

Gila River Basin Native Fish Conservation Program
Joint Policy-Technical Team Meeting

January 30, 2009

Final Meeting Minutes – these are not verbatim, but paraphrased

Meeting location: Pintail Conference Room at Arizona Game & Fish Dept headquarters
5000 W Carefree Hwy, Phoenix, AZ

Starting time: 9 am local (MST)

Attending (in person or via conference call): Mike Senn, Tony Robinson, Jeff Sorensen, Don Mitchell [2nd session only], and Dave Weedman [2nd session only] (AZGFD), Rob Clarkson, Henry Messing, Bruce Ellis [2nd session only] (Reclamation), Steve Spangle, Doug Duncan (FWS), David Propst and Yvette Paroz [both 1st session only], (NMDGF), Amy Unthank (USFS), and Tim Frey (BLM-NM)

Topics: (presenter)

1. Review of 2008 accomplishments and any difficulties (Duncan, Propst, Sorensen, Clarkson)
 - FWS (Duncan)—working on the genetic biocontrol symposium, planned for June 2010 (date was pushed back by 1 year). Not much new to report. Sent invitations to speakers—waiting to hear back.
 - CAP updated BO finished in May 2008, includes Gila chub and Chiricahua leopard frog, and includes the Santa Cruz Basin.
 - Got the final ASU report on chub genetics—check on the Reclamation website for the PDF.
 - Acquired 300 gallons of CFT Legumine rotenone. Some of that was used for the Bonita Creek renovation. The rest is stockpiled at AZGFD's warehouse.
 - Coronado NF did a public relations effort on rotenone use before and during the Romero Canyon renovation—that worked well.
 - AZGFD co-op agreement extended another year. Will do a new a 5-yr agreement.
 - Amended NMDGF agreement. It is close to being signed. Removed language in the agreement on the \$50,000 cap on spending per year.
 - Got funds to FWS NMFWCO & NMDGF offices.
 - Working on agreement with TNC on green sunfish removal in Redfield. Agreement should be completed within next month. Now have to post these tasks on Grants.gov website, which means FWS gets more inquiries from external vendors about bidding for this work. Most of what the CAP program does is sole-sourced—state G&F agencies only authorized to do. FWS won't have to do 424 forms each year—instead it'll be the total amount for 5 years.
 - FWS has to do annual report on expenses per Reclamation contract, but lower priority—likely to combine FY07-08 financial info.

- FWS is working with ASU (Marsh & Associates, Inc) on the topminnow stock maintenance agreement; ASU is handling the administrative aspects; Marsh still maintains 0.01 FTE for ASU for maintaining these agreements.
- AZGFD (Sorensen)—Muleshoe Ecosystem monitoring—Gila topminnow and desert pupfish mostly established in each site stocked, except Cherry Spring Canyon. Spikedace reproduced in Redfield Canyon and loach minnow reproduced in Hot Springs Canyon (1st time this has been documented range-wide, due to a repatriation effort).
- Fossil Creek stockings: 480 razorbacks in early December 2008; and 1000 loach minnow, 600 spikedace, and 2000 topminnow in late November 2008.
- Sorensen talked with Pam Sponholtz (FWS) a couple weeks ago. She reports that river otters in the Fossil Creek drainage are eating the stocked razorbacks—FWS and NAU researchers have found PIT tags in otter scat, that indicate around 40% of the stocked razorbacks became otter food.
- Bonita Creek salvage/renovation/stocking: successful renovation in early October 2008 and later stocked loach minnow, spikedace, topminnow and pupfish; Reclamation committed to 5 years of monitoring that system due to barrier construction; to start in fall 2009.
- NMDGF (Propst)—sent progress report in 2008 (see Paroz’s email attachment)
- Still working on W Fork Gila renovation effort—plan to do in June 2009 if the paperwork is done.
- Completed 3 mechanical removal efforts in the Lower W Fork Gila. Some loach minnow and spikedace were observed.
- NMDGF finished surveys of E Fork Gila River—final report will be out in a few months.
- Cienega construction near Lordsburg. Removing tamarisk and bull thistle now. Anticipated to start construction in March-April 2009. Received \$50,000 grant from Desert Fishes Habitat Partnership as a demo project—want to get started before July. Plan to stock topminnow and Gila chub at this site.
- Stocked spikedace in the San Francisco River (used Gila forks source fish from Bubbling Ponds Fish Hatchery); plan to do augmentation again in June 2009.
- Topminnow was stocked on private land near Lordsburg, in June 2008. Monitoring results indicate that fish were doing well. Moved some fish into a side-channel to help with future flooding events and ensure topminnow persist in greater numbers.
- For another private landowner (the TNC pond next to Gila River), drained a pond, refilled it, and stocked roundtail chub in Feb 2008. Monitored in Oct 2008—chub are still there, and growing.
- Some headwater and roundtail chub surveys were done by NMDGF, but more to do—mainstem of San Francisco River.
- Year 4 of the mechanical removal project got started late; actually they are getting started late on most projects (off by a year); the 5-yr co-op agreement will help resolve this in the future.
- Reclamation (Clarkson) —Provided funds (mostly non-CAP \$) to help line the TNC Dudleyville upper pond—should be done today. The pond liner is covered with 3” of river rock to help in removing cattails in the future. CAP set aside \$35,000 in

