

Gila River Basin Native Fish Conservation Program
Policy Committee Meeting
Thursday, May 16, 2019 *1PM – 4PM
Bureau of Reclamation, 6150 W Thunderbird Rd, Glendale, AZ 85306

MEETING NOTES

Meeting Objectives

- Review work completed by the Program in the last year
- Revise and approve the FY20 Work Plan
- Provide relevant updates on projects, contracts and species' recoveries

Participants – see last page

New Committee Members to the GRBNFCP

Bill Stewart introduced the new members of the Policy and Technical Committees

Policy Committee

- 3 new members: USFWS – Jeff Humphrey, NMGF - Kirk Patten, AZGFD – Chris Cantrell

Technical Committee

- 1 new member, NMGF - Jill Wick; and 1 new alternate, NMGF - Bryan Ferguson

GRBNFC Program Discussion and Year in Review (see attached PDF)

Bill gave a presentation that provided an overview of what the Gila River Basin Native Fishes Conservation Program (Program) does, how it is run, what the objectives are and how the program receives guidance. The presentation also covered the updated logo (for approval) and brief overview of the current projects across the basin.

Objective: Technical and Policy Committees purpose, roles and responsibilities

Overview: Biological Opinion (BO) - initial consultation in 1994 (set up this program), 2001 court ordered to re-initiate consultation (conservation measures developed), 2008 include Santa Cruz basin, the Chiricahua leopard frog and Gila chub –

- Policy Committee developed to agree upon how the funds would be spent. Consultation will be re-initiated (gartersnakes) in the next year

Monitoring – monitoring was changed in 2011 from sampling the canal every year to once every 5 years and funds were shifted to monitoring the Gila basin outside of the canal. When there are changes to monitoring, these changes can be made through a letter, not through the (additional) BO

Program guidance (link) – document established in 2003, initiated the start of the 5-year strategic plans

- Technical committee meeting – size and participation?
- One day of reporting, annual report and updates of all funded projects
- Second day as a smaller meeting with just the technical committee
 - Committee recommended to formalize this direction – narrow it down to review and finalize the plans of work on the second day of the Tech Committee meeting.
- Other proposals (Tier 2) – how solicited?
 - Combination of informal and formalized solicitation
 - Would be nice to have the Policy Comm. Drive the needs of work, not researchers/academics driving the proposals

Timeline – transfer of funds has been able to get \$ to projects for multiple years, there is the possibility that this could change from year to year or lead to a shortage in one year

Roles - the technical and policy committees' primary roles are to review and approve the work plan associated with the native fish conservation and nonnative control conservation measures. They also provide input into barrier planning and fish monitoring. The policy comm. can approve variances in the \$ spent in Santa Cruz basin outside of what is listed in the 2008 BO (8% of funds spent on work inside the Santa Cruz sub basin and 8% spent on Gila Topminnow).

Program future - review of the progress towards the Strategic Plan goals (see attached Strategic Goals Status document)

Logo – Ensure that we have the right to use the image

- [Approved and on the website](#)

Projects – Each project has been assigned an ID code. The ID code is the State, followed by the year the project was initiated and a number that indicates the project sequence.

Annual Reports – up soon on the website

FY20 Work Plan (Request to approve by Policy Committee)

The Policy Committee reviewed the FY2020 Draft Work Plan and a representative from each agency briefly described the projects requesting funding (both ongoing and new projects). There was also discussion surrounding the use of the project evaluation form moving forward and how the ranking from those results should be presented and utilized in the future.

