San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program

Biology Committee Meeting
November 28, 2000
Durango, Colorado

Welcome: Frank Pfeifer opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Those in attendance included:

Tom Wesche	Water Development
Bill Miller	Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Vince LaMarra	Navajo Nation
Paul Sawyer	US Bureau of Land Management
David Propst	State of New Mexico
Larry Crist	US Bureau of Reclamation
Frank Pfeifer	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Paul Holden	Jicarilla Apache Tribe
Ron Bliesner	US Bureau of Indian Affairs
Tom Nesler	State of Colorado

Agenda: Changes were made to the agenda to include approval of the August 16-17, 2000, Biology Committee meeting summary and to include a review of the status of the database for the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program (Program).

Minutes of August 16-17, 2000, Biology Committee Meeting: The minutes were approved. There were no comments or changes.

2001 Work Plan and Budget: The Work Plan and Budget for Fiscal Year 2001 passed at the Coordination Committee meeting in September 2000.

Status and Funding: The long-term funding authorization for the Program passed in

Washington, D.C., but funding has not been appropriated yet. Western Area Power Administration is experiencing a shortfall in revenue of roughly $50 million. They had to use money in its reserve fund due to a loss of revenue due to the drought and increased demand for power. It is looking at increasing its utility rates and borrowing money from the States it serves. The US Bureau of Reclamation has indicated that some level of funding for the Program will be available, but they are unsure as to the amount. If there is not enough funding available, some projects may be cut.

The temperature modeling proposal proposed by Keller-Bliesner and approved by the Biology Committee was removed by th Coordination Committee at the request of the Bureau of Reclamation. The US Bureau of Reclamation indicated that it wanted to submit a work proposal for temperature modeling. However, they have not provided a scope of work yet.

It was decided to wait until January to prioritize Work Plan items if funding levels change.

Draft Long-Range Plan Review: Ron Bliesner stated that everyone was sent a draft copy of the Long-Range Plan. Shirley Mondy sent him necessary dates that have been inserted into the Plan. His comments included:

–There is a new format for the final table in Chapter 5. It follows the format of the Program Evaluation Report on goals.
–Other edits were made based on the comments he received.
–Table 3.1 detracted from the document and was put in as an appendix since it restates what was in the old Long-Range Plan.
–Table 5 was kept up front in the new Long-Range Plan.
–The Plan has been reorganized by species. Details are in the appendix.
–Some items not finished were scheduled and rolled into the new Plan.

Comments made by Biology Committee members included the following:

–Whenever possible, the document should be streamlined.
–Accomplishments should be highlighted.
–Table 5.1: Add detail and highlight what tasks will be accomplished by whom.
–Add another table to show tasks and the fiscal years covered in accomplishing those tasks. Give a target completion date and also show the entire period covered for the task.
–Added detail would help in planning but do not put a name or agency on the task. Tasks need to be open as to who might actually do the work.
–Thirty-four of the 44 identified tasks have been accomplished. These are major milestones. The public needs to see that 75% of the identified tasks have been completed. This represents progress in the Program!
–Those that are not completed are ongoing.
–Table 3 needs to have more comments.
–The water quality issue was taken out of the Program Evaluation Report. Irrigation return flow channels may contaminate backwaters. This needs to be investigated and mitigated if necessary. The NIIP consultation requires another review of water quality in

the backwater areas. This might be a NIIP responsibility.
–The Biology Committee needs to look at the Long-Range Plan annually and adjust it as needed.
–There needs to be clarification on how to deal internally with the adaptive management process.
–Tom Wesche felt that statements on pages 2 and 3 of the Long-Range Plan portray recovery as depending on the recovery of the roundtail chub (statements are ecologically but not politically or legally valid). The water development community has serious concerns about the statements since they feel that the success of the recovery program is linked to non-threatened species such as the roundtail chub.
–Other members pointed out that the statements on pages 2 and 3 were taken directly from the original Program document.
–Tom Wesche wanted the portion "Authority 1.1" streamlined. However, it was expanded by Ron Bliesner based on past comments received from other committee members.

