

Gila River Basin Native Fishes Conservation Program
Technical Committee Meeting
Bureau of Land Management, Safford Field Office
October 26, 2012

Final Meeting Minutes

Meeting Participants:

Rob Clarkson (Reclamation)
Andrew Monie (NMDGF)
Tim Frey (BLM-NM)
Kirk Patten (NMDGF)

Doug Duncan (FWS)
Tony Robinson (AZGFD)
Jeff Sorensen (AZGFD)

See full meeting agenda appended below.

1. Fund Transfers

Duncan and Clarkson provided an overview of the new process for how FWS and Reclamation prepared and executed the new fund transfer agreement, which is now a single agreement that incorporates both the native fish conservation and nonnative fish control tasks. Although the new agreement intended to fund fiscal year (FY) 2013 projects was not executed until September 21, in the future it is hoped new annual agreements will be executed not later than mid-summer. The new agreement format requires government cost estimates for each task, and tasks are to be identified with the expectation they will be obligated by FWS and work initiated within the following fiscal year. Duncan reviewed the FWS process for subcontracting task implementation to other agencies, and the FY2013-approved tasks were briefly reviewed by the committee.

The committee identified new and continuation tasks for FY2014, which are shown below. Robinson noted that AZGFD salaries have recently been increased 5%, which will assumedly result in a new funding request to the GRBNFCP at some point in the near future.

The committee discussed the previous request by NMDGF for \$120,000 of annual funding to cover their and all partner agency (FWS, BLM, USFS) expenses for projects that occur in New Mexico. The New Mexico agencies will have to detail their government cost estimates for projects they expect to accomplish or initiate in the upcoming fiscal year to justify the funding transfers under separate agreements with FWS. It is expected that New Mexico funding would proceed similar to AZGFD funding, where a list of tasks to be completed would be created and adjusted as they are completed and new tasks identified. In addition to completing already-approved tasks, that list is to include surveys for chubs in canyon-bound reaches of NM rivers, continuation of Mule Creek repatriations, Bear/Blue/Apache creek surveys, and Gila forks tributary fish inventories.

The committee reviewed and approved a request by the Black Canyon City Community Association to install solar pumps for its native fish refuge pond system at Black Canyon

Heritage Park. The committee briefly discussed funding a new chub morphology and genetics study.

Tony Robinson is to check ~~on~~ if the stockpile of sodium permanganate can be used to detoxify rotenone during renovations, and whether or not it is registered for use in Arizona. If it is not registered, then it needs to be. Need a cost estimate for the registration and storage, so that it can be added as a task.

Proposed FY2014 tasks:

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Topminnow stock maintenance (yr 5 of 5) | ~\$ 16,000 |
| NM tasks (yr 1 of n) | \$ 120,000 |
| AZ tasks (yr 7 of n) | \$ 275,000 |
| Bubbling Ponds Native Fish Conservation Facility (yr 7 of n) | \$ 100,600 |
| Redfield Canyon green sunfish mechanical removal (yr 5 of 5) | ~\$ 10,000 |
| Black Canyon Heritage Park solar pumps (yr 1 of 1) | \$ 20,400 |
| TOTAL | ~\$ 542,000 |

The requirement for completion reports for two New Mexico tasks was briefly noted.

2. Fish Barriers

Drop Structures – Clarkson reviewed Reclamation’s requirement to construct 12 fish barriers under the 2008 biological opinion that created the GRBNFCP. Six have been completed (Aravaipa Creek, Cottonwood Spring, Fossil Creek, Bonita Creek, Hot Springs Canyon, Blue River), and Redfield Canyon is expected to be completed in calendar year 2013. Several of the sites in the original list have dropped out or may drop out in the future for various reasons: Redrock Canyon (proposed to be replaced by Sonoita Creek), Sheehy Spring, and Verde River. Only O’Donnell Canyon and Spring Creek (Tonto) remain probable, but they are not a certainty either. Therefore, Reclamation has been trying to identify alternative barrier sites.