Review project proposals by agency (Jill, Tony, Heidi, Bill)

- New Mexico – 4 projects (all collaborative), 3 are from the past; one new project is being proposed which is the permanent site monitoring that has been ongoing under different funding since 1988.
 - Permanent sites funded by Warm Water, partners, grants, NM Game and Fish and others (the GRBNFCP has provided funding in the past to summarize this data in a report).
 - In previous years, the NM BLM has reported out on the permanent monitoring sites that are on BLM land
 - Funding level same on the existing projects?
 - Varied over time, but in the past 3-4 years the funding has been the same
 - Agreement to fund the agency by year, not by individual projects (potentially if the projects are tied together). However, BOR asks agencies to estimate the cost of each project for tracking purposes.
 - The USFWS NM Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office gets additional money for I&E
 - The I&E funds need to be moved to a different part of the budget (should not be reflected as part of the funds transfer program as those funds are not to be used for I&E or Tier 2).
- Arizona – 5 year funding agreement (as opposed to the original 1 year at a time that was before)
 - Project 6: Muleshoe Ecosystem – Overall project is winding down. Still need to continue monitoring Double R and Bass Canyons to determine if topminnow establish. Monitoring of fishes in Hot Springs Canyon should continue but could be transferred to GRBNFCP monitoring contract.
 - Project 8: Gila Topminnow Stockings – aim for 6 new sites per year for stockings, followed by 3 years of monitoring at each location to determine if populations established or failed to do so. Short-term monitoring of established sites ends 3 years post-stocking, and the site is then transitioned to the GRBNFCP long-term monitoring list.
 - Project 9: Spring Creek repatriations – 5 years of monitoring after the final stocking. May stock more spikedeace in 2019.
 - Project 11: Assess potential repatriation waters to determine if they are suitable for native fish establishments in addition to presence of other species. Recommended this be rolled into species reintroduction projects next year, rather than have assessments as a stand-alone project
 - Project 12: Expand Gila chub in Harden Cienega. Plan to move more chub upstream in 2019. Post-stocking monitoring should continue, but could be covered under the GRBNFCP monitoring contract
 - Project 13: Eagle Creek repatriations – dependent on the barrier status/completion. Once barrier is completed, will stock spikedeace and loach minnow upstream, and possibly Gila Topminnow.
 - Project 14: Red Tank draw removal – continue this project. Eradicate nonnative yellow bullhead in Rarick Canyon and translocate Gila chub and stock Gila topminnow upstream of the large waterfall. Continue nonnative removals in Red Tank Draw to control their numbers and benefit Gila chub.
 - Project 15: Sharp Spring restoration – Project has not moved beyond concept phase because of lack of communication from State Parks. Chris to follow up with the new State Parks director
 - Project 16: Boyce Thompson – This is another location on State parks. The park indicated they need a new well before project could move forward (Ayer Lake could be dewatered). This project could be

