the ALP Biological Opinion).

Chapter 2 - Inclusion of the roundtail chub as a target species for restoration efforts is new for the SJRIP and fits into development of interim management objective for the native fish community. Re-wording on roundtail chub abundance patterns in newly formed Navajo Reservoir vs. the river will clarify the discussion. Works that need to be cited include Lamarra's habitat studies in Table 2-1 and the SWAN citation for the Colorado pikeminnow collection in 1977.

Chapter 3 - Comments were provided for re- or additional wording to clarify points on habitat changes and the response time for long-lived native fishes, reasons for decline of roundtail chub, comparability of SJR to other rivers, and a variety of minor editorials. It was suggested that figures 3.3 and 3.4 be combined (Colorado pikeminnow habitat use) and the figure 3.5 was not needed. Flow Recommendation Report wording should be used for figures 3.11 and 3.12 and the associated discussion. Reference of the Gunnison River in figure 3.18 was suggested but not included as a revision. Tables 3.7 and 3.8 (fish health) showed a higher rate of abnormalities in subsamples than for

the total fish observed. Comparability of these data were questioned and it was decided that table 3.8 be deleted from the report. In the contaminants discussion there is inconsistency about whether or not there is a problem. Reference to recent work that includes design flaws (no replication, statistical power) and the section needs to be reworded to accurately present the relative threats. The final paragraph in the summary should be moved to the front of that section (3-102).

Chapter 4 - More wording should be provided on the mimicry of the natural hydrograph in the discussion of flows and the success of the stocked fish should be highlighted. Interim management objectives that work back toward recovery need to be discussed to justify a continuation of the SJRIP efforts. Nonnative stocking policies have not been developed by the SJRIP but need to be addressed. Wording clarification was suggested for all actions regarding augmentation and experimental stockings of razorback sucker and Colorado pikeminnow which were done within existing genetics guidelines. Development of the Augmentation Plan for razorback sucker paralleled drafting of genetics guidelines specific to the SJRIP. The summary (4-11) should be deleted.

Chapter 5 - It was suggested that the chapter be retitled to "Future Program Direction" and that "Recovery Needs" sections be renamed, "Management Actions". The use of a priority system was discussed for presentation of future needs. It was decided that the chapter would be reorganized and sections developed for Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, and the native fish community (include specifics on roundtail chub in current draft). Adaptive management principals discussed on page 5-12 will be incorporated into the introduction section.

Redrafting - Additional written comments are due to Holden within one week and the next draft of the Program Evaluation Report will be sent to the Coordination and Biology committees by 1 June 2000. A revised Chapter 5 and Executive Summary will be emailed to Biology Committee members in mid-May for review and immediate turnaround.

Selective Fish Passage at PNM Weir

Peggy Bailey (TetraTech) and Bob Norman (BOR - Grand Junction) presented four alternatives for construction of selective fish passage at the weir for Biology Committee discussions. Primary concerns for placement of fish passage facilities were sedimentation, location of entrance to fish ladder away from structure, target velocity (3 fps), and high flows (> 15 K cfs) that allow uncontrolled fish passage around the South side through existing side channel. The four alternatives were: 1) North side, under structure, 2) North side, use existing sluiceway with cage to route fish upstream, 3) South side with a ladder, 4) South side, existing side channel with entrance further downstream. No. 2 was considered the least desirable because of potential complications with maintenance of the cage and screen in front of the sluiceway. The alternative preferred by the Committee was No. 1.

The fish return channel will be used to return native fishes (nonnatives removed) and to minimize contact, the channel should be filled to float fish, not flush. With the preferred alternative the fish return channel, to be far enough upstream may require a location off PNM land on other private land. It was suggested that a temporary

easement may be all that is required to place and bury the return pipe and outflow structure. A draft report will be prepared by 26 April 2000 that considers three alternatives (No. 2 excluded) for final review.

Update for Hogback and Cudei Structural Modifications

Ron Bliesner updated the Committee that there are no design changes, the schedule remains on time and work will begin after the irrigation season has ended. BIA will prepare a letter before June relative to construction activities on Cudei and that all activities related to this project are for endangered fish restoration and not for agriculture.

