

**Gila River Basin Native Fish Conservation Program
Policy Committee Meeting
Tuesday, May 8, 2018 *1PM – 4PM**

Draft Meeting Notes

Meeting Objectives

- Review work completed by the Program in the last year and current standing of the interagency agreement
- Revise and approve the FY19 Work Plan
- Review, revise and approve the 5-year Strategic Plan for the Program
- Provide relevant updates on projects, contracts and species' recoveries

Participants – see last page

1. Tracking Progress: FY19 Work Plan

Bill Stewart led the review of the FY19 Work Plan and asked the committee if there were any revisions or content changes; at the time, there were none. The group discussed the potential for a YY Male project, Julie Carter recommended that Aravaipa Creek may be an ideal location due to the presence of a barrier. Regarding the budget moving forward, Bill did remind those in the committee that the original agreement was for \$550,000 annual transfer; the overage for the FY19 Work Plan has been accommodated, but, please keep the budget in mind as new projects are brought forth.

The Policy committee voted unanimously to fund the FY2019 projects as specified in the handout.

2. 5-year strategic plan pending approval revisions

Doug Duncan and Bill Stewart reviewed the effort that led up to the most recent Strategic Plan, the fourth version since 2003. The intent, moving forward is to revisit and assess accomplishments and use them to shape the next version. The committee expressed no concerns or needed edits to the Strategic Plan. The evaluation form did warrant extended discussion regarding its use for existing or new projects. The committee did see value in using a type of evaluation for both types of projects in addition to “tier 2” projects. There was some concern from AGFD that evaluating ongoing projects and potential subsequent decrease in funding could impact the hiring process of full time personnel attached to those projects. There was general agreement that projects need to be evaluated each year. A sub-committee including Bill Stewart and Kent Mosher will revise the current evaluation form to be applicable to the three kinds of projects (new, existing and tier 2); this effort will be important when and if the Bureau is strict in its \$550,000 per year funding.

The Policy committee voted to approve the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan with the following exceptions:

1. Page 4, second paragraph omission
2. Appendix B removed and will be added with edits/refinements by the subcommittee

3. CAP Program Discussion

Bill Stewart presented on the Biological Opinions for the CAP Program (see attached). Doug Duncan recommended that before the Bureau initiates consultation that they consult the AGFD, NMDGF, USFWS to start an initial dialogue with the right people concerning garter snakes. Bill stated that the consultation process will start this year and the Bureau will develop a Biological

Assessment that will be sent to the USFWS for review. There are some barriers that have not been completed yet and those remain under the current Biological Opinion, this may be another reason to wait on initiated consultation. Projects including barriers and habitat enhancement projects as well as the renovation that the ARCC facility will be looked at. Bill then presented on the future of the GRBNFCP (see attached)

4. Streams monitoring contract update

Marsh & Associates were awarded the monitoring contract last year. There is a need to better define the goals and objectives of the monitoring programs. The Bureau is investigating putting together a facilitated Monitoring Workshop to determine how monitoring should be done including: frequency, intensity, stream prioritization, best practices and methodologies, etc. There have been concerns regarding monitoring survey timing and protocols and the workshop could address a statewide or watershed effort to provide consistency across agencies. The timeline for the workshop would be contacting those people interested, developing a scope of work and awarding a contract in late summer or early fall of 2018. The workshop would be held in late 2018 or early 2019. There could be some challenges in the short term especially regarding mid-season changes to protocols, these would require some adjustments to timing and potential modifications to contracts.

5. ARCC update

Bill Stewart stated that the ARCC facility was in a 3-phase renovation; the first is the implementation of spawning tanks, the second is to increase the overall footprint of the facility and, third is the construction of the new building and lab. The first 2 phases are complete and now they are renewing the agreement with USFWS and next year there will be funding for the last phase. Chris Cantrell noted the distinct locations that make up ARCC: Page Springs (hatchery), Bubbling Ponds and now the recently purchased Page Family Property has native aquatics. There has been a need to have better oversight of the project and come up with a larger vision. Ideally the vision and goals will be completely developed by the end of May and then set up a meeting to get feedback from stakeholders in June or July. Chris stated the goals of ARCC during the meeting, these included the production of sport fish, native fish recovery, enhanced research, responsible management of water, increase biosecurity and outreach, recreation and education, among others.