- o funded as a Tier 1 (as similar-type projects have been) or Tier 2 project
- Project 17: Upper Verde restoration – Potential tasks for this project keep evolving. Last year we had planned to start conducting tank surveys, but those were postponed because the overall timeline of the project changed. If project moves forward, will likely do some work in support, just not sure what yet.
- o Discussion
 - Question: Can things be moved from one task to another (if work cannot be completed on the Verde Project because of delays in project implementation, can work be shifted to another project task)?
 - Answer: Changes to the projected work would need a justification
 - Q: Some projects may not happen, but funding stays the same – how does this work?
 - A: Funding was provided through 2021, these funds support Tony and 2 of his staff. As a task drops out, the contract is adjusted and activities/work are shifted to a different project while the overall funding remains the same – depending on the outcome of the Upper Verde discussion this could happen with the Upper Verde Project. One option would be to shift money to increase removal efforts at Red Tank Draw or Redfield Canyon.
 - The money needed for administration (meetings, workshops, etc.) all comes from this same pot of money
- o BLM – continue Bonita and Aravaipa work
 - o With the success of the elimination of green sunfish, efforts will be directed at removing the yellow bullhead from the mainstem of Aravaipa
 - o The money helps fund interns, and additional contract workers, there has been match funds from BLM for all projects.
- o ASU Topminnow
 - o Longest running project this program has funded. The primary purpose of this is to serve as a highly secure Gila topminnow refuge.
 - o Maintain 6 different lineages of topminnow. The populations are augmented periodically (2-3 yrs with specimens from the wild) (Doug mentioned a new species in Mexico, clonal species SW of Santa Cruz)
 - o They are sometimes used to stock out new or augment populations – increases agreed cost
 - o Wade Wilson is conducting genetics work on the populations and his work should result in refined info for those populations (alleles)
 - o Move for a field trip in Mexico – Cantrell
- o Evaluation and ranking
 - o Reclamation has committed to funding \$550,000/year to native fish conservation and nonnative control projects per the 2008 BO.
 - o The past several years project amounts have exceeded \$550,000, but Reclamation has had the money to fund all those projects
 - o Reclamation is able to set up multi-year agreements with the agencies and if funding is available can fund work for more than a single year (up to five years). This allows Reclamation to transfer funds for out years which help reduce any possible lapse in funding due to government shutdowns/continuing resolutions.
 - o This was the first year the new project evaluation form was used for Tier 1 projects. There were issues with the evaluation and proposal forms and changes will be made next year. Despite scoring form issues, the general ranking of the projects seemed to make sense to the tech committee.
 - o Changes to the new scoring form should be documented and explained (clarity language, annotated for discussion purposes only)
 - o Bill presented the table of project ranking
 - Technical committee and affiliate members (7 people) scored each of the projects.
 - The table presented had a red line that indicated where total projects exceeded \$550,000.
 - Red line as a cut-off – does that affect the consideration for tier 2 projects?
 - Tier 2 are generally more research focused, and this hasn't had to be addressed in the past.
 - The Tier 1 that didn't meet the “red line” should be considered for Tier 2.

FY 2020 Work Plan Approval (pending the following edits)

- Goal 5a, Project 17 – typo
- Preamble language ahead of the ranking table
- Bill to have the ability to adjust the budget table

Upper Verde Barrier - Bill Stewart, Bureau of Reclamation

- Presentation, Discussion and Q&A
 - Two barriers are being investigated. One barrier 18 miles down from Paulden, one 18 miles down from there (above Sycamore Creek).
 - Public engagement needs to happen before the implementation of this effort. Before initiating NEPA.
 - The Verde Watershed Fisheries Management Plan specifies that the upper Verde River is managed for native sportfish (roundtail chub) and self-sustaining populations of native fish (look online). One tool to control nonnative fishes is rotenone, but, rotenone is not the silver bullet. Long term management will require many other tools in addition to rotenone. AZGFD would like rotenone to be left out of the NEPA (due to concerns with wells, human populations downstream, etc.) –Need to be conscious of socio-political issues. AGFD is fully supportive of the implementation when done right.
 - The current plan is to initiate NEPA a year from now and having it completed Fall of 2020
 - Construction could start as soon as 2021 for the first barrier and then in 2022 for the second
 - Sean: There is a need for a holistic approach (barrier and control) – what type of treatment would occur after construction and would it be successful?
 - There is a need to do a lot of outreach, pre-scoping, and a need for transparency. Would AGFD be amenable to say that there is a suite of treatments (mechanical removal, electrofishing, and rotenone with additional analysis that would be needed)? Cantrell: Yes, there needs to trust and there needs to be flexibility to use new available technology for treatments.
 - It would be difficult to highlight the suite of treatments and not include rotenone.
 - AGFD is very aware of the audience in that region, transparency is key.
 - AGFD, as a cooperating agency is fully supportive of the placement of the barriers and they are committed to managing for native fishes upstream of those barriers
 - What needs to happen between now and a year from now (implementation)?
 - Planning to determine feasibility and scope of nonnative fish control is happening outside of CAP funding
 - All other Reclamation barrier NEPA documents have included some level of nonnative management (if nonnatives were present) as part of their proposed action. This includes rotenone treatments (Aravaipa – if needed, Fossil Creek, Bonita Creek, W. Fork Black-US Forest Service NEPA) and/or mechanical removal (Aravaipa, Blue, and Spring Creek).
- **See Appendix A for next steps on the Upper Verde Barrier**

Updates

This portion of the meeting was omitted to provide ample time for discussion of the Upper Verde Barriers, all updates below were provided via email for the notes.

