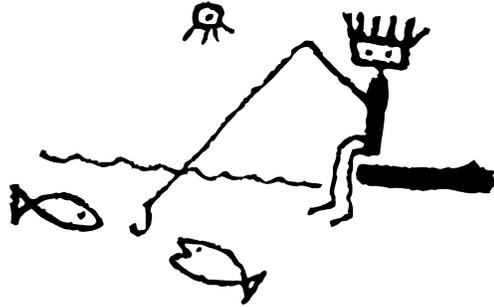


Feb 27, 2003

**San Juan River Basin
Recovery Implementation Program
Biology Committee
October 17, 2002
Conference Call Summary**



Members Present:

Ron Bliesner
Tom Chart
Paul Holden
Vince LaMarra
Chuck McAda
Bill Miller, Chairman
Dave Propst
Tom Wesche

Others Present:

Rob Ashman
Jason Davis
Steve Platania
Dale Ryden
Shirley Mondy, Program Coordinator
Marilyn Greenberg, Program Assistant

Representing:

U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Jicarilla Apache Nation
Navajo Nation
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Southern Ute Indian Tribe
State of New Mexico
Water Development Interests

Public Service Company of New Mexico
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
University of New Mexico
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Welcome and Review of Agenda

Bill Miller welcomed those participating, who then introduced themselves, and the agenda was approved.

Finalize Draft Meeting Summaries (February, May, July)

The following draft meeting summaries were approved by the Committee: February 19 - 21, 2002, May 21, 2002, and July 16, 2002.

Request to Add Julie Jackson to the Biology Committee Listserve

The Committee voted in favor of adding Julie Jackson to the listserve.

350 CFS Winter Flow for November 1, 2002 through April 30, 2003

There was a discussion regarding a request from the Coordination Committee to extend the 350cfs flows in the critical habitat through the winter in order to conserve water in the reservoir

for next year. There is a 10 - 15% chance of not having a full water supply for NIIP, 33% chance that water will be drawn down to where we are currently next year, and a 50% possibility of not having a flow release next year. This is an effort to try to reduce the risk of shortage for water users. Legally the reservoir cannot be operated to create a shortage for anyone.

At least an average runoff is needed in order to make a spring peak release. There is a 12 - 15% risk that there will be a shortage situation.

This year has been the worst in history, but we have been able to stay in the 500cfs range. There may be a week or 2 where flows have dropped below the flow recommendation weekly average.

Given today's flows, we would be just below 500cfs in the critical habitat range starting in November when irrigation stops. Snow melt will not start until February. December and January are when historical 350 cfs flows have occurred in the critical habitat.

There were concerns regarding setting a precedent that it is ok in low water years to go down to 350cfs in the summer, and then cutting back in the winter also. The biggest concern is the biological implications and response. The 350cfs was originally agreed to for the summer to get a physical measurement to determine the impact. In the summer, fish can feed and move around. But in the winter their metabolism is slower and the lower water flow may be a greater stressor.

Dale Ryden observed that razorbacks stayed semi-active in water temperatures almost down to zero. If we get down to those temperatures and have low flows, there will perhaps be less pools for the razorbacks to hang out in. The riffles are really shallow at 250 - 350cfs.

Vince LaMarra observed only 6" riffles in many places this summer. There was not a lot of classic pool habitat observed. Everything just gets shallower. The runs that are usually 3 - 4 feet, are now down to 2 feet.

Ron Bliesner clarified that if the Biology Committee makes no recommendations, the flows have to be kept at 500cfs in the critical habitat. There was zero inflow into the dam in August, 2002.

The Biology Committee's recommendation will be used by FWS. Reclamation will consult with FWS, and FWS will consult with the Biology Committee. The current Biology Committee memo expires on November 1, 2002. It was suggested that no action be taken by the Biology Committee until a formal request is received from FWS. The Committee agreed to have a recommendation ready to go. Dave Propst clarified that the Committee is recommending a variance (adaptive management) for this year only - not to be interpreted as a change to the flow recommendations.

The Biology Committee agreed to recommend that flows not go below 400cfs for more than two cumulative months, specifically 8 weeks [from November 1 to March 31]. This is a recommended flow in the critical habitat range - not a recommended release from the dam.

Recovery Goal Integration into SJRIP Program/Status of Augmentation Plans

Dale Ryden reviewed the recovery goals when rewriting the augmentation plans. When he incorporated the downlist and delist numbers he received comments from the Biology Committee to take that information out because many other factors are tied to those numbers. Since only one point of the recovery goals was being addressed (by Dale) in the augmentation plans, it was suggested that he take the recovery numbers out of the text, but leave it in the tables. Dale has been in the field since February and hopes to be able to get back to rewriting the genetics and 2 augmentation plans within the next 2 weeks and to complete them by January 1st, 2003. Bill Miller stated that it would be helpful, as the monitoring integration is done, to document how and where progress toward the recovery goals is indicated. Tom Wesche added that recognition and acknowledgment of the goals is good. Washington likes to see that goals are being met and progress is being made. It was agreed by the Committee that current goals would be referenced whenever possible.

