

Revised (Feb. 10, 2016) Draft Meeting Notes
Technical Committee Meeting
Gila River Basin Native Fishes Conservation Program
BLM Safford District Office, AZ
December 10, 2015 @11:00 AM

Participants:

Rob Clarkson (Reclamation)
Doug Duncan and Andy Dean (U.S Fish and Wildlife Service)
Andrew Monié and Mike Ruhl (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish)
Jeff Sorensen and Tony Robinson (Arizona Game and Fish Department)
Yvette Paroz (U.S. Forest Service)
Heidi Blasius (U.S. Bureau of Land Management Arizona)
Tim Frey (U.S. Bureau of Land Management New Mexico)

Meeting notes are in *italics* below each agenda item.

1. Preliminaries, lunch arrangements, etc.

2. Update on progress of moving fund transfer administration to Reclamation

Reclamation completed agreement with NMGFD. The AZGFD and ASU agreements have been sent to Reclamation's Boulder City office where they will be finalized. The existing Gila National Forest agreement is still funded, so there is no immediate need to start a new agreement with Reclamation, but that will likely be completed later in 2016.

The agreement between Reclamation and USFWS will be maintained to enable transfer of funds for renovation of the Aquatic Research and Conservation Center (ARCC) and for New Mexico Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office participation in the Program.

3. Review existing partner tasks, recommendations for changes/new tasks

a. NM tasks (general)

- *NMDGF wants to stock spikedace into the upper San Francisco River at least four more times.*
- *Loach minnow was stocked into the upper San Francisco River after the Whitewater-Baldy fire, and was detected during monitoring in 2015. The proposed stocking of loach minnow into Saliz Canyon was postponed until 2016. Tularosa River has a healthy loach minnow population that will be used to stock Saliz Canyon.*
- *Little Creek has had loach minnow stocked for two years; source stock was West Fork Gila.*
- *Pueblo Creek is a potential chub stream; needs more recon.*
- *Mule Creek needs two more Gila chub stocking.*
- *Redrock Wildlife Area Pond appears to be holding only a marginal population of Gila chub.*
- *Gila topminnow are doing well in Burro Cienega.*
- *The Nature Conservancy's Gila Farm Pond was invaded by nonnative fishes.*
- *NMDGF acquired EE Ranch along lower Bear Creek and was surveyed in June 2015; captured one loach minnow.*
- *Single pass NNR of Heart Bar Wildlife Area on West Fork Gila River continues with few nonnatives detected.*

b. Repatriation tasks (AZ + NM)

- *Tony distributed a handout with tables of: 1) status of priority actions identified in cooperative agreement, 2) planned field work during 2016, 3) suggested modifications to existing tasks, and 4) potential new projects to add to task list.*
- *Tony gave a brief update of highlights of each of the individual tasks.*
 - *Gila Topminnow only stocked into two new sites last year, but there is a long site list for next year.*
 - *Arnett Creek – Thanks to Mike Martinez (USFWS) the project consultation is moving forward and Gila topminnow will be stocked into both Arnett Creek and Telegraph Canyon in spring of 2016.*
 - *Blue River Restoration – Spikedace and roundtail chub seem to have established.*
 - *Muleshoe Ecosystem Repatriations – Spikedace and loach minnow seem to have established in Hot Springs Canyon.*