Ridges Basin Nonnative Letter For DSEIS

The letter sent to BOR regarding the mitigation for minimizing impacts of nonnative species in the La Plata and Animas rivers included two points not discussed by the Biology Committee at the February meeting: 1) larval fish impingement at the pumping plant and 2) maintenance of a permanent pool for recreation. Escapement of nonnative fishes from Ridges Basin reservoir to the Animas and La Plata rivers and the rationale for fish mitigation in the La Plata for impacts in the Animas were the issues to be addressed. The discussion centered around the need to write a new letter to clarify concerns of the Biology Committee. Of concern was how much of the EIS needed to be reviewed and it was discussed that since this issue had been brought to the Biology Committee at the 15-16 February 2000 meeting, it was appropriate for the Biology Committee to relay concerns, similar to recommendations to BOR made on an annual basis for Navajo Dam operations. Ron Bliesner agreed to draft a new letter for Committee consideration and present the next day (12th). Bill Miller would not be in attendance on the 12th and agreed to the letter being finalized as long as nonnative fish escapement and resulting impacts was the focus.

The re-draft provided a brief overview of Chapter 3 of the DSEIS regarding the likelihood of nonnative species being introduced into Ridges Basin Reservoir and the less than 100% success in controlling nonnatives by the methods proposed. It was pointed out that there are no specifics to the monitoring plan for assessing escapement control of nonnatives and that no corrective action is proposed in the event that escapement is observed. The plan and rationale for providing and supplementing flows in the La Plata is not discussed and there was no recognition of the potential harmful effects of nonnative species introductions into a primarily native fish community. Also, delivery of 5 cfs is not included in the hydrology discussion and the enhancement of surface flow with this addition would be minimal due to increased channel losses. Finally, the need to perform mitigation in the La Plata rather than in the Animas requires detailed explanation. It was also recommended in the draft letter that if mitigation in the La Plata proceeds, the first priority for securing the needed water should come from acquisition of water rights in the La Plata Basin. If a water transfer from Ridges Basin remains the only alternative for mitigation, then the water requirement should be accurately quantified, the delivery system described, and description and commitment of fish escapement prevention methods should be explained. Fish escapement was considered to be the most important issue and anything less than 100% effectiveness in control was unacceptable.

After review and discussion of the letter, the internal process for Biology Committee was discussed and it was

acknowledged that commenting on issues was on a case by case basis. After lengthy discussion over process and concurrent development of the Biological Opinion and Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report for ALP, it was decided to not send out the letter. The Biology Committee agreed that there are major deficiencies in the mitigation strategy and outlined. Given the deficiencies pointed out in the mitigation strategy above, individual SJRIP participants were to comment within their respective agencies.

Revised Long Range Plan (LRP)

The draft LRP was handed out by Ron Bliesner on the first day for later review in the meeting. Discussion of the authority for the program in the introductory section needs rewording regarding membership and participation for water users, environmental interests and Utah participation. The two tables at the end of the draft need to be reviewed for omissions and the restructured to fit the restructuring in Chapter 5 of the Program Evaluation Report. Rewording relative to use of the term "recovery" and importance of the SJR to overall basin recovery is necessary. Discussion of augmentation efforts centered planning and further definition, particularly for Colorado pikeminnow. Nonnative species policies for the SJRIP (stocking, baitfish) have not be accomplished per original program dates. Tom Nesler took the lead for contacting individual states and developing nonnative policies. Based upon restructuring of the Program Evaluation Report, the two tables need review and comment back to Ron by 1 May 2000. It was decided that the timeline for completion of the draft LRP for Coordination Committee review would be delayed due to necessary edits to the Program Evaluation Report that are required for inclusion in the LRP.

Recapture Reservoir Stocking Proposal

Matt Andersen and Melissa Trammel made a presentation of the proposal to approve stocking nonnative sport fish in Recapture Reservoir and to request SJRIP funding for screening the outlet structure. Primary concerns were the inability to screen all potential outflow (rainstorm events that result in flow through spillway) and proposed stocking of nonnative warm-water sport fishes (particularly smallmouth bass). The general discussion by the Committee was that funding for screening should be sought from other sources first. Species selected for stocking were hatchery-reared rainbow trout and largemouth bass and channel catfish transplanted from the nearby San Juan River.

After lengthy discussion a motion was delivered to the floor by Matt and Melissa for voting by the Committee and seconded. The motion read, ".....". The vote was unanimous to support the motion on the condition of approval on the screen design and satisfaction of necessary regulatory processes (ESA, NEPA, other).

Razorback Sucker Larval Availability

Frank Pfeifer gave a brief overview on the availability of razorback sucker larvae for rearing in grow-out facilities in ponds at NIIP. In spite of the assistance of BIA and ERI personnel to larval collection efforts at Lake Mohave, no fingerlings were made available to SJRIP and this was based upon prior commitments to the Lower Basin program and limited rearing facilities. Frank's rearing facility in the Grand Valley will produce larvae from Upper Basin and

San Juan razorback sucker for stocking into Hidden Pond. Razorbacks were sampled by BIA and FWS personnel in the Avocet ponds to check status. It is planned that fish from these ponds will be harvested in fall 2000 for stocking into the SJR.

