

Gila River Basin Native Fish Conservation Program
Core Technical Team* Meeting
Bureau of Reclamation, Phoenix Area Office
August 23, 2011

Final Meeting Minutes

Meeting Participants:

Rob Clarkson (Reclamation)	Doug Duncan (FWS)
Eliza Gilbert (NMDGF; by phone)	Tony Robinson (AZGFD)
Andrew Monie (NMDGF; by phone)	Jeff Sorensen (AZGFD)

*Due to the funding subject matter of the agenda, participation at this meeting was limited to the core members of the Technical Committee with voting rights.

I. Review of Program funding concerns (see full agenda appended below)

The amount of fixed funding the Program is expending is reaching the point where there is little if any flexibility left to fund miscellaneous or unanticipated projects that may arise. After discussion of the issue, savings were identified in two areas: (1) The Fossil Creek monitoring contract with Marsh & Associates will not be renewed for the next option year, resulting in a savings of approximately \$35K per year. It was decided that it was mostly redundant to monitoring being conducted by AZGFD Region 2 and Northern Arizona University. The Program, however, has requested that thorough annual reports from AZGFD be provided for our use. We also anticipate receiving the data reports that NAU provides to AZGFD as part of their permit requirements. (2) NMDGF has dropped their funding request to \$120K per year, saving \$30K per year. That funding will be split evenly among NMDGF, FWS, and USFS; it was stated that BLM does not need outside funding to continue to participate in New Mexico activities.

AZGFD will evaluate the status of wild/refuge Gila topminnow sites to determine the overall “security” of the various topminnow lineages, with the intent to possibly reduce the number of populations (and therefore cost) being maintained by ASU.

Revised fixed annual funding costs for the Program are listed below:

AZGFD recovery/control activities	\$ 275,000
Bubbling Ponds Native Fish Conservation Facility	\$ 100,600
NMDGF recovery/control activities	\$ 40,000
FWS (NM) recovery/control activities	\$ 40,000
USFS (NM) recovery/control activities	\$ 40,000
Topminnow stock maintenance	<u>\$ 15,000</u>
TOTAL	<u>\$ 510,600</u>

Of \$550,000 per year available to the program, this will leave approximately \$39,400 for use in funding miscellaneous and unanticipated projects.

II. Need to develop new fish barrier site alternatives

It was determined that the requirements in the 2008 biological opinion to construct three fish barriers in the Santa Cruz subbasin likely cannot be met. With the loss of the potential Redrock Canyon, Sheehy Spring, and Santa Cruz mainstem sites, the only remaining possible site is on Sonoita Creek upstream of Patagonia Lake. With already-constructed Cottonwood Spring site as the only other fish barrier in the subbasin, the Program will need to identify new barrier sites to evaluate outside of the Santa Cruz. A brief discussion of alternative barrier sites concluded that a barrier on Spring Creek in the Verde River drainage would be a good possibility, and New Mexico's highest priority stream for a fish barrier would be Turkey Creek. Other streams listed in the agenda were mostly not considered good candidates for barriers for a variety of reasons. Much further evaluation of new potential sites is needed. A minor reinitiation of consultation would be necessary to address any changes in proposed barriers.

III. Changes to the information and education component of the biological opinion

It has been determined that Reclamation does not have the authority to directly fund educational programs, so in the future Reclamation will comply with this conservation measure by providing funding to FWS for them to implement identified information/education actions.

IV. 2012 fund transfer projects

The proposed list of FY2012 fund transfer projects is shown below:

1. Topminnow stock maintenance (yr 5 of 5)	\$ 14,800
2. Redfield Canyon green sunfish removal (yr 5 of 5)	\$ 7,500
3. AZGFD recovery/control activities	\$ 275,000
4. Bubbling Ponds Native Fish Conservation Facility	\$ 100,600
5. NMDGF recovery/control activities	\$ 40,000
6. FWS (NM) recovery control activities	\$ 40,000
7. USFS (NM) recovery control activities	\$ 40,000
8. Blue River stock tank surveys	\$ 60,000
TOTAL	\$ 577,900

The ongoing NM tasks for West Fork Gila River mechanical removal (yr 3 of 5), and private lands fish restoration (yr 5 of 5) will be rolled into the new NM agreements with NMDGF, FWS, and USFS. It has yet to be determined if we will execute the Blue River stock tank survey at its estimated funding level, as watershed conditions will need to be evaluated following the impacts of the Wallow Fire (need to check with BAER team and USFS for information on stock tanks).

V. Other discussion items

No fishing signage – Brief discussion about the status of and need for no fishing signs on closed waters such as Bonita Creek.

Reward/penalty for illegal stocking – Agreed that specified funding for a reward would not require a dedicated funding task. AZGFD will investigate the possibility of increasing the

penalty for illegal fish stocking to \$25,000. The Technical Committee previously agreed via email that raising the reward to \$25,000 was warranted [we need to get this advertised somehow].

Status of rotenone use – Only a single meeting of the Rotenone Review Advisory Committee has been held, and its primary task was development of a committee charter. Four subcommittees have been formed (public health, alternative management, social impacts, policy and BMPs) to review relevant issues. A report is technically due by the end of this calendar year.

White River loach minnow – Discussed the attempt by Kelly Meyer of AZGFD Region 1 to speed up consideration of our proposal to obtain live fish by the WMAT tribal council. The proposal is in hands of the FWS Arizona Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office.

Purchase of Redfield Canyon property – Discussed some of the details of attempts to acquire the last parcel of private lands within the Redfield Canyon drainage upstream of the proposed fish barrier site. The possibility of the Program in assisting with the purchase was raised.

