

MEETING SUMMARY

SMP Work Group Meeting

September 29, 2025

1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Location: Conference Room A, Bureau of Reclamation's Western Colorado Area Office and remote meeting via Microsoft Teams

Attendees: Jenny Ward (Reclamation), Frederick Busch (Reclamation), Christina Wyatt (Reclamation), Cory Williams (USGS), Trisha Solberg (USGS), Patrick Longley (USGS), Charles Wahl (USGS), Kurt Broderdorp (FWS), Clinton Evans (NRCS), Kevin Hyatt (BLM), Kara Scheel (CWCB), Nora Flynn (CWCB), Kenan Diker (CDPHE), Raquel Flinker (CRWCD), Allen Distel (BPWCD), Paul Kehmeier (DCD), Steve Pope (UVWUA), Nadine Winner (UVWUA), Mike and Amber Weber (Maverick Solutions)

Introductions and Discussion of Agenda

The agenda was accepted, and introductions were completed. During the last SMP Workgroup meeting, it was questioned who the BLM, NRCS, and EPA SMP Workgroup contacts are. It was identified that Jedd Sondergard and Kevin Hyatt are the BLM contacts. Clinton Evans is the NRCS contact. Raquel Flinker is reaching out to the EPA to determine if they have a contact to include in the Workgroup. Kenan Diker suggested Erika Larsen (Larsen.Erika@epa.gov) may be an appropriate EPA contact.

Species Conservation Trust Fund Update

The USGS request for funding the continuation of monitoring the 30 well network was approved by the legislator and funds were issued to CWCB. The funds are available whenever the USGS is ready to be contracted for the funds.

Kara Scheel has heard that there is a possibility that CWCB will not receive as much or potentially any funds for the SCTF in fiscal year 2026. Kara suggested the Workgroup continue to develop projects for funding until CWCB receives word from leadership on whether or not CWCB will be able to move forward with funding any projects in fiscal year 2026.

Revisions to USGS Data Release

Patrick Longley presented data to be included in the Water Year 2024 data release. Selenium levels based on discrete samples and on regressions were presented. Seven out of 12 sites exceeded the state Selenium standard of 4.6 µg/L. Whitewater was below the standard, at 4.1 µg/L. There continues to be a downward trend at Whitewater. The flow adjusted trend removes the effect of streamflow to look at changes in concentrations. This trend shows a strong decline from 1986 through 2024, which confirms that there are large declines in Selenium concentrations

at Whitewater regardless of streamflow. It helps us understand if the Selenium levels are the result of something like high snow runoff or reservoir management, or if we are actually headed to a “new normal” level of Selenium.

CDPHE uses the 85th percentile of the previous five years of discrete sample data to determine compliance. In addition to discrete samples, the USGS has been performing regression analyses in an attempt to take into account events outside of the sampling conditions, such as storms. There are multiple ways of conducting a regression analysis, and the USGS presented a graph that shows that the current way of performing the regression analysis is outdated and is showing a slightly low bias. As concentrations continue to drop, this bias will eventually be biased high rather than biased low. Often times the difference in the bias is small, but the small differences matter when our levels are so close to the state standard.

Cory Williams said due to the identification of this bias, they either need to (1) stop doing a regression analysis moving forward, or (2) update the regression analysis methodology to the Weighted Regressions on Time, Discharge, and Season-Kalman Filter (WRTDS-K) method to get rid of the bias and correctly estimate the trend. It was questioned if it is more worthwhile to invest in more discrete sampling rather than the regression analysis since that is what the CDPHE uses to determine compliance. Cory explained that the SMP Workgroup originally wanted the regression analysis in order to have the ability to look at real time regression and understand what Selenium levels are doing between samples. In order to move to the WRTDS-K method, the USGS would have to write a one-time report, but then they could go back to the data release format. Cory indicated the USGS could retroactively evaluate the data sets and improve the existing numbers by removing the bias.

Kenan mentioned that regression analyses introduce errors, and Cory countered that there are always errors, and there are errors with discrete sampling as well. Kenan mentioned that Pueblo is doing an analysis that looks at electrical conductivity and Selenium. Cory said that is exactly what the USGS is proposing to do with the WRTDS-K method.

FY26 Data Collection

The following ancillary sites were discontinued in FY25:

- Montrose Arroyo at East Niagara Street
- Peach Valley
- Alum Gulch Near Hotchkiss
- West Trib of Loutsenhizer Arroyo below East Canal

Ancillary sites typically track something else happening in the system, such as an improvement project, to help explain changes in concentrations we might be seeing at core sites. Ancillary sites are typically sampled quarterly, but because Travis Schmidt alluded to October being an important month biologically, the USGS has tried to get samples in October in addition to the quarterly samples. Cory asked what the Workgroup may want to try to add back on to the sampling plan for FY26.

Reclamation funding for streamflow and discrete sampling at Loutsenhizer Arroyo at Highway 50 ended in 2025 due to issues with the funding source (CRSP MOA). Funding for 2025 was provided by credits from the USGS and funding through CWCB. Funding is not secured for this site in 2026.

Restarting sampling at the West Trib of Loutsenhizer Arroyo was suggested by Cory due to the upcoming project Reclamation will be conducting on the East Canal. The project would divert return flows from the Loutsenhizer Arroyo into the East Canal, and eventually the water would waste into the Gunnison River upstream of the junction with the Uncompahgre River rather than wasting into the Uncompahgre River upstream of the junction with the Gunnison River. Cory suggested that if we sample this year, we could recharacterize the area and be able to see the post-project effect of moving the Selenium load to a different part of the system. Frederick Busch said Reclamation is still working on right-of-way acquisition for that project, and construction would likely occur in 2026-2027. Frederick indicated funding sampling in this area would make sense, but the funding source is unknown. Cory suggested a different partner may potentially be able to fund sampling at this location. The Science Team plans to meet in early November to discuss available funding and determine which areas would be best to sample in FY26.

Another sampling idea Cory presented was associated with the Gunnison Tunnel to determine wildfire effects in that area. There may be a change in the quality of water coming through the Gunnison Tunnel, which could confound what is occurring in the system.

The USGS published a circulator in 2025 titled Summary of Selenium in the Lower Gunnison Basin, Colorado – Information and Data Gaps (<https://pubs.usgs.gov/publication/cir1559>). The report identifies potential studies to help close some of the data gaps, such as expanding monitoring of Selenium in the fish community, as data collection of benthivores (suckers) is currently missing. Other information gaps include how wildfire might affect selenium or understanding Selenium and zebra mussels, as some evidence suggests the mussels are Selenium hyper-concentrators who could pull Selenium out of the water column but could also be a food source.

The Science Team will meet in early November once some Reclamation and SCTF funding information is available to refine interests in data collection and studies to pursue in FY26.

Presentation by Amber Weber with the Ditch and Reservoir Company Alliance

Raquel requested the SMP Workgroup add Amber Weber from the Ditch and Reservoir Company Alliance to the agenda for a presentation on the work conducted by Maverick Solutions, as it can spark ideas such as if there are opportunities to work with agricultural producers to reduce selenium loading at the field level. Amber and Mike Weber presented a PowerPoint on their Non-Point Source Load Reduction Program.

Schedule for next SMP Meeting

The next Workgroup meeting will occur after the Science Team meeting.

ACTION ITEMS

- The Science Team will have a meeting in early November to discuss funding and refine interests in data collection and studies to pursue in FY26.