Top of the new list are Spring Creek (Oak), Eagle Creek, and West Fork Black River. The latter two barriers are proposed to be cost-shared with Freeport McMoRan and AZGFD, respectively, and thus together they will constitute only a single barrier under terms of the biological opinion. There are a host of other streams being considered or will be evaluated that could also make the alternative barrier list, including Blue Creek, Turkey Creek (NM), Wet Beaver Creek, Bear Creek, Sycamore Creek (Agua Fria), Webber Creek, Pine Creek, Wet Bottom Creek, and Marsh Creek. Most have not been fully evaluated. Reclamation is requesting further input from all parties to identify streams with the highest benefit to listed native fishes.

Electrical – Clarkson recently completed the second 10-year review of the effectiveness of the electrical barriers on the Salt River Project (SRP) Arizona and South canals and the Florence-Casa Grande (FCG) Canal near China Wash, which was briefly reviewed. All barriers continue to have periodic outages of both remote monitoring capability as well as barrier integrity, and the FCG Canal barrier performed worse during the past 10 years than it did during the previous ten. It does not appear the technology is capable of completely stopping upstream fish movements.

Reclamation is seeking guidance from the management agencies as to how to address the issue. Possible outcomes include: 1) Are the barriers still necessary? If not, can they be abandoned? 2) If the barriers remain necessary, how should we proceed to enhance barrier effectiveness? One option for the latter include requiring SRP and San Carlos Irrigation Project to upgrade barrier components as suggested by Smith-Root, Inc. (the manufacturer). Another possibility is that the proposed concrete lining of the FCG canal system might allow replacement of the electrical barrier with a drop structure. These and other nuances associated with the electrical barriers will be a topic at the upcoming Policy Committee meeting.

3. Information and Education

Clarkson stated that Reclamation is anticipating replacing its existing government native fish website, that among other things is mostly comprised of GRBNFCP subject matter, with a .org website dedicated solely to the GRBNFCP. This move will free up the site from government bureaucratic restrictions and better and more rapidly serve the GRBNFCP as well as interested organizations and the public. Clarkson requested input ideas on its intended audience, layout, etc. Duncan mentioned a FWS volunteer who has some expertise in the area that might be able to assist. A content suggestion was to include a High School teacher page.

4. Fish Monitoring

Clarkson briefly reviewed the recent changes to its monitoring program to emphasize acquiring data on T&E populations.

5. White River Loach Minnow

There was little progress reported on the GRBNFCP's efforts to acquire loach minnow from the White Mountain Apache Tribe for repatriation to streams off the reservation.

6. Environmental DNA

Duncan reviewed the technique where water samples from surface waters can be screened for the potential presence a species via DNA identification. The technique's potential use for the GRBNFCP was discussed, including the possibility of determining a species' presence in a stream without the substantial effort required to conduct monitoring using "standard" sampling techniques. Costs were discussed. Robinson stated that AZGFD and UA had already submitted a proposal to the Department of Defense to develop markers needed for the technique, but it was rejected. He mentioned that AZGFD and UA may submit an unsolicited proposal to the GRBNFCP for funding.

7. Strategic Plan Revision

The 2013-2017 five-year update to the GRBNFCP's strategic plan is due. The committee agreed to revise the old plan in advance of the upcoming Policy Committee meeting for their review and potential approval.

The meeting was adjourned after Sorensen agreed to schedule the next Policy Committee meeting.

Agenda
Gila River Basin Native Fishes Conservation Program
Technical Committee Meeting
October 26, 2012

I. Fund transfers

- A. New process description
 1. FWS-BR procedures
 2. Government cost estimates
 3. Task implementation schedule
 4. Review of FY2013 tasks and funding
 5. FWS process for subcontracting
- B. FY2014 task identification
 1. Continuation tasks
 2. New tasks
- C. Missing completion reports
 1. San Francisco drainage inventory, task 3-92e
 2. Little Creek mechanical removal, task 4-88a

II. Fish barriers

- A. Drop structures
 1. Review completed barrier list
 2. Discuss new list
 3. Identify best alternatives
- B. Electrical barriers
 1. Discuss 10-yr effectiveness draft report
 2. Concerns and response
 3. Continued need for annual SRP canal above-barrier censuses?

III. Information and education

- A. Web page changes
 1. Change from BR site (.gov) to GRBNFCP site (.org)
 2. Intended audience
 3. Layout ideas, etc.
- B. Other

IV. Fish monitoring – quick review

V. White River loach minnow update

VI. Environmental DNA discussion

VII. Update strategic plan

VIII. Schedule Policy Committee meeting