Cease Verde/Black river rare species surveys – Agreed that annual surveys are not needed, but that it is very difficult to declare a population extirpated with certainty. If White River loach minnow become available, they likely would be used for repatriation attempts into the Black River drainage if the N Fk E Fk Black River population remains undetected.

Blue River fish barrier update – The low bid for construction was more than \$2M above the government cost estimate. Reclamation is currently trying to round up the additional money needed.

Temporary Fossil Creek fish barrier update – Project remains on hold until the USFS Wild & Scenic River Section 7 analysis is completed. Still tentatively planning on constructing August 29-31.

Change in monitoring from canals/mainstems to headwater streams – AZGFD mentioned that it would like to pursue a cooperative agreement to conduct this new monitoring. Clarkson requested a letter from AZGFD explaining this request, as the monitoring request-for-quotes from GSA-approved contractors was about to be advertised, and AZGFD had previously approved the approach to the monitoring change at the joint Policy-Technical Committee meeting held on January 26, 2011.

Agenda
 Technical Committee Meeting
 Gila River Basin Native Fishes Conservation Program
 August 23, 2011

I. Review of Program funding concerns---proposed spending vs. available funds

- A. Fixed existing + proposed outlays
 - 1. Annual AZGFD recovery/control outlays \$ 275,000
 - 2. Annual Bubbling Ponds NFCF outlays \$ 100,600
 - 3. Proposed NMDGF recovery/control outlays \$ 150,000
 - 4. Topminnow refuge maintenance \$ 15,000
 - 5. Fossil Creek monitoring \$ 30,000
 - 6. TOTAL (\$550,000 available) \$ 570,600
- B. Other anticipated Program needs
 - 1. Blue River stock tank surveys (~\$60K)
 - 2. Increase penalty/reward for illegal stocking (\$25K*)
 - 3. Start accumulating fish barrier construction \$\$?
 - 4. Continued piscicide purchases?
 - 5. Continued contribution to piscicide development?
 - 6. Miscellaneous expenses (BPNFCF, helicopter, etc.; ~\$25 K)
 - 7. Increased commitment to BPNFCF?
 - 8. White River loach minnow acquisition (~\$50K)
- C. Conclusion: We cannot fund everything we want; how much do we need in reserve?
- D. Resolution options
 - 1. Decrease funding to State GFDs
 - a. AZGFD---eliminate one funded position? ~\$ 200,000
 - b. NMDGF---reduce proposed outlay? ~\$ 50,000
 - 2. ~~Increase funding to BPNFCF?~~ ~~~\$ 150,000~~
 - 3. TOTAL \$ 400,000
- E. Impacts
 - 1. AZGFD may have to reduce monitoring commitments and depend more upon inter-agency assistance and otherwise restrict CAP staff use
 - 2. NMDGF will not be able to implement all the actions it wants
 - 3. Bubbling Ponds needs to be fully funded to continue its primary role in the program

II. Need to develop new fish barrier site alternatives

- A. Sonoita Creek---will need to find replacement outside of Santa Cruz subbasin
- B. Verde River---as a contingency
- C. Still short one barrier for biological opinion commitments
- D. Top sites based on conservation priority ranks or high species richness:
 - 1. Silver Creek (Agua Fria)
 - 2. Eagle Creek
 - 3. Canyon Creek
 - 4. Cherry Creek

5. Kayler Spring (Gila County)
 6. Oak Grove Canyon (Graham County)
 7. Spring Creek (Verde)
 8. West Clear Creek
 9. Black Canyon Creek, NM
 10. Main Diamond Creek, NM
 11. Tularosa River, NM
- E. Other methods to evaluate possible fish barrier sites
1. Which populations need replication the most, then search for nearest neighbor streams
 2. Which streams are most feasible, then search for which populations could be Replicated
 3. Other?

III. Changes to the way the information and education component of the BO is implemented

- A. Reclamation lacks authority to execute agreements with contracts to conduct educational programs
- B. Proposal is to transfer I&E funds to FWS for them to execute specific agreements

IV. 2012 fund transfer projects

A. Ongoing tasks

1. topminnow stock maintenance (yr 5 of 5)	\$ 14,000
2. NM private lands fish restoration (yr 5 of 5)	\$ 5,000
3. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (NMDGF; yr 3 of 5)	\$ 20,000
4. Redfield Canyon green sunfish removal (yr 5 of 5)	\$ 7,500
5. Fossil Creek nonnative fish monitoring (yr 3 of 5)	\$ 30,000
6. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (USFS; yr 3 of 5)	\$ 10,000
7. AZGFD recovery/control funds	\$275,000
8. Bubbling Ponds NCF	<u>\$100,600</u>
9. TOTAL	<u>\$462,100</u>

B. New tasks

1. Blue River stock tank surveys?	\$ 60,000
2. NMDGF funding?	<u>\$ 20,000</u>
3. GRAND TOTAL	\$542,100
4. Other?	

V. Other discussion items

- A. No fishing signage
- B. Reward/penalty for illegal stocking
- C. Status of rotenone use
- D. White River loach minnow
- E. Purchase Redfield Canyon property?
- F. Cease Verde/Black river rare species surveys?
- G. Blue River fish barrier update
- H. Temporary Fossil Creek fish barrier update
- G. Other?

* Johnson et al. (2009) recommends \$100K/\$50K for penalty/reward

Johnson, B.M., R. Arlinghaus, and P.J. Martinez. 2009. Are we doing all we can to stem the tide of illegal fish stocking? *Fisheries* 34:389-394.