

**Gila River Basin Native Fish Conservation Program
Policy Committee Meeting**

Tuesday, May 19, 2020 *1PM – 4PM (AZT)

Bureau of Reclamation, 6150 W Thunderbird Rd, Glendale, AZ 85306

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MEETING NOTES

Meeting Objectives

- Review work completed by the Program in the last year
- Finalize recommendations for the FY21 Work Plan
- Provide relevant updates on projects, contracts and species' recoveries

Action Items:

- AGFD to send updated version of the proposal for West Fork of the Black removal to Bill, he will send updated version of the budget
- AGFD/Chris to share the management plan for ARCC, if available
- Bill to send most recent update on the yy male project
- Doug and Bill to draft guidance language about avoiding conflict of interest in project assessment and recommendations – send to policy and technical committees
- Bill to refine the timeline for project and report submission, committee meetings and work plan review – send to policy and technical committees

Participants – see last page

GRBNFCP Year in Review - Bill Stewart, Bureau of Reclamation

- Questions and clarifications
 - More specifics on the non-native control at Aravaipa? 5 trips with 133 yellow bullhead removed.
 - Green sunfish eliminated from the tributary of Aravaipa Creek (Horse Camp Canyon), no longer capturing them during biannual monitoring or when the yellow bullhead are being removed.
 - In 2020, close to 500 yellow bullhead removed, revisiting areas/pockets of the bullheads – these are being found in larger concentrations in heavily vegetated stream beds

Program Operations - Doug Duncan, US Fish and Wildlife Service

- Conflict of Interest (CoI) discussion
 - Process that has been used has been the same, WMI review there was expressed concerns about conflict of interest
 - Recently, Doug has found that CoI forms are required for submitting packages (esp. since the WMAT submission) for funding – all those that review projects and make recommendations need CoI forms signed.
 - Forms are required, per regulation, AGFD has still not signed
 - Headquarters for financial assistance has said that they are not requiring the forms.
 - This is more than the perception of conflict of interest.
- Proposed solution (approved by regional director):
 - Tech committee ranks the projects, but will NOT rank their own projects, no voting for approval from tech to policy committee.
 - Policy committee will also NOT vote.
 - Service and BOR are the final say, but as this is a partnership, we will strive to seek broad consensus from the policy and technical committee members.
 - BOR controls the funds, correct? Mostly.
 - Seems like it is more of a BOR question, since they administer the funds
 - There are a couple of projects that FWS is currently administering

- Strategic Plan discussion - Change to the bylaws of the program?
 - We need to determine if we want to make a change in the strategic plan, now or in the regular cycle of strategic planning? The next regular 5-year strategic planning revision will begin in 2022.
 - Vulnerabilities by not having it noted in the strategic plan, or does it need to be documented that there are changes being made?
- Document that changes need to be made.
 - AZ Attorney general concerns were that they (forms) were worded quite generally.
 - Who signs it? Agency representative or a individual?
 - Financially, there are many projects that pay for individuals work...the changes in the ranking will ultimately change the projects evaluation and the level of funding
 - Go forward on the record with how we do business, and then document that those ranking the projects will not rank their own agency's proposals
- **Suggestions:**
 - AGFD - Increase transparency on the rankings from the technical committee on why some are low or high, in addition to draft language solving the conflict of interest in ranking. Perhaps providing scores for each criteria as part of the presentation to the Policy Committee. Some projects rank low because they are monitoring and not on the ground management or are small in scale.
 - Doug will work with Bill to draft language on how we will assess projects moving forward. We still need to decide if we work the new language in the current the strategic plan, or can it wait until 2022?
 - Utilize the San Juan example (programmatic agreement with roles and responsibilities) – voting by policy only and not at the technical committee
 - Technical committee will draft for this process and then send it out to the policy committee for approval.
- Concern about the technical committee participation in a meeting without participation from broader participants (the smaller, the better) –
 - This will be refined in the 2020 Technical Committee meeting, could call it Executive Session.
 - If you are not affiliated with an representative agency on the technical committee you are not allowed to attend the technical committee meeting.
 - **Suggestion** – add the timeline, add the refinements to the technical committee meeting participants.

FY21 Work Plan – Bill Stewart

- Project proposals by agency – updated projects from AGFD
 - Ranking – projects scores were both averaged by score and by rank. Since tech committee members did not rate all projects the average score were used to calculate mean of the rank.
 - NMDGF projects are joint projects, who votes on those?
 - BOR, BLM AZ and BLM NM.
- Technical committee review and revisions – **more discussion needed:**
 - How did the rankings change with the new CoI issues? Rankings did not change dramatically.
 - Follow up meeting with side by side ranking tables and with draft language to amend the strategic plan addressing the CoI.
- Clarifications/Questions
 - West Fork of the Black removal project – the number of passes was increased without regional knowledge, not that many removal passes (change the number of passes to 3-5 and \$ allotted)
 - AGFD send updated version of the proposal to Bill, he will send updated version of the budget

Updates

- Section 7 consultation (Bill/Jeff)
 - Update consultation to get garter snakes covered under the Program – happen in the next year. There is a lot of history in this program Several changes to status on how we are implementing our conservation measures will need to be addressed in the consultation.. This may need a new BA, the old BO expires 2027 for RPA3 and 4. The Proposed action was consulted on for the life of the CAP (100 yrs)
- CCAST and Non-native workshop (Bill)
 - with a nonnative aquatics workshop is being planned through the CCAST effort led by FWS and

Reclamation (Boulder City office). Matt Grabau (FWS) is leading this effort with assistance from Genevieve Johnson (BR), and Alex Koeberle (University of Arizona). The workshop will be paired the technical committee meeting in December in Tucson. Bill was tasked at the 2019 Tech Comm. Meeting to put together a team to defining thresholds for non-native removal. Partnering with this CCAST opportunity seemed like a good fit to bring additional resources to the issue.