- Streams monitoring update – workshop and process forward (Bill)
 - 2017 Workshop for program and out of that came a Monitoring Workshop, this was held in April 2019
 - Current Goals of BR Monitoring:
 1. Detect focus species in each stream/stream reach.
 2. Assess the conservation status of federally-listed/candidate fishes and the co-occurring fish assemblage (including nonnatives).
 3. Delineate the distribution of the priority species within occupied streams.
 - Recommendation out of our 2017 workshop to evaluate the monitoring program: Concerns regarding: overlap, timing, tailored protocols, sample locations, streams to sample, communication, monitoring distribution.
 - Steps to address monitoring concerns:

1. Workshop 1: collect existing monitoring information, identify priority monitoring, identify data gaps.
 2. Compile information and develop stream specific objectives
 3. Workshop 2: science panel with experts in sample design and analysis to review objectives and provide recommendations on sample design and analysis.
- AZGFD is working with U of A on standard methods for sampling protocol. We are working on ways to integrate this effort to align with AFS approved standard sampling methodology.
 - The intent is to improve the monitoring that Reclamation has committed to as part of the 2008 BO.
 - NM hesitant to engage in another workshop unless there is a lot of clarity on the outcome
- ARCC update (AZGFD) –
- Reclamation has set up a 5 year agreement with USFWS which contains the funds to complete the Phase 3 building at ARCC as designed in the last contract and a few additional items to outfit the facility.
 - This would be the last component on the overall renovation.
 - USFWS has indicated the agreement with AGFD will not be completed until the start of next fiscal year (October 2019).
 1. AGFD has a five year window to spend the funds, which began last fall, but would like to get the work completed as soon as possible.
 2. Realistically, the renovation will be complete by spring 2020.
 3. A summary of work completed during 2018 can be found in AGFD's annual report.
- Fish barrier update
- Eight barriers have been constructed to date.
 - Redfield Canyon - State Lands denied our application for a perpetual right-of-way and we will no longer pursue a barrier at Redfield at this time.
 - Verde barrier - geological investigations are underway on the upper of the two barriers. Lower barrier geological investigation will likely take place this fall.
 - O'Donnell Canyon - a new research ranch director is on board with the Audubon Society and we are going to plan a meeting to revisit the barrier options. TNC seems to be on board with an O'Donnell barrier.
- Tier 2 projects update
- We received 4 tier 2 projects. The projects went out for review and scoring. About half of the technical committee members ranked the projects. The projects ranked as follows:
 1. Spikedace and loach minnow tagging study
 2. Gila chub habitat suitability project in the San Francisco River in NM.
 3. Razorback sucker stocking evaluation in the lower Verde/Horseshoe Reservoir
 4. Ammonium Chloride literature review and lab trials for EPA registration application.
 - We will be having calls over the course of the next month or so to refine details of each proposal.
- I&E update
- Native Fish in the Classroom
 - Completed draft curriculum for Native Fish in the Classroom Gila River and Mimbres River fishes
 - On May 15th and 16th, 100 students will be releasing the Gila Trout that they raised into the wild. Biologists will show them how to transport the fish and will discuss other important biological topics. The kids will also write and read poems about their experience with the native fish.
 - Trinkets
 - \$2,000 to NMFWCO to produce GRBNFCP swag
 - Swag will likely also have to promote the USFWS/NMFWCO
 - Stuart Wilkins is currently looking into potential vendors and items
 - Gila Topminnow/Desert Pupfish Citizen Science
 - Reclamation purchased three monitoring kits that participants who have completed the Gila Topminnow/Desert Pupfish Identification and Monitoring Workshop can borrow to monitor captive populations.
 - First workshop was held in Tucson at the University of Arizona on March 28, 2019.
 - Second workshop will be held in Phoenix at Scottsdale Community College and Rio Salado

Audubon Center on May 22-23rd.

