# MEETING SUMMARY

**SMP Work Group Meeting**
June 4, 2026
10:00 PM – 12:00 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), Cory Williams (USGS), Joel Homan (USGS), Trisha Solberg (USGS), Charles Wahl (USGS), Natalie Day (USGS), Ken Leib (USGS), Kevin Hyatt (BLM), Kara Scheel (CWCB), Paul Kehmeier (CDA), Caleb Foy (CRWCD), Allen Distel (BPWLD)

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**Introductions and Discussion of Agenda**

The meeting began with introductions and review of the day's agenda. Representatives from Reclamation, USGS, CWCB, and partnering agencies attended. The group planned to discuss the latest selenium and mercury monitoring results, fish tissue updates, changes in analytical methodology, and upcoming needs for the 2026 field season.

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**Overview of Monitoring and Current Conditions**

USGS provided an update on ongoing selenium monitoring throughout the Lower Gunnison Basin. They reviewed sampling frequencies at the core river sites and the ancillary irrigation drains, noting that several locations—particularly Loutsenhizer Arroyo and Sunflower Drain—continue to show elevated dissolved selenium compared to the mainstem. These tributary inputs remain important for understanding overall basin selenium patterns.

USGS also described the timing of fieldwork completed in Water Year 2025 and early 2026, including quarterly sampling, increased sampling during irrigation start-up, and operation of continuous sensors. Low snowpack and reduced spring runoff resulted in fewer high-flow events this year, which can influence how selenium moves through the system.

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**Need to Transition to the State of Colorado's Selenium Assessment Method**

The primary technical discussion centered on changing how annual selenium concentrations are summarized for reporting purposes. Historically, USGS has used LOADEST, a regression-based model, to calculate the 85th-percentile selenium concentration, which is the metric used by the State of Colorado to determine whether a site meets or exceeds the selenium standard.

USGS explained that as concentrations in the basin have declined, the LOADEST method has begun producing increasingly biased results. In some years the model slightly underpredicts

selenium; in others, it overpredicts. Although the differences appear small, they become meaningful when concentrations hover near the State's 4.6 µg/L standard.

For this reason, the group discussed shifting to Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's method, which calculates the 85th percentile directly from five years of discrete samples, rather than from modeled estimates. This approach includes confidence intervals, is more transparent, and matches the method the State itself uses to judge compliance. Adopting the State method would also avoid the long-term uncertainty created by regression bias.

To support this shift, the group agreed that USGS should prepare a short transition memo documenting the move from LOADEST to the State's discrete-sample method. The memo would clearly explain the limitations of the old regression approach, why the State method is now preferred, and how the change will affect future reporting and interpretation of long-term trends. This written explanation will help ensure that the transition is transparent, technically supported, and easy for future Work Group members and partner agencies to reference.

USGS noted that transitioning to the State method may require a one-time report documenting the change, after which annual reporting would continue in the usual data-release format. This proposed shift was emphasized as the main takeaway from the meeting and the most important decision to finalize before next year's reporting cycle.

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**Fish Tissue and Mercury Updates**

USGS provided a brief update on mercury and selenium concentrations in fish. Field crews collected the first 2026 round of biological samples in March, with additional rounds planned for August and September/October. Changes in USFWS drift-sampling logistics may slightly alter fall field operations, but coordination is already underway.

Preliminary observations suggest that selenium concentrations in some fish species may be gradually decreasing, although more data are needed before trends can be confirmed. Mercury patterns vary across the upper Colorado River Basin and are influenced by food-web structure, non-native species, and reservoir processes. While Gunnison fish generally show lower mercury levels than some other basins, mercury still biomagnifies efficiently in the system, and continued monitoring is important.

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**Species Conservation Trust Fund**

Colorado Water Conservation Board provided an update on the Species Conservation Trust Fund (SCTF). Funding for the well-monitoring network has already been secured, but SCTF funding levels for FY2026 remain uncertain. It was asked whether SCTF funds could potentially be used to support the transition to the State's selenium-assessment method; for example, preparing the required documentation, updating the analytical approach, or re-running historical data using the new method. CWCB staff explained that SCTF eligibility is tied to work that supports recovery of threatened and endangered species, and that a methodology change could be eligible if it strengthens the scientific basis for management decisions. The USGS will develop a cost estimate for completing the model-transition work

The group also discussed potential additions or changes to the FY2026 sampling plan, including whether to revisit discontinued ancillary sites or evaluate the effects of upcoming Reclamation projects on selenium movement.

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**Schedule for next SMP Meeting**

Jenny will reach out to the SMP Workgroup to schedule the next meeting likely around September/early fall, once the WY25 data release and State-method transition memo are ready.

## ACTION ITEMS

- USGS will prepare a transition memo documenting the need to move from the LOADEST regression approach to the State of Colorado's selenium-assessment method (the 5-year discrete-sample 85th-percentile with confidence intervals).
- USGS will develop a cost estimate for completing the model-transition work to support potential funding discussions at the next SCTF review.
- Jenny will reach out in early fall to schedule the next SMP Workgroup meeting once the transition memo and cost information are ready for group review.