Use of Upper Basin Rearing Ponds for Razorback Sucker

The Hydrology Committee requested a \$400,000 placeholder from the Coordination Committee for construction of rearing ponds, if they were available next year. With that in mind, the Committee discussed the possibility of using Upper Basin Rearing Ponds - in the event that they became available. Chuck McAda stated that, in theory, there is a lot of space available in the current Upper Basin ponds, but the family lot issue may eliminate many of the smaller ponds. In theory the surface acreage would be enough to raise a large number of fish, but they would have to be harvested with nets - and it takes a good deal of effort to get the fish out of these ponds. The Upper Basin may be able to get 12,000 or 13,000 fish out this year, and the stocking goals for the Upper Basin have not yet been met.

After discussion, the Biology Committee agreed that it wanted to keep the request for \$400,000 to create 9 or 10 additional acres of ponds in the Farmington area. The Committee needs to write down the criteria of what would make a good, acceptable pond. ***Jim Brooks has the action item.***

Dale Ryden indicated that there are enough fish available for stocking for this spring. The numbers in the augmentation plan begin in 2003. We are going to start harvesting the current 9 ponds with the 2003 plan. The Committee had previously agreed on 9 additional acres of grow out ponds. Different results are obtained from different ponds. Dale feels that the sooner we can get additional ponds the better. In April and May 2003, current ponds will be stocked with larval fish. These ponds are big enough for larval fish. We are good at getting the larger adults out of there. Then the younger fish can be placed to replace the larger fish. We have enough ponds for one growing season. The sooner that productivity can be increased, the sooner the size of the fish that are being produced will increase. The larger fish that come out of the ponds are ready to spawn within the first six months. Extra ponds will give us space to grow larger fish.

Discussion of Scopes of Work for Pikeminnow Production, Monitoring Summary Report, YOY Pikeminnow

Colorado Pikeminnow Augmentation

Paul Holden explained that the peer review committee suggested that the stocked pikeminnow should be monitored regularly, rather than waiting for over a year to determine whether there are problems or not. Since survival of these fish is important, we should be monitoring them to

see how well they are doing and what areas they are using. We should be trying to learn as much as we can about these fish and our success in reaching the recovery goals. We are open to suggestions from Dale Ryden regarding which reaches to use. Good locations would be repeated. Dave Propst indicated that it would be important to measure to determine size and the coexisting species to determine impacts on the species. May want to add a sentence to explain to the general public why we are doing this.

There was a question about why are we not measuring the Animas. We want to know how important the upper reaches are - below the one big diversion on the Animas. There are currently 6 or 7 stations included. A small sampling of the Animas could be included as well. Dave Propst said that the San Juan monitoring could be modified to be the same as the Animas - no more than a mile each. Few fish are anticipated upstream. This will just answer the question of whether the fish have moved up to that reach.

Paul Holden will modify the scope of work to add an Animas station and will modify costs to include measurements of the size of the fish and to add manhours.

Tom Wesche asked about page 4, beginning of the 3rd paragraph: did the ranges of expected results need to be added to the proposal? Paul Holden responded that it is in the augmentation plan. Maybe ***the augmentation plan can be sited in this location also.***

Bill Miller stated that funding will not be available to conduct the sample at the end of November 2002. ***The report should indicate that the sampling will begin March, July, and November of 2003, with a note added to say that if funding is not available in November/December 2002, sampling will be conducted in November/December 2003.***

Shirley Mondy will add a note, when she sends it to the Coordination Committee, that the November 2002 trip is critical. Paul Holden hopes to make the changes today and get it out to Shirley and the Biology Committee. ***The Committee approved the scope of work with the revisions stated today. Once it is revised, it will be sent to the Coordination Committee for review and approval.***

Monitoring Summary Report

Paul Holden had said that he would put together a scope of work for this. There appears to be a need to condense these large reports down to a large executive summary to explain what is being found in monitoring. The executive summaries from the monitoring reports may not have the data and graphs that demonstrate the overall results. This would be a 25 page document, with the same information [presented differently] that would set on top of the actual monitoring reports. If funding is approved, Holden feels that he could move forward quickly. The Biological reports are due out next month; the Summary could be out in December - January. The Physical report would not be available until the end of January. The summary would be available 45 days following the completion of individual monitoring. ***The Committee approved this scope of work and will forward to the Coordination Committee for review and approval.***

Fingerling Production

This scope of work was revised and resubmitted to include a production of 350,000 Colorado pikeminnow instead of 200,000 as originally approved. The scope of work shows that stocking will occur in October. ***This should be changed to November.***

The scope of work was approved with the suggested modifications.

Winter Meeting Date

The Coordination Committee meets Wednesday, February 26th, 2003. All committees are encouraged to get together and the Biology Committee has the most information to share with the other Committees.

The Biology Committee will meet in Farmington on Monday, February 24th at 9am and on February 25th until 5pm. This will be the annual presentation of what has been seen the previous year.

Subgroups

The Biology subgroup will meet on November 12, 2002 at 1pm, and on November 13th in the New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office conference room, in Albuquerque.

The Physical subgroup meeting cannot be scheduled until Ron Bliesner and Vince LaMarra get a contract - the earliest will be sometime in January.