- Native fish monitoring (Kent)
 - BOR is required to conduct long term monitoring for native fish recovery, currently Marsh and Assoc. Non-native monitoring every 5 years, that is this year – in the stream portions, and BOR will be monitoring in the canals. The pandemic may affect the ability to monitor this year and BOR may not be able to fulfill this requirement. Monitoring plan is in progress, final draft of generalized protocol will be sent out this week to the core team, site specific will be sent out later, but July 1st.
- ARCC update (Doug/AZGFD)
 - Bill covered some, see ppt.
 - Doug – package to fund phase 3 of modernization \$750,000, final building, etc., not sure what the status is of the submission, follow up is needed (new grants and agreements process for FWS this year)
 - Review of the management plan for the entire complex – that plan is complete and final (adaptive), the operations in place do not change for ARCC or the hatchery.
 - [Chris to share with the group \(per Jim’s approval\) and with the public in the Fall](#)
- Fish barrier update
 - Website is live for the Upper Verde Barrier proposal, press releases will be in the Daily Courier in the Prescott and in the Verde Independent starting tomorrow.
 - June 3 and 4 from 5-7pm there will be virtual public meetings with presentation from BOR and the partner agencies.
 - Eagle Creek – Freeport McMoran has asked BR to cost share the barrier. This comes after discussion between FWS and Freeport on their coverage from the in progress Safe Harbor agreement. . Reclamation will be requesting full credit for the barrier. Best case scenario is that construction could happen next year
 - Redfield fell through, O’Donnell is in conversations with the Audubon Research Ranch and BLM.
- Tier 2 Projects update
 - Discussed non-native chemical control at the technical committee meeting in December 2019, next phase of crayfish project is lab experiments to test lethal doses for target species,. Unfortunitley USGS has not gotten back to Bill on moving to the next phase. We may try again next year if funds are available.
 - Movable barrier idea – BOR potentially testing products that exist in streams and with small size fish
 - Kansas State wrapping up their rangewide spikedeace/loach minnow habitat assessment this next Fall
 - Genetic work results coming this year – SSA help for gila topminnow, spikedeace and loachminnow help with management plan and hatchery improvements
 - eDNA markers continue to get more samples and conduct some analysis
 - Raszorbuck sucker proposal discussion later this week with AGFD –PhD student from UofA to start in the fall with assessing habitat in the verde river and inflow area to Horseshoe reservoir.
 - yy male – still working on this at UofA, discuss how to transition/transfer this work into practical application
 - Findings: testing different concentrations of the estradiol, first trials had higher mortality –
 - [Bill to send the most recent update to the group](#)
- I&E update (Kent)
 - NMFWS conservation offices – fish in the classroom (native fish)
 - FY20 working on agreements on the Sharing Tails program
 - Fund a pocket field guide of fishes of AZ
 - Audubon AZ wanted a presentation on Gila Topminnow
- White Mountain Apache Tribe Loach minnow (Doug)
 - Project – assessment with habitat information, eDNA work could be part of the project as well, working with the Water Department, not wildlife.
 - Indirect cost document is approved from the Tribe, Doug to move forward with this agreement, deadline for submitting the package is June 2020

- Recovery plan and species status assessment updates (FWS)
 - Loach minnow and Spikedace – recover plans are in stasis
 - Gila Topminnow - working on SSA for status review for petition to downlist, weekly meeting with SSA team
 - Gila chub – taxonomic issues, SSA for Colorado River canyon
 - Desert Pupfish – To be hired species specialist to take projects to lesson Tony’s workload
 - Razorback suckers – region 6,
 - Narrow-headed and Northern Mexican garter snakes - recently re-proposed critical habitat , main reason for reinitiating section 7 consultation
- Sport fish stocking section 7 consultation (AZGFD and FWS)
 - Doug: Working with AGFD on next sport fish stocking consultation, early in stages, looking at which waters, which species may be affected, working with the Dept before developing a BA
 - Julie: working on BA, recently submitted the effects analysis to the Service, everything expires next July 1 (Mary and Julie leading this), draft BA will be out July 15, action description and the NEPA process starts then.
 - NEPA will be likely an EA, all stockings in open waters, separate for closed basins

Participants

Heidi Blasius	Technical Committee Affiliate	<i>Bureau of Land Management, Arizona</i>
Chris Cantrell	Policy Committee Member	<i>AZ Game and Fish Department</i>
Julie Carter		<i>AZ Game and Fish Department</i>
Doug Duncan	Technical Committee Member	<i>US Fish and Wildlife Service</i>
Bryan Ferguson		<i>NM Department of Game and Fish</i>
Sean Heath	Policy Committee Member	<i>Bureau of Reclamation</i>
Brian Hickerson		<i>Arizona Game and Fish Department</i>
Jeff Humphrey	Policy Committee Member	<i>US Fish and Wildlife Service</i>
Kent Mosher		<i>Bureau of Reclamation</i>
Yvette Paroz	Technical Committee Affiliate	<i>US Forest Service</i>
Kirk Patten	Policy Committee Member	<i>NM Department of Game and Fish</i>
Tony Robinson	Technical Committee Member	<i>AZ Game and Fish Department</i>
Bill Stewart	Technical Committee Member	<i>Bureau of Reclamation</i>
Jill Wick	Technical Committee Member	<i>NM Mexico Department of Game and Fish</i>
Carrie Eberly	Facilitation Services	<i>Southwest Decision Resources</i>