- Website
 - New GRBNFCP logo on Home page.
 - Added 2018 reports to Hatcheries, Stream Monitoring, and Recovery Actions pages.
 - Added post-construction fish barrier monitoring reports to Physical Fish Barriers page.
 - Updated Policy and Technical Committee information on Administrative page.
 - Added revised FY2019 Workplan to Budgets and Work Plans page.
 - Added Dec and March Technical Committee Meeting agendas and notes to Meetings and Workshops page.

- BOR projects update
 - Upper Gila Diversion - Reclamation and NM interstate stream commission are the lead agencies for this EIS. This diversion and storage project is located in the San Francisco River upstream of Glenwood, the Cliff-Gila valley, and Virden, New Mexico. Scoping began this past summer and currently a draft EIS is being prepared for release in September 2019. The latest information on this EIS can be found here: <https://www.nmuniteis.com/>
 - Miner Flat dam - Reclamation initiated an EIS with issuance of an NOI in September 2013. The EIS was put on hold in 2015 due to design issues. The project remains on hold with a potential for restarting the EIS this fall.

- White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) Loach minnow
 - Working with WMAT on a cooperative agreement for FY19 funds; waiting on their applications. All internal documents are ready to go; the deadline for submittal to our regional office is June 20th.

- Recovery plan and species status assessment updates
 - Loach minnow
 1. Final draft recovery plan 90% complete
 2. Recovery Team
 - Technical Subcommittee:
 - Has reviewed multiple times; latest edits being incorporated
 - Still seeking resolution on a few issues and/or incorporating edits
 - Stakeholders Subcommittee –
 - Replacing 2/3 of the team (due to members retiring or resigning)
 - Need new orientation session
 - Review and comment on final draft
 - Incorporation of edits
 3. Final draft – due this calendar year (exact date still being determined)
 4. Peer Review
 5. Final RP – aiming for FY2020.

 - Spikedace*
 1. First draft of the recovery plan is approximately 40% completed
 2. Recovery Team
 - Technical Subcommittee - Has not yet seen a draft
 - Stakeholder Subcommittee
 - Orientation as noted above (for both species)
 - Review and comment on final draft
 3. Review by both teams, with potential meetings and additional drafts, as needed.
 4. Peer Review
 5. Final due to the Regional Office – June 30, 2020.

*Anticipate this one going more quickly as the process has been developed, and we have moved to writing by one author and review, rather than team document preparation.

- Gila Topminnow
 - Beginning Gila Topminnow species status assessment; Arizona Game and Fish Department has been notified, Doug will talk with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
- Desert Pupfish
 - The Desert Pupfish recovery plan amendment should be out soon for a public comment period; it is unknown how long that comment period will be. The draft amendment is currently under peer review and the deadline for finalizing it is September 30th.

- Razorback sucker

**NOTE: Razorback sucker is a shared species lead with Region 6 of the FWS, with Region 6 being the overall lead.

- A Species Status Assessment (SSA) was completed in August 2018 and is available at www.coloradoriverrecovery.org which is the website for the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program.
- A five-year review and recommendation was published on September 20, 2018. This resulted in:
 - A downlisting proposal and 4(d) rule, which are under development with a targeted release of September 2019.
 - A final rule on that will follow.
 - A final rule timeframe will depend on the number and extent of comments, but could be developed as early as winter 2019/2020.
- If the final rule goes through, a 4(d) rule will be developed and will likely propose to put a “blanket” approach of 4(d) back in place, meaning everything would be prohibited except what’s specifically listed as not prohibited. Specifically listed exceptions would be related to relieving regulatory burden on completing conservation activities, such as nonnative removals, stockings, etc.
- A recovery plan revision is underway. This is partially complete due to SSA from August of 2018, which is the first 1/3 of the recovery plan. Timing of the recovery plan is independent on completion of a final listing decision, so approximately 2021.
- We anticipate additional coordination with the Gila River Basin Native Fishes Conservation Program soon to see how recovery activities might be coordinated.
- Our species lead, Jess Gwinn, is working on a “conservation brainstorming group”. She’s pulling together those with species experience to brainstorm and see what hasn’t been tried, or things that might need to be re-tried, and to gather information on what activities might be feasible or infeasible.