- program funds to help with this effort. AZGFD loaned 2 high-capacity sump pumps to help drain the pond; those pumps should be returned in a few weeks. Hope to take care of the *Lernaea* parasite problem in the lower pond. *Lernaea* has been in the Gila River Basin for ~100 years, and is found at most wild sites. However, we want to limit its spread to new areas where we repatriate topminnow, pupfish, and razorbacks.
- Working on the W Fork Oak Creek barrier design; USFS is trying to get NEPA done for that project. The Blue River barrier design is being drafted. The Tonto Creek barrier feasibility report is mostly done.

2. Approve fy09 fund transfer project list (Clarkson & Policy Comm)

- Lining of San Pedro Pond (Dudleyville) ok'd via phone/email last year.
- First year that the full amount of program funds was fully allocated (we actually over-budgeted a little and used lapse dollars, with the expectation that some task expenses won't be as much as estimated).
- Unthank asked about the ASU topminnow stock maintenance agreement with Marsh—Clarkson explained that the CAP program still deals with ASU on the financial aspects. Marsh will still collect wild stock to maintain those topminnow lineages.
- Clarkson handed out RPA3 and 4 spreadsheets (11-7-08 version) and summarized the balances.
- We are attempting to bring both RPA balances close to zero (allocated vs expenditures).
- Reclamation and FWS need to rectify their respective financial books.
- Spangle—perhaps we should have combined the two RPA efforts under just one RPA? Both Clarkson and Duncan said we still have flexibility in spending program funds—there is a lot of overlap on the efforts and the overall goal is recovery of listed fishes; the system isn't broke, so we don't necessarily need to fix it.
- Policy Comm doesn't need to take an action today on approving fy09 projects. Existing/continuing tasks are already approved. No new proposals to act on since program funds are fully allocated (for now).

3. Prepare a Program statement on rotenone use? (Spangle & Sorensen)

- Issue raised on the Redrock Canyon EA—formal letter sent by Peterson's lawyer (Dennis Parker, of Patagonia), although Don Mitchell (AZGFD Region V) talked with the Petersons recently, and he believes they are not concerned about rotenone use now. Spangle talked with Parker, who is strongly opposed to rotenone use (Parker's letter contained a lot of incorrect information and presented "facts" out of proper context). There is also much concern among the local community of the Blue River area on using rotenone to treat the Blue River.
- Spangle—the issue of piscicide use will keep coming up with each treatment project, and the program could use a position statement that identifies relevant literature and facts to counter rumors and misinformation.
- Robinson—AFS already has a position statement on piscicide use in fisheries management.