Committee members then went through Table 5.1 point by point setting task starting and targeted completion dates. Those tasks that will go past the Program end date will be footnoted.

Members want to see a draft copy of the Long-Range plan sent to Coordination Committee members before the meeting scheduled for January 30, 2001. Biology Committee members need to send their comments to Ron Bliesner by December 1, 2000. He will make the requested changes and send another draft Long-Range Plan back out to Biology Committee members within 10 days..

Members want to have a mid-winter meeting for open discussion of issues without there being a set agenda.

Members would like to see copies of the Coordination Committee meeting summaries brought to the Biology Committee meetings in the future.

ALP Biological Opinion: The US Bureau of Reclamation is required within one year to develop positive biological response criteria for the San Juan Program. Bureau of Reclamation representative Pat Schumacher asked what criteria did the Fish and Wildlife Service want. The Bureau of Reclamation is interested in setting up a monitoring plan to gauge the criteria.

–Could someone develop draft criteria for members to look at that would measure whether the Program is meeting recovery goals? Recovery goals would show species numbers (population criteria.)
–Some Biology Committee activities may already be doing this.
–The monitoring program was to see whether there is a negative or positive response from the fish.

Recovery goals are being developed by Region 6, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Those goals will be published soon in the Federal Register. After publication, it would be good to sit down

and talk with the author of the ALP Biological Opinion. In the interim, it would be good to establish what the adult population is and if there has been any reproduction success.

It was suggested that some Biology Committee members, representatives from the Bureau of Reclamation, and the authors of the ALP Biological Opinion sit down and talk and develop criteria to present to the whole Biology Committee. The criteria should be consistent with the Recovery Goals and with monitoring plans.

> **Action Item:** Larry Crist and Pat Schumacher will develop draft criteria to present to the Biology Committee. If anyone has ideas, please contact them. They will contact the authors of the ALP Biological Opinion in Region 6.

Ron Bliesner wondered if this meant there might be implications for the Long-Range Plan. If so, he would be unable to give the draft Long-Range Plan to the Coordination Committee. However, if the Plan is redone each year, additional wording could be added.

If the criteria used are based on criteria developed for the recovery goals, then the monitoring plan would have to be modified to fit the criteria. And, are the criteria something the Bureau of Reclamation could use? Specific criteria might be needed for the two endangered fish species. Population estimates could be developed but might not be reliable. However, as actual populations grow, it would be easier to do population studies. Studies are contingent on populations which depend on stocking.

The monitoring plan looks at the whole fish community so its data could be used to see if there are positive responses.

Future Work Plan Development:

–The Biology Committee will meet in February (mid-winter meeting) to discuss the Long-Range Plan, identify high priority tasks, and identify new tasks which need to start.
–Draft Scopes of Work should be submitted by April 30, 2001.
–May 2001 the Scopes of Work will be reviewed.
–June 2001 all Scopes of Work will be in final form. The Biology Committee will then evaluate all proposals and select the best ones. Members realize that scopes of work will become more competitive.

At the February meeting, the following should be discussed:

–Important research observations should be brought out.
–Concentrate on interesting items that might affect future work.
–Each presenter will have 30 minutes. A discussion period will be held after each presentation. Similar scopes of work may be placed together on the agenda.

Action Item: The Biology Committee will meet in Farmington, New Mexico, February 5 - 7, 2001. The meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m. on February 5 and end at noon on February 7.

The Coordination Committee is slated to meet in Farmington, New Mexico, on January 30, 2001, and the Hydrology Committee will meet in Farmington, New Mexico, on January 31, 2001.

Monitoring of Fish Community in River Outflow: Matt Andersen

-Monitoring at the mouth of the San Juan River is very important to the State of Utah.
-The State of Utah wants to see if stocking pikeminnow is having an impact.
-Utah also wants to see if fish are moving out of Lake Powell and up the San Juan River.
-The State of Utah wants to have a more active role in the San Juan River Basin Program. Staff feel there are gaps in the monitoring program. The State wants to collect larval as well as juveniles, and see if larvae are getting into nursery habitat. If they are not there, then why? Is it due to predation?
–The scope of work submitted by the State of Utah could be tied to other scopes of work.