- *Acquire spikedace, loach minnow, and rare populations of other fish – AZGFD surveyed East Fork Black River and tributaries within historic range, but did not detect any loach minnow.*
- *Fossil Creek – Spikedace and Gila topminnow seem to be established. Does not appear that loach minnow has established; but were not able to stock the last two years because too few fish were available at ARCC.*
- *Transfer of chub and topminnow to New Mexico – Weather caused the postponement of collection of Gila chub from Harden Cienega Creek, so no chub were translocated to NM in 2015. However, in April, Gila chub were moved further upstream in Harden Cienega Creek.*
- *Bonita Creek – stocked more Gila topminnow and desert pupfish in upper reach of stream near the San Carlos Apache Reservation boundary.*
- *The Technical Committee agreed with the suggested modifications to the existing tasks.*
 - *A list of Gila topminnow stocking sites for 2016.*
 - *Arizona trout stream loach minnow repatriations – Broaden the project to include Gila chub repatriations, so that lower portions of Pinaleno mountain streams could be repatriated with Gila chub after or concurrent with Gila trout repatriations in the upper reaches.*
 - *Blue River native fish restoration – Add stockings of spikedace and loach minnow into Blue River tributaries that have suitable habitat.*
 - *Muleshoe ecosystem stream and springs repatriations – Stock spikedace and loach minnow into Bass Canyon near Patterson Cabin.*
 - *Mineral Creek drainage native fish restoration – Add mechanical removal of green sunfish from Devils Canyon upstream of Five Falls.*
- *The Technical Committee approved the addition of the four suggested new tasks to the priority list: 1) Boyce Thompson Ayer Lake native fish restoration, 2) Sharp Spring native fish restoration, 3) West Fork Pinto Creek native fish restoration, and 4) Red Tank Draw native fish restoration.*

c. Renovations (Mineral Creek, Bonita Creek, others?)

Tony distributed a handout of AZGFD's draft 10-year plan for native fish control projects, and then briefly summarized the potential CAP funded projects.

- *Devils Canyon planning will begin in 2016, and AGFD may also attempt mechanical removal of green sunfish above 5-falls in 2016. The perennial sections only include a few landowners (State Land, ASARCO Ray Mine and grazing allotment permittees were mentioned), so there may be little public concern with a renovation. However, nonnative fish would have to be eliminated from two tanks in the drainage too, one on Forest property and one on private land.*
- *AZGFD would like to chemically treat or use other means to eradicate western mosquitofish from Sharp Spring and then stock Gila topminnow and Gila chub.*
- *Bonita Creek – AZGFD has not yet begun to draft plan for renovation of the previously renovated reach, BLM appears to have had success with green sunfish removal, so a chemical renovation may not be necessary.*

d. USGS piscicide development study

The study results did not confirm Dave Ward's study. Therefore the second phase of the research will not be pursued or funded, and registering the product as a piscicide will not be pursued.

e. ARCC expansion update

AZGFD is clearing out area between caged building and other building. Phase 1 will be completed in Spring of 2016. Phase 1 includes piping to sump, installing new tanks between the buildings, and fencing. Phase 2 will start afterwards, and is when the retaining wall and the pad for the new building will be constructed. Phase 3 is when the new building will be constructed.

f. E Fork White River loach minnow acquisition

USFWS reported that the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) completed some loach minnow surveys last year and that relatively few loach minnow were captured. WMAT plans on completing more loach minnow surveys this year. WMAT still wants to redevelop Alchessay as a loach minnow hatchery.

4. Recommendations to Policy Committee re: new outside proposals (chub genetics, Bonita Creek green sunfish removal)

- AZGFD and USFWS indicated that there were two other chub genetics studies going on (University of Hawaii and University of Arkansas) that are using similar techniques as the Dowling chub genetics proposal. Need to evaluate how the three studies differ. USFWS wanted to review the project with staff before making a recommendation. The Technical Committee agreed to postpone making a recommendation on the proposed study until after internal staff discussions of the three studies.
- The Technical Committee unanimously voted to fund BLM's green sunfish removal project in Bonita Creek.

5. Identification of FY2016 fund transfer projects

Continuation Projects:

The Technical Committee unanimously voted that all continuing projects be funded. The Committee will recommend that the Policy Committee approve funding of all continuing projects.