FWS Funding Status

It was reported to the Biology Committee that there is currently a \$20.4 K shortfall in the FWS funding commitment. Frank Pfeifer agreed to reduce his budget by \$5 K to reflect the discontinuation of efforts to acquire razorback sucker larvae from Lake Mohave. Ren Lohofener committed to making up the additional \$15.4 K before the completion of the fiscal year and will provide Frank's office with the appropriate funding code. In the interim, other contracts to disperse BOR and BIA funds would be completed. The shortfall to be made up by FWS will be included in the funds provided to Frank's overall budget for FY 2000.

Colorado Pikeminnow Stocking Timing

Jim Brooks reported for Dexter that delayed spawning timing for the hatchery broodstock in 1999 contributed to a 33% mortality in the females spawned and that future efforts should not include any delayed spawning. The purpose of the delay was to provide larval fish more appropriately sized for SJR studies. It was discussed whether or not this stocking and study should proceed if the spawning time cannot be delayed and the general consensus was that it would be acceptable and that fish should not be stocked before 10 June 2000, after cessation high spring releases.

Other

Camera ready copies of the final 7-year research reports need to be sent to the Program Coordinator as soon as possible. The Monitoring Plan will be placed on the SJRIP WEB site. The Hydrology Committee letter to Randy Seaholm from the Biology Committee was finalized. Individual Committee members were encouraged to comment on the draft Section 7 Agreement thru their respective Coordination Committee members.

The next meeting was scheduled for 13 June 2000 in Farmington, New Mexico and the primary discussion topics were the revised draft LRP and presentation of findings reported in the 1998-1999 reports.

San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program

Biology Committee Meeting Attendee List

Farmington, New Mexico

11-12 April 2000

Attendees: (*Biology Committee Member)

- **Jim Brooks-US Fish and Wildlife Service***
- **Ron Bliesner-K-B Engineering, Bureau of Indian Affairs***
- **Vince Lamarra-ERI, Navajo Nation***
- **Bill Miller-Miller Eco. Consultants, Southern Ute***
- **Paul Holden-BIO/WEST, Jicarilla Apache***
- **Matthew Andersen-UDWR**
- **Melissa Trammell-UDWR**
- **Larry Crist-US Bureau of Reclamation***
- **Steve Platania-University of New Mexico**
- **Tom Wesche-Habitech, Water Development Interests***
- **David Galat-USGS**
- **Frank Pfeifer-US Fish and Wildlife Service***
- **David Propst-New Mexico Game and Fish Department***
- **Rob Ashman-PNM**
- **Keith Lawrence-ERI**
- **Mike Buntjer-US Fish and Wildlife Service**
- **Dale Ryden-US Fish and Wildlife Service**
- **Ernie Teller-Bureau of Indian Affairs**
- **Matt Lavery-PNM**

- **John Whipple-New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission***
 - **Shirley Mondy-US Fish and Wildlife Service**
 - **Ron Ryel-Ryel and Associates**
 - **William J. Miller-WJM Engineers, Inc.**
 - **Bob Norman-US Bureau of Reclamation**
 - **Peggy Bailey-Tetra Tech**
 - **Shelley Smithson-Farmington Daily Times**
 - **Bob Krakow-Bureau of Indian Affairs**
 - **Tom Nesler-Colorado Department of Wildlife***
 - **Steve Harris-ALPCD**
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**SAN JUAN RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
BIOLOGY COMMITTEE DRAFT MEETING AGENDA**

11-12 APRIL 2000

FARMINGTON CIVIC CENTER, FARMINGTON, NEW MEXICO

11 April

8:00 AM Introduction, review/revision of agenda

8:10 Review Draft Meeting Summary for 15-16 February

8:20 Update on Runoff Forecast (Bliesner)

8:30 1998-1999 Reporting Status

8:35 Recapture Reservoir Stocking Proposal (Andersen)

9:00 Begin Review of Program Evaluation Report

12:00 PM Lunch

1:00 Continue Review of Program Evaluation Report

3:00 Break

3:15 Continue or Begin Review of Long Range Plan

5:00 Adjourn

12 April

8:00 AM Review Long Range Plan

9:00 BSEIS/BC Comment Letter

- Process

- Further actions

9:45 Break

10:00 Funding Status - FWS shortfall of \$20K (Brooks, Mondy)

10:15 Colorado Pikeminnow Stocking Timing (Brooks, Trammel)

10:45 Diversion Structure Modifications for Hogback and Cudei Update (Bliesner)

11:00 Other Items

11:45 Scheduling

12:00 PM Adjourn