In the past, some members of the Biology Committee have objected to the monitoring plan. This will be discussed at the mid-winter meeting in February where scopes of work can be refined. Ron Bliesner felt it was premature to monitor larval fish until further drift studies are completed and larval fish locations identified. Right now, there are not enough fish in the system to monitor.

Utah staff wondered if more fish needed to be put into the river. However, this is part of the Program's augmentation plan. This topic needs to be discussed further at the mid-winter meeting.

Agenda Item for Mid-Winter Meeting: Monitoring and sampling will be discussed at the mid-winter Biology Committee meeting in February.

Fall Monitoring Schedule: This past fall, due to low flows, researchers seining for fish fell behind. In the future, there should be better coordination between all researchers and those people who are seining.

Razorback Sucker Pond Culture and Fall Harvest Results (Dale Ryden): Avocet ponds were first stocked in 1999. The east cell was stocked in March 1999 with fish from Lake Mohave. The west cell was stocked with fish from the hatchery in Grand Junction, Colorado, in May 1999. Fish stocked in the east had much lower survival rates and grew less. This was due to the ponds being too cold at the time the east cell was stocked. In October 2000, 1,044 fish were harvested from the two ponds, pit-tagged, and stocked into the river, downstream of Hogback Diversion. Razorback suckers can be reared successfully in these ponds. However,

there is more to learn about density versus the growth rate before we can maximize the productivity of these ponds.

Razorback sucker were stocked into Hidden Pond in May 2000 and checked for survival and growth in September. Survival appears to be good so far, with fish being from 4-6 inches. These fish will be stocked into the river in 2001.

From the results so far, it is felt that stocking needs for the razorback sucker cannot be met solely from existing growout ponds. Over half the fish stocked into the Avocet Ponds in 2000 (namely those in the east cell) did not survive. However, with these ponds being stocked later in the year in 2000, researchers are hoping for a better rate of return in 2001. The bottom line is that survival and harvest rates in the growout ponds will continue to be highly variable from year to year. Researchers want to leave fish in the ponds a minimum of two growing seasons before stocking them into the river..

Tom Nesler pointed out that the stocking goals outlined in the razorback sucker augmentation plan will likely need to be re-evaluated if growout ponds only furnish 2,000-4,000 fish annually. Originally, the plan called for stocking 20,000-30,000 fish annually in the river.

Frank Pfeifer pointed out that the augmentation of razorback sucker, via growout ponds needs to be given another year or two before members reach any conclusions. Due to many variables, results can vary widely from year to year. This year, the Program will be getting 100,000 RBS fry from the Lower Basin area in March for stocking. Dale Ryden felt it would be good to look into obtaining more growout ponds.

Rearing Pond at Bluff, Utah: William J. Miller Engineers, Inc. of Santa Fe, presented the Committee with a proposal for the Recapture Lodge Fish Rearing Project. Comments received from members during the discussion of the proposal included the following:

–This is a good "outreach" proposal. It might be a way to bring more landowners into the Program.
–Is this the place to spend over $150,000? The cost is three times that of Hidden Pond.
–Will the Program pay the entire cost? Maybe funding could be obtained from other sources such as Ducks Unlimited. Bill Miller agreed to look at sources of funding through the Lower Basin and partnership funding.
–Do members want to commit to $1,350 per month in operation and management costs?
–Access to the pond is controlled. There is no direct access to the river. Would the Upper Basin be interested in the pond to help with their razorback production?
–Could the Program use $50,000 being held by the Fish and Wildlife Foundation for the proposal? This money was received from the City of Durango.
–What will happen to the fish in 10 years when the proposed number for stocking has been reached?
–Are we at a stage where we can walk away from off-channel rearing sites? These facilities would be nice to have in reserve.
–How many more ponds does the Program need, and does the Program need to look for more ponds? Is the Program looking at other sites for ponds such as gravel pits in the

Farmington, New Mexico, area. Maybe it would be better to have more ponds on NIIP land.
–The pond is maintained by groundwater levels. There would be seepage into the pond.
–Some members wondered if there were metals such as selenium or other fish in the pond.