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| 1. Topminnow stock maintenance (yr 1 of 5) | \$ 13,690 |
| 2. NMDGF recovery actions (yr 10 of n) | |
| <i>NMDGF indicated that the Turkey Creek project would be completed by the end of 2016 with the survey of Skeleton Canyon. The other three projects will continue. Reclamation asked NMDGF to provide a list of new projects. The West Fork Gila project will continue while alternatives for permanent conservation measures on the Middle Fork Gila are assessed. Reclamation indicated that a report on the West Fork Gila removal project will be needed. It was agreed to combine tasks 2b and d below and also tasks 3b and d and 4b and d.</i> | |
| a. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (yr 5 of 5) | \$ 21,175 |
| b. Spikedace repatriations to San Francisco River (yr 5 of 5) | \$ 3,250 |
| c. Turkey Ck trib surveys/mechanical removal (yr 4 of 4) | \$ 16,100 |
| d. T&E fish repatriations and monitoring (yr 5 of 5) | \$ 14,600 |
| 3. FWS recovery actions (yr 10 of n) | |
| a. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (yr 5 of 5) | \$ 10,570 |
| b. Spikedace repatriations to San Francisco River (yr 5 of 5) | \$ 3,055 |
| c. Turkey Ck trib surveys/mechanical removal (yr 4 of 4) | \$ 15,215 |
| d. T&E fish repatriations and monitoring (yr 5 of 5) | \$ 3,055 |
| 4. USFS recovery actions (yr 10 of n) | |
| a. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (yr 5 of 5) | \$ 9,790 |
| b. Spikedace repatriations to San Francisco River (yr 5 of 5) | \$ 1,982 |
| c. Turkey Ck trib surveys/mechanical removal (yr 4 of 4) | \$ 14,440 |
| d. T&E fish repatriations and monitoring (yr 5 of 5) | \$ 2,727 |
| 5. AZGFD recovery actions (yr 10 of n) | \$ 306,970 |
| 6. Bubbling Ponds O&M (yr 10 of n) | <u>\$ 106,000</u> |
| TOTAL | <u>\$ 542,599</u> |

New Projects:

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| 1. Chub genetics? | \$ 125,131 |
| <i>Decision delayed. See discussion under item 4 above.</i> | |
| 2. Bonita Creek green sunfish removal? | \$ 18,000 |
| <i>The Technical Committee voted unanimously to fund the project proposed by BLM Safford Field Office.</i> | |
| 3. Extra funds for helicopter support? | <u>\$???</u> |
| <i>The Technical Committee members recognized the need for funding helicopter support, and voted unanimously to set aside \$25-50K for helicopter support.</i> | |

Total FY2017 funding estimate: \$ 585,599 - \$ 610,599

6. Fish barrier update

A. Spring Creek (Oak)

Completed in 2015.

B. West Fork Black River

In construction and should be completed by early summer 2016.

C. O'Donnell Canyon

BLM will be cancelling its land management agreement with Audubon Research Ranch. The barrier project EA is ready, but waiting on approval of BLM to release.

D. Redfield Canyon

Still need to complete the 'friendly condemnation' and go through the Department of Justice. Target year for construction is 2017.

E. Eagle Creek

Barrier is a joint venture of Reclamation and Freeport McMoran. Target year for construction is 2017.

F. Middle Fork Gila River

NMDGF indicated that various issues needed to be addressed. Target year for construction is 2020.

7. Recommendations to streamline AZGFD, NMDGF annual reports

Reclamation and FWS recommended that AGFD shorten the background information on each project. Don't report on historical information. Include a short results paragraph for each project.

8. Effect of AZGFD restructuring on GRBNFCP?

Jeff Sorensen will no longer be the Native Fish Program Manager. Julie Carter in the new Aquatic Wildlife Branch will be the new Native Fish Program Manager. Tony will be the new CAP Technical Team Member. The CAP program within AZGFD will move to the Aquatic Wildlife Branch, but other than that will remain intact.

9. BLM NM

Tim Frey stated that Apache Creek (Apache Box ACEC) was explored in 2014 and found that the stream was dry on top of the plateau. In 2015 the BLM explored the possibility of getting equipment and personnel into the lower reach below the springs, but without success and will further investigate possible access from above in 2016. A preliminary survey and exploration of Blue Creek occurred in 2014 and subsequently the BLM reach was surveyed in 2015. He mentioned that neither loach minnow nor Gila chub were found. In 2016, access to the middle, private lands reach will be assessed and if access is allowed, a survey will also be performed. Bear Creek will not be formally surveyed as now that NMDGF owns the property and has already surveyed the BLM reach, there is no point for BLM to also perform a survey. Loach minnow were found during the NMDGF survey, below the BLM reach, however. A proposed contract modification will be forthcoming and if approved by FWS and the technical team, BLM will utilize the funds originally intended for the Bear Creek survey for the revised project.

10. Other discussion items?

Rob Clarkson formally announced he is retiring on December 31, 2015.