- Unthank—USFS will need to do more macroinvertebrate monitoring on these chemical treatments as proof of no long-term effects to ecosystem diversity and function.
- It was suggested we adopt the AFS statement and modify to our needs. AFS has already done a major literature review and published a paper.
- Propst—NMDGF is always fighting this problem...the folks opposed to rotenone use really don't want to learn the facts, they are using scare tactics to oppose the overall project (i.e. installing a barrier or changing the fish community), not necessarily the use of piscicides as a management tool.
- Senn—it's less of a science issue, and more of a public perception and education issue.
- Propst—a short summary may be helpful to the general public, and our ability to promote a fisheries project with more support.
- Spangle—perhaps a 1-2 page brochure/handout as an educational tool?
- Clarkson—sees the utility of a brochure as a collection of facts for the public. Sorensen agreed.
- Duncan and Propst—a brochure will be useful when meeting with permittees, landowners, and at public scoping meetings.
- Propst—brochure will blunt rumors and provide accurate information in context to our management goals.
- Spangle—we have a unanimous endorsement by all CAP partners may help on these issues.
- Robinson—maybe a MOU among all partners on rotenone use? ...signed by regional federal and state leaders? The brochure would have logos of all agencies that endorse using chemical renovations as a management tool.
- Unthank—our biggest weakness is the macroinvertebrate monitoring. We need to do more invertebrate salvage and monitoring to provide data to back us up on legal challenges.
- Sorensen—for the Bonita Creek renovation, we salvaged and held a lot of macroinvertebrates and released them after the treatment. Heidi Blasius (BLM) and others report that the invertebrate community bounced back well in later monitoring surveys.
- Propst—we need to get that information published and in reports on invertebrate community responses to chemical treatments, including what concentrations were used at labeled levels or when exceeded.
- The group agreed to do a white paper/policy statement and brochure fact sheet—using NMDGF's old infosheet and AFS's statement (**Propst volunteered to draft new version for our use**). Spangle offered up Jeff Humphrey's shop (FWS) to assist. Propst would like input from experts that have used antimycin and rotenone to compile relevant facts. **Sorensen and Robinson will assist, too—Sorensen will PDF some information from the AFS piscicide training binder that has general public questions.** Unthank—also has recent summaries that Kirk Young (AZGFD) and Stephanie Coleman (USFS)? have developed that could be used. Bonita Creek and W Fork Oak Creek EAs both have good info to incorporate on this task.
- We don't need to do an MOU amongst the partners—just do it.

- Reclamation has education funding, endangered species funding, as well as potentially CAP program surplus monies that may be used to produce bulk supply of brochures. To do a color brochure printing is estimated around a few thousand dollars—Clarkson may be able to cover under his Reclamation credit card.
 - Clarkson—heard rumors that antimycin may start being produced again; apparently the vendor has resolved some of the problems with the contractors in India. Perhaps may be able to ferment locally?
4. Discuss how best to spend the \$100K Chiricahua leopard frog fund that becomes available in 2010 (Duncan)
- Duncan has had initial discussions with Jim Rorabaugh and Clarkson on this topic—suggested making an ad hoc group with frog folks. They will propose frog projects for the Tech Comm to review in Nov 2009 and to be funded in 2010. Most work will likely be done by AZGFD and NMDGF—suggest adding these tasks to their existing agreements.
 - Per Unthank--Ron Maes, the USFS frog lead—needs to be involved. Mike Sredl with AZGFD. Various folks with Chiricahua leopard frog recovery team, too. We already have an existing process—just tap into frog expert knowledge. Rorabaugh has talked with the frog folks and is setting up meeting dates.
 - Policy Comm approves forming an ad hoc group of frog folks to propose tasks and incorporate under the existing program review and funding. This \$100,000 frog money is a one-time allocation of funds. The headstart facility at the Phoenix Zoo is already up and running, so it won't need much \$ to implement—those funds can be used to develop other headstart facilities.
5. Schedule next meeting dates for Technical Committee and Joint Committee (all)
- Likely no reason to hold a face-to-face Joint Comm meeting in May-June 2009. Only topic to discuss would be piscicide use brochure draft—which we can do via email or phone.
 - Next Tech Comm meeting scheduled for Nov 3rd (Tues) at Reclamation office in Glendale.