Frank Pfeifer suggested that the Program sample the site and nearby ponds for metals/biota before making a decision. The Program could fund the work for the water quality tests using a portion of the $50,000 available with the Fish and Wildlife Foundation (roughly $3,000-$5,000 would be needed). Members felt they should discuss this request with Coordination Committee members before the January 30, 2001, meeting in Farmington, New Mexico.

Action Item: Jim Brooks will work with the Chairman of the Coordination Committee to poll the committee members on funding this water quality work before the January 2001 Coordination Committee meeting.

Action Item: Bill Miller of William J. Miller Engineers, Inc. will check into possible other funding sources for the project such as partnerships.

Roundtail Chub Broodstock Development Efforts: Working together, Tom Nesler and Dave Propst have been looking for possible sites for obtaining broodstock from the river to put into a hatchery facility. Due to the reluctance of various groups and agencies to assist them, this effort has been put off until Spring. They will continue to work with the National Park Service, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe in locating a large population of roundtail chub. Staff from the State of Colorado will also work with landowners in the area.

To obtain the amount of broodstock needed for the Program, fish from several sources in the San Juan River will have to be used. The roundtail chub is a low priority with the State of Colorado, and the State might not be able to maintain roundtail chub broodstock for the Program at their facilities. Fish could not be kept at the state hatchery past 2004. Currently, other species have priority over the roundtail chub in Colorado.

Dave Propst indicated he wanted to have an initial population for research. Approximately 1,000 fish would need to be pit tagged. Once the fish were larger, radio transmitters could be placed in them to tract their movements in the river. Dave Propst will see if Section 6 funding is available from the Bureau of Reclamation. Tom Wesche reiterated that water development interests will help with developing outside funding sources for this work when called upon.

Non-Native Species Removal Results and Future Needs: This needs to be discussed further at the February meeting. There has been no documentation of striped bass eating pikeminnow. The stomach contents of 38 striped bass were examined. Researchers found red shiners, carp,

spikedace, and flannelmouth in their stomachs but no pikeminnow. Dale Ryden handed out a summary of striped bass collections in the San Juan River from 1991-2000.

Striped bass had moved into the river system during low flow periods. Fall storms helped move them back out of the system and further down river. However, he did note that some striped bass will remain in the river system in spite of high flows.

There are no regulations on the number of striped bass that anglers can catch in Utah and Colorado. The State of New Mexico is presenting a proposal to the Game and Fish Commission requesting removal of limits on catfish and striped bass in the San Juan River.

San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program Database: Ron Bliesner handed out information on the status of the Program's database to members. Some data is missing. Currently, there are 968 files in the data set. He requested that researchers send him the missing data through 1999 as soon as possible to keep the database up-to-date. Any data on 2000 should also be sent in if ready. All data up to 1999 should be sent to Mr. Bliesner by January 1, 2001. Members should also let him know how they want the data cataloged.

Action Item: Researchers need to send all data through 1999 to Ron Bliesner by January 1, 2001.

BLM Permits: Paul Sawyer contacted the Bureau of Land Management Utah office on how best to resolve conflicts for river permits. He has not heard anything yet. He did recommend that researchers send a tentative schedule of planned research trips to the office in Monticello, Utah, with a carbon copy to him. Most research trips are held in the fall when recreational float trips are over.

Other Items: None

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m. Biology Committee members will meet again in Farmington, New Mexico, on February 5, 6, 7, 2001.

Other Attendees:

Attendee	**Organization/Company**
Michael Hudson	Utah Department of Wildlife Resources
Steve Harris	Southwestern Water Conservation District
Ernie Teller	Bureau of Indian Affairs-NIIP
Keith Lawrence	ERI
Dale Ryden	U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6
Matthew Andersen	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
Amber Hobbes	New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
Tom Chart	U. S. Bureau of Reclamation
Sue Mullane	U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2
Mike Buntjer	U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2