

Final Minutes

Technical Committee Meeting Gila River Basin Native Fishes Conservation Program BLM Safford District Office, Safford, AZ December 9, 2014

Participants:

Rob Clarkson (Reclamation)
Doug Duncan and Tom Sinclair (USFWS)
Yvette Paroz (phone) (USFS)
Tim Frey and Heidi Blasius (BLM)
Andrew Monie and Mike Ruhl (NMDGF)
Jeff Sorensen, Tony Robinson, and Clay Crowder (AZGFD)

See agenda (appended) that was used to guide the discussions for additional detail.

I. Update on progress of moving fund transfer administration to Reclamation

Clarkson reported that the issue of Reclamation having the appropriate Congressional authority to enter into grants and cooperative agreements for this program has been forwarded to a Solicitor. A determination is expected by the end of December 2014. Assuming a positive finding, Reclamation would then begin transferring or replacing the existing USFWS agreements beginning in calendar year 2015.

II. Discussion of ALWT proposal to retire Aravaipa Farms irrigation rights

The committee discussed the proposal and agreed that it could provide positive benefit to native fishes, and is potentially suitable for funding under criteria the GRBNFCP has defined. A permanent easement to retire the irrigation water rights would be far preferable to a temporary retirement, although we would be willing to entertain the possibility of a temporary easement. There was a fair amount of confusion about exactly what the proposal would end up doing with the water right, and we agreed that more information was needed. Also discussed the possibility of purchasing the property and its water rights outright, and how that could be handled (e.g., transfer to The Nature Conservancy?). Clarkson will get clarification of the proposal from the ALWT.

III. Discussion of USFS/Scott Bonar proposal to define HSI curves for native fishes

Scott Bonar and Ken Bovee called in to introduce the proposal to the Technical Committee. The proposal seeks funding to develop “generalized” Habitat Suitability Index curves for native fishes for use in future court cases that deal with proposals to divert stream surface flows. Bonar stated that most of the information needed already existed, but would need to be compiled. The new curves might more easily allow a determination of how new diversions would impact native fishes. We requested a written proposal before we could act further, but after Bonar and Bovee hung up, the Technical

Committee determined that the proposal likely would not provide sufficient direct “on-the-ground” benefit to native fishes according to our established criteria, although we would be interested in getting more specifics.

IV. Review of old Program project spreadsheets and update of task progress

We discussed the progress of all ongoing and pending project tasks with the intention to modify the Program project spreadsheets. Clarkson will disburse the revised spreadsheets to all Policy and Technical Committee members when completed.

Bonita Creek. Blasius indicated that the Bonita Creek MOU was scheduled to be renewed in 2016; suggested that partners comment on the MOU when it becomes available. Clarkson asked if AGFD could look into completing a chemical treatment without actually having a treatment date; opportunistic the next time a flood wipes out the beaver dams. Robinson said he would find out if that was possible.

Voeltz indicated that FWS will be doing loach minnow surveys on White Mountain Apache lands in 2015.

V. Identification of FY2016 fund transfer projects

We reviewed the status and progress of each of the continuation projects, and determined that all of the “routine” annual funding allocation (\$550,000) for the Program has been reserved by continuation projects. The final list of recommended FY2016 tasks is shown below (modified from that shown on the appended agenda).

3-143. Topminnow stock maintenance (yr 1 of 5)	\$ 13,710
3-144. NMDGF recovery actions (yr 9 of n)	
a. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 21,175
b. Turkey Ck trib surveys/mechanical removal (yr 3 of 4)	\$ 16,100
c. T&E fish repatriations and monitoring (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 17,850
3-145. FWS recovery actions (yr 9 of n)	
a. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 10,819
b. Turkey Ck trib surveys/mechanical removal (yr 3 of 4)	\$ 15,602
c. T&E fish repatriations and monitoring (yr 3 of 5)	\$ 6,110
3-146. USFS recovery actions (yr 9 of n)	
a. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 9,790
b. Turkey Ck trib surveys/mechanical removal (yr 3 of 4)	\$ 14,440
c. T&E fish repatriations and monitoring (yr 3 of 5)	\$ 4,709
3-147. Surveys of Gila River tributaries on BLM lands in NM (yr 3 of 3)	\$ 10,370
3-148. AZGFD recovery actions (yr 9 of n)	\$ 306,950
a. Sand Draw repatriations	
b. Spring Creek (Oak) spikedece repatriation	
3-149. Bubbling Ponds O&M (yr 9 of n)	\$ 106,000
TOTAL	\$ 553,625