6. Fish barrier update

Bill Stewart reviewed that the goal is 12 barriers completed by 2022; the construction of Eagle Creek and Redfield in 2019 and two additional barriers on the Upper Verde in 2020/21 will satisfy the goal. There will also be a request for credit on the Eagle Creek and ARCC facility. There was a question regarding potential barrier sites in New Mexico, Bill stated that the Middle Fork is a back-up and that the feasibility study has been completed and the rest will need secure populations above the barrier in order to be implemented.

7. I&E update

Kent Mosher gave background information on the I&E program; the focus has evolved over the various Biological Opinions. It started with education on non-native species introductions and education on native species, next the “sharing tails” with Marsh and Associates, and then it became less of a priority in 2011/12. There was also an I&E sub-committee meeting during the week of May 1, they will be giving a presentation at the next Technical Meeting of current ideas and website updates. They are currently looking to fund Native Fish in the Classroom, from New Mexico, to come to Arizona. Doug Duncan mentioned that, going forward, the new website should try to be 508 compliant, assisting the visually impaired.

8. BR Projects update

Sean Heath discussed the Upper Gila Diversion in New Mexico; the Bureau started and EIS although the engineering is behind schedule. The biggest concern with the project is threatened and endangered species because of the amount of water that is taken out of the river. The goal is to start scoping in late June and have a record of decision by the end of September 2019. The other project reported on is the Miner Flat Dam; the project is currently on hold because of engineer issues. The deadline for the project is 2021, the flow has not yet been modeled, when that is complete the EIS process can begin again, ideally in the Fall of 2018.

9. Recovery plan and species status assessment updates (FWS)

- a. **Loach minnow** – A draft recovery plan is due June 30th of this year, the recovery team is meeting on the 18th of May to finalize edits, then public review and peer review. It is likely a year out before it will be final. – Mary Richardson
- b. **Spikedace** - Same as above, but with a due date of June 30th 2019. The plan is started and 30% done currently. – Mary Richardson
- c. **Gila Topminnow** - SSA is due June 1 2019, a revised recovery plan and 5-yr review will be due at the end of the fiscal year. – Doug Duncan
- d. **Desert Pupfish** - No SSA or recovery plan in the works right now. No changes or additions at this time. – Doug Duncan
- e. **Razorback Suckers** - FWS currently working with federal and state partners, SSA and draft 5-yr review to be completed by the end of fiscal year. Need representation from state and federal partners. – Mary Richardson
- f. Recovery plans discussion included that there is new guidance to go back and assess delisting criteria for the above species. There are some instances when state and tribal coordination can happen and the FWS timeline can't be met without additional coordination. There is also the need for opportunities for BR to comment on recovery plans and SSAs.

10. CAMP update

Julie Carter and Chris Cantrell stated that the progress to date included consultation, 46 conservation measures have been completed with projects underneath them; loach minnow and apache trout conservation measures still need to be completed. Focal species have been round tail and headwater chub (most projects and conservation measures), now most chub projects under CAMP are finishing and then they will be addressed outside CAMP. Next, the plan is to start looking at the ways non-native stocking has been done in the upper basin of the Colorado and see some of their evaluation measures can be adopted here. The procedures tend to be species and geographically focused, also reducing impacts on native species. The format they use allows for data to be uploaded into a geospatial background and edits/feedback can be made online in real time.

11. **Genetics for the Santa Cruz top minnow report** – Bill was able to provide some funding to Dr. Melanie Culvers lab to assess the genetics of the gila topminnow in the Santa Cruz. Dr. Culver indicated that they should have results back by the end of the week (May 11). A press release/report will likely follow.

Decisions/Actions

- Policy Committee voted and approved FY19 Work Plan
- Policy Committee voted and approved (with exceptions) the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan

Participants

Heidi Blasius (AZ BLM); via conference call

Chris Cantrell voting for Jim DeVos (AZGFD)

Julie Carter (AZGFD)

Doug Duncan (USFWS; Technical Committee member)

Bryan Ferguson (NMGFD); via conference call

Sean Heath (BOR; Policy Committee member)

Kent Mosher (BOR)

Mary Richardson for Steve Spangle (USFWS; Policy Committee member)

Tony Robinson (AGFD; Technical Committee member)

Mike Ruhl (NMGFD; Technical Committee member); via conference call

Mike Sloan (NMGFD; Policy Committee member); via conference call

Bill Stewart (BOR; Technical Committee member)