Lunch Break (11am – 12:30 pm)

6. Review proposed Reclamation fish barrier projects (Sorensen & all)
- AZGFD supports building a barrier on Sonoita Creek, above Patagonia Lake (in preference to barrier at Redrock Canyon). It would protect much more of the watershed, including Redrock Canyon, Temporal Gulch, Harshaw Canyon, and Cottonwood Spring.
 - AZGFD emphasized that they will manage Redrock Canyon for topminnow, regardless of whether it has a barrier or not. We don't need to wait to start removing nonnatives in that drainage—if necessary we can consider mechanical removal and pumping (although rotenone treatment is still the best option for success).
 - The BO states that Reclamation will build 2 barriers in the Santa Cruz watershed (either Redrock Canyon, Sonoita Creek, or Sheehy Spring).

- Reclamation had considered Upper Santa Cruz in the San Rafael Valley, but there is too much private land in the upper valley where we couldn't manage nonnatives effectively.
- Reclamation concerned about the larger scale of the Sonoita Creek watershed, and many more ranchers and landowners that might throw a wrench in the proposed Sonoita Creek barrier and nonnative removal using rotenone.
- Reclamation might have to ask for a time extension on the barrier construction, if we went with the Sonoita Creek site instead of Redrock Canyon.
- At Sheehy Spring we know we can't do a 100-yr flood designed barrier, so this effort would be simpler to do, as well as cheaper.
- Mitchell—there is enough ephemeral habitat in the Sonoita Creek watershed where we could treat incrementally to remove nonnatives.
- USFS didn't include all of their necessary internal requirements in preparing their Decision Notice for the Redrock Canyon NEPA—which is why it was retracted.
- The cost of a Sonoita Creek site barrier would be in the millions (based on what it cost to build Bonita Creek barrier).
- Mitchell knows that his big hurdle is the discussion of rotenone use and fish community management with the Town of Patagonia.
- Spangle—are there issues of grazing use with ranchers/permittees with this fish work? FWS is willing to help with those discussions.
- **Task due end of February 2009 by AZGFD (Don Mitchell): Reclamation requests a letter from AZGFD that gives a commitment on these barrier decisions and on native fish management for these watersheds.** This is to ensure the partners don't have to revisit this situation again in another year or two, after a lot of time, effort, and money have been spent on initial efforts. **AZGFD will do an internal review of letter and submit it to the Policy Comm on March 16** (post-meeting note: the 15th was a Sunday).
- Mitchell—Circle Z Ranch (the landowner between the lake and TNC property) is very supportive of our past efforts to survey native fish species on their private property.
- The Policy Comm agreed to pursue the Sonoita Creek barrier site (pending further analysis by AZGFD and the rest of the Tech Comm).
- USFS will not have to sign a decision notice on the Sonoita Creek barrier site and renovation for the watershed (primarily Redrock Canyon).
- Reclamation—there are 2 barrier sites for the Muleshoe Ecosystem—Hot Springs and Redfield, and Reclamation is planning to build one at each site.
- AZGFD is supportive of both the Hot Springs and Redfield barriers.
- Reclamation—they are ready to go this year on building Hot Springs barrier. Past month or so, Reclamation identified a potential site at Redfield Canyon—still have engineering plans and NEPA to do (a couple years out to install the Redfield barrier).
- Redfield barrier site would be entirely helicopter-supported for moving barrier materials and construction. No roads nearby.
- Hot Springs project has no grazing, so it was considered a non-issue related to the EA. Reclamation believes the grazing issue is a philosophical one with the

cattlegrowers—general opposition to native fish management statewide, not specific to this EA.