There was agreement that should extra funds become available above the base amount, the Technical Committee would consider funding additional tasks. The top priority task to fund if additional funds are identified is for NMDGF to survey fishes in the Middle Fork Gila River in support of a potential fish barrier/chemical renovation project there (\$60,120).

Other potential projects included: a) fish survey of the San Francisco River in Arizona, b) fish surveys of Blue River tributaries, c) green sunfish removal in the Blue River, d) new well and pump for The Nature Conservancy's Lower San Pedro River Preserve pond, e) bullfrog removal.

VI. Fish barrier update

The status of the fish barriers that have not yet been constructed was presented by Clarkson. Spring Creek (Oak) is on track for a late winter 2015 construction, to be followed by a spring/summer 2015 construction of the West Fork Black River fish barrier. The O'Donnell Canyon (NEPA pending) and Redfield Canyon (NEPA completed) fish barriers could possibly be constructed in FY2016 depending on a number of factors generally outside of Reclamation's control. A fish barrier on upper Eagle Creek is still being actively pursued in cooperation with Freeport McMoRan (potential construction in 2017), and NMDGF is waiting on a feasibility study of the Middle Fork Gila River fish barrier. Other potential barriers on Spring Creek (Tonto) and Verde River are awaiting decisions by AZGFD before any further work is applied toward them.

VII. Bubbling Ponds Native Fish Conservation Facility expansion update

Clarkson reported that the first modification to the ongoing Interagency Agreement (IA) between Reclamation and FWS that is being used to reserve funds for the BPNFCF expansion/modernization was executed on September 18, 2014 in the amount of \$898,403. A second mod to the IA in the amount of \$435,000 to complete the project funding is expected to be executed in January 2015. The plan then is for FWS to modify their Cooperative Agreement with AZGFD to implement the project, with construction expected in autumn 2015.

VIII. Status of USGS selective piscicide development study

Duncan and Clarkson reported that the USGS IA with FWS was executed in 2013, and that they have been arranging disease certifications of native species for the study with the FWS La Crosse Fish Health Center. Once certified, Clarkson has been arranging the collections and transport of live fish to the USGS in La Crosse. Although results remain preliminary, USGS in general is confirming the results of Ward (2005) that most nonnative fishes tested appear much more susceptible to mortality from Supaverm® treatment than do native fishes. The list of species being tested includes the natives longfin dace, speckled dace, roundtail chub, bluehead sucker (surrogate for desert sucker), Gila topminnow, loach minnow, and spikedace. The list of nonnatives being

tested include smallmouth bass, green sunfish, red shiner, mosquitofish, channel catfish, yellow bullhead, and flathead catfish.

IX. Native fish conservation activities update

The various participatory agencies presented updates on their recent conservation actions with native fishes. Highlights include: NMDGF reported that loach minnow salvaged from the San Francisco River and held at BPNFCF before the Whitewater/Baldy fire was repatriated in 2014, but that a portion of the salvaged stock was used to establish a long-term captive population at BPNFCF. Loach minnow was not stocked into Saliz Canyon in 2014, but it was stocked into Little Creek. Spikedace also was stocked into the San Francisco River in 2014. Sixty loach minnow from the West Fork Gila River were captured to augment the captive stock held at BPNFCF. Gila chub also was stocked (augmentation) into Mule Creek in late 2014.