- Sport fish stocking/CAMP update

- At the end of FY2018, 23 measures are completed and 16 measures are ongoing (n=39; Table 1). These numbers include conservation measures for Roundtail Chub; however, beginning in FY2019 Roundtail Chub is no longer a CAMP species (per USFWS).
- Table 1. Completion status of CAMP measures (n = 39; Measures 22-24 are no longer considered in CAMP; Measures 11 and 15, and 14 and 16 were combined due to the change in chub taxonomy; Measure 12 was removed due to the change in chub taxonomy).

Species (Measure #)	Number of Measures Completed	Number of Measures Ongoing
Mandatory ESA Conservation Measures		
Multiple Species – Triploid Trout Conversion (1)	1	
Multiple species – Live Bait Outreach and Risk Assessment (2, 3, 4)	3	
Apache Trout (5)		1

Chiricahua Leopard Frog (RACH)(6, 7, 8)	3	
RACH (9), Sonora Tiger Salamander (26), Arizona Treefrog Huachuca DPS (38)	3	
Gila Chub (10)	1	
Roundtail Chub (11[15], 13, 14 [16]) n=3	2	1
Spikedace (17)		1
Loach Minnow (18, 19, 20, 21)	1	3
Sonoran Tiger Salamander (25)		1
Northern Mexican Gartersnake (NMG)(27, 28, 30)	2	1
Narrow-headed Gartersnake (NHG)(31, 32, 34)	2	1
NMG and NHG (29, 33)	2	
Little Colorado Spinedace (35)		1
New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse (36, 37)	1	1
Three Forks Springsnail (39)		1
Mount Graham Red Squirrel (40)		1
Bonytail Chub and Razorback Sucker (41, 42)	1	1
Mandatory NEPA Mitigation Measures		
Stressor Removals by Watershed (43)		1
Watershed Planning (44)		1
Riparian and Aquatic Nesting Birds (45)	1	
TOTAL	23	16

Participants

Chris Cantrell – AGFD
 Doug Duncan – USFWS
 Sean Heath – BOR
 Jeff Humphrey – USFWS
 Mary Richardson – USFWS
 Tony Robinson – AGFD
 Bill Stewart – BOR

On the phone

Heidi Blasius – AZ BLM
 Yvette Paroz – USFS, Region 3
 Kirk Patten - NMGFD
 Mike Ruhl – NMGFD
 Jill Wick – NMGFD

Appendix A – Next Steps for Upper Verde Barrier

- **Follow up meeting on path forward with the Verde**
 - Participants:
 - USFWS: Jeff Humphrey and Shaula Hedwall
 - BOR: Sean Heath, Bill Stewart and Alex
 - USFS: Sarah Tompsky, Dale Dietrich, and Cheryl Pruitt (Regional or Forest level NEPA),
 - AGFD: Chris C., Jim, Craig, Larry Phoenix
 - Alternatives on path forward for discussion, talking points
 - Identify the common goal, if not the barrier in the Verde then where?
 - Is it realistic to say mechanical treatment is a solution combined with a barrier? A partial solution, yes, but for an entire solution would need more tools
 - Agenda for the meeting: goal, timeline, construction, public engagement, NEPA portion (tools after implementation)
 - Include all the potentials in the EA (ammonia, rotenone, antimycin, etc.) and that the use of those would requires additional analysis and decision.
 - July/August timeframe for a meeting
 - Bill will work to organize this meeting.