- O'Donnell Creek has 2 options—repair and improve the 2 existing BLM dams or install a new barrier on Audubon Research Ranch property lower in the drainage (that would add the tributaries—Post Canyon and Turkey Creek, with more private landowners that might not want chemical treatment done).
- AZGFD is supportive of either option for O'Donnell Creek. We have no strong opinion on either action.
- Suzy Ehret (AZGFD Region V) will be talking with the 2 landowners on Turkey Creek soon. One of them is the Steens—who wanted chub for their pond. Mitchell wasn't real optimistic that either landowner would be really supportive of rotenone treatment of Turkey Creek.
- Mosquitofish recently found in upper O'Donnell Creek (upstream of the 2 existing barrier and TNC property—near the highway, on private property). The drainage was treated for green sunfish in 2001, and that effort was successful. Above this treated area, the drainage wasn't surveyed, since the landowner wouldn't allow access.
- Mitchell—that landowner suspects that someone snuck onto his land and killed all the fish.
- Clarkson—The CAP program still has a fund to pay private landowners for stock tank management to remove nonnatives and assist with native fish management.
- Sheehy Spring has Gila chub and formerly had topminnow in this small drainage. The landowner, Ross Humphreys, is very supportive of improving this barrier and renovating the site, as is AZGFD. Need to do NEPA still. Spring is occupied by mosquitofish and chub. It would need to be renovated.
- Spring Creek Canyon—will protect several tributaries (some of the headwaters for the Tonto drainage). AZGFD very supportive of this barrier site. Spring Creek is eligible for wild-scenic river status, not designated (as incorrectly stated in the draft AZGFD notes document on proposed CAP barriers). It's a large area to treat, but provides for very good metapopulation dynamics.
- Weedman—the area is occupied by headwater chub (ESA candidate), desert and Sonora suckers, speckled and longfin dace, green sunfish, bullheads, bluegills (maybe?), and remnant brown trout. Lots of good habitat for native fishes. We still need to talk with local landowners on this project.
- Upper Verde River—Reclamation on the hook to build only one barrier on the Upper Verde—it will be expensive, and likely their last for the BO.
- AZGFD prefers having 2 barriers—a smaller one (or gabion-type) at River Mile 6 (at the boundary of the AZGFD wildlife area and USFS land) and a larger barrier at RM 18 (near the confluence of Hell Canyon).
- Senn—this area is used a lot by the consumptive anglers in the local communities, so illegal bait bucket stocking of nonnatives will be a constant problem. Having a couple barriers makes it easier to treat when nonnatives become established.
- Clarkson—Verde River was considered for a barrier under the BO due to its historic assemblage of many native fishes, which unfortunately now is reduced to 3 species.
- Senn—Management of the fish community in the Upper Verde River will be a continual effort. There are many ways that nonnatives can be introduced to that system.