AZGFD reported that loach minnow and spikedace captured from Aravaipa Creek were transferred to BPNFCF in 2014 to augment hatchery stocks. Gila topminnow was stocked into Wildcat and Bass canyons (Hot Springs Canyon drainage), approximately 2,500 fingerling razorback sucker were stocked into lower Fossil Creek, and Gila topminnow, desert pupfish, and loach minnow were stocked into Bonita Creek in 2014. Several other topminnow and pupfish translocations were also conducted at various smaller waters in 2014. Approximately 350 nonnative green sunfish were removed from Redfield Canyon this year.

X. Blue River/Spring Creek (Oak) repatriations/augmentations

The Technical Committee recommended that spikedace and roundtail chub augmentations be continued in the Blue River, as it appears that a chemical renovation of the system may not be required to control the relatively small population of green sunfish detected so far. Translocation of spikedace to Spring Creek (Oak) should be made in 2015 after the fish barrier is installed.

XI. Other discussion items

Because all of the tasks recommended for funding in FY2016 are continuation projects that already have been approved by the Policy Committee in past years, it was recommended that this year's Policy Committee business could be conducted via email in lieu of the need for a face-to-face meeting. After the Technical Committee meeting minutes are finalized, Clarkson will send them and the supporting documents for the FY2016 task list to the Policy Committee and request they approve the list via email exchange.

PROPOSED AGENDA, version 2
 Technical Committee Meeting
 Gila River Basin Native Fishes Conservation Program
 BLM Safford District Office, AZ
 December 9, 2014 @ 10:00 AM

I. Preliminaries, lunch arrangements, etc.

II. Update on progress of moving fund transfer administration to Reclamation

III. Discussion of Arizona Land & Water Trust proposal to retire Aravaipa Farms irrigation rights (proposal expected prior to meeting)

IV. Discussion of USFS/Scott Bonar proposal to define Habitat Suitability Index curves for native fishes (further info expected prior to meeting)

V. Review old spreadsheets; update task progress (spreadsheet colors)

VI. Identification of FY2016 fund transfer projects

Preliminary list:

1. Topminnow stock maintenance (yr 1 of 5; renewal?)	\$ 13,710
2. NMDGF recovery actions (yr 9 of n)	
a. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 21,175
b. Spikedace repatriations to San Francisco River (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 3,250
c. Turkey Ck trib surveys/mechanical removal (yr 3 of 4)	\$ 16,100
d. T&E fish repatriations and monitoring (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 14,600
3. FWS recovery actions (yr 9 of n)	
a. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 10,570
b. Spikedace repatriations to San Francisco River (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 3,055
c. Turkey Ck trib surveys/mechanical removal (yr 3 of 4)	\$ 15,215
d. T&E fish repatriations and monitoring (yr 3 of 5)	\$ 3,055
4. USFS recovery actions (yr 9 of n)	
a. W Fk Gila River mechanical removal (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 9,790
b. Spikedace repatriations to San Francisco River (yr 4 of 5)	\$ 1,982
c. Turkey Ck trib surveys/mechanical removal (yr 3 of 4)	\$ 14,440
d. T&E fish repatriations and monitoring (yr 3 of 5)	\$ 2,727
5. Surveys of Gila River tributaries on BLM lands in NM (yr 3 of 3)	\$ 10,370
6. AZGFD recovery actions (yr 9 of n)	\$ 306,970
a. Update list of old continuation projects	
7. Bubbling Ponds O&M (yr 9 of n)	<u>\$106,000</u>
TOTAL	\$ 552,989
8. Other	
a. Middle Fork Gila River surveys?	\$ 60,120
b. Phoenix Zoo Gila chub refuge pond?	

VII. Fish barrier update

- A. Spring Creek (Oak)
- B. West Fork Black River
- C. O'Donnell Canyon
- D. Redfield Canyon
- E. Eagle Creek
- F. Middle Fork Gila River
- G. Spring Creek (Tonto)
- H. Verde River

VIII. BPNFCF update, including hatchery expansion, funding, etc.

IX. Status of USGS selective piscicide development study

X. Native fish conservation/renovation/repatriation/monitoring activities update

XI. Blue River/Spring Creek (Oak) repatriations/augmentations

XII. Other discussion items?