- Senn—the RM 18 site would likely be more difficult to treat the entire reach up to Sullivan Lake, as opposed to the RM 6 site. The logistics of treating 18 miles of stream becomes more difficult, but can be done with drip stations.
- May be some barrier sites downstream of RM 6 on USFS land, where it has more bluffs. Not certain how many public access roads or trails into the reach between RM 6 and 18. Need to find out.
- **AZGFD Task—ask Andy Clark (AZGFD Region III) and his staff to provide further evaluation of area between RM 6 and 18. Coordinate with the Reclamation engineer** to look upstream of RM 18 for a suitable barrier site and proposal for Policy Comm. Clarkson will call Clark next week to discuss this.
- If someone else can pay for a second barrier, then that would give us more options.
- Clarkson—has AZGFD formally designated the Upper Verde as a native fish management unit?
- Senn—nothing formal, yet. There were past concerns with the Commission on “no net loss to sport fishing opportunities”. AZGFD executive staff recently approved an internal team report on the process to designate native fish management areas. Glen Knowles and Jeremy Voeltz (FWS) also participated on that team.
- **Sorensen Task—forward a copy of the AZGFD final team report on the statewide fisheries management plan process to the Joint Comm representatives and have Chris Cantrell (AZGFD) cover this with the NFCT partners.**
- Lower Blue River—currently has loach minnow, and spikdace and roundtail chub are proposed for translocation. The upper drainage and tributaries were historically stocked with nonnative trout and Apache trout—now decided to remove the nonnative trout and Apache hybrids in the tributaries and replace with Gila trout.
- An alternate site—the Juan Miller Crossing barrier—would lose 9 miles of loach minnow habitat, as opposed to the Reclamation-proposed site (half mile upstream of the confluence with the San Francisco River).
- Clarkson and Marsh & Associates observed and caught adult channel catfish and flathead catfish upstream of proposed site in larger pools in 2008. They believe that this small population of catfish is non-reproducing and could be removed using mechanical means, not chemical treatment.
- Clarkson—Reclamation’s analysis found it was cheaper to build the proposed barrier with all helicopter use, and no road, compared to having a road built to the site. There are no plans to build a road now or later, even for long-term maintenance of the site.
- Public scoping meeting was done a long time ago—the biggest concern was chemical renovation. The watershed associations (local stakeholders and landowners) are behind the barrier and native fish community goals, but are very much against chemical treatment.
- Reclamation has dedicated money now to build this barrier, but won’t have those funds after this year, possibly for a couple years. The time to act on this is important. The NEPA is being drafted for the proposed barrier and nonnative removal. USFS is working on the wild-scenic eligible status for the drainage.
- Most of AZGFD is supportive of the lower barrier site. The local Wildlife Manager (Steve Najar) may have concerns with this site, if it requires that a road must be built to that site for development or maintenance activities. AZGFD is concerned that

- development of a road to this area could increase disturbance to the area with increased recreation use to the detriment of wildlife resources.
- Blue River Hatchery still produces rainbow trout (and supplies fish to AZGFD for urban lakes), but are interested in switching to native species propagation instead.
 - Policy Comm agrees to the lower barrier site as proposed and non-chemical treatment to remove nonnatives. The plan is to stock spokedace and roundtail chub into the lower drainage.
 - The CAP partners need to meet with the watershed associations again on the plan described above.
 - Clarkson—Cienega Creek is home to the largest extant natural topminnow population, and a robust Gila chub population. It is not a BO-mandated barrier drainage, because it already has a natural barrier in place near the gauging station. There is concern that head-cutting on nearby Wood Canyon drainage or a huge flood would redirect the Cienega Creek flow (= stream capture) and potentially impact the Gila chub habitat. This is a habitat protection issue, not a nonnative issue. The area is managed by BLM. No easy solution to fix. BLM and Reclamation are looking into this. The Water Protection Fund might be a funding source to work on this.

End. Notes by Jeff Sorensen

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Final AGENDA

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(presenter)

3. Review of 2008 accomplishments and any difficulties (Duncan, Propst, Sorensen)
4. Approve fy09 fund transfer project list (Clarkson & Policy Comm)
3. Prepare a Program statement on rotenone use? (Spangle & Sorensen)
4. Discuss how best to spend the \$100K Chiricahua leopard frog fund that becomes available in 2010 (Duncan)
5. Schedule next meeting dates for Technical Committee and Joint Committee (all)

Lunch Break (noon – 1:30 pm)

6. Review proposed Reclamation fish barrier projects (Sorensen & all)

Conference call in numbers for 1st half of meeting: 1-888-865-8337 or 623-236-7995, ID# 8642

For 2nd half of meeting: same phone number, but ID# 8046