

Date: January 20, 2003

To: Members of the Adaptive Management Work Group

From: Barry Wirth
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Subject: AMWG Outreach Program

Please accept this informal note as my report to the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) meeting on January 28, 2003. On that date I will be attending a required meeting elsewhere. It includes some observations on problems we are having and a suggestion for a Chair of this function from within AMWG with staff support/work by me.

The development of a specific Outreach Program for the Adaptive Management Program and the Adaptive Management Work Group following the July 2002 AMWG meeting was delayed as my staff and I supported the development and release of the Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Experimental Releases from Glen Canyon Dam and Removal of Non-native Fish and the Finding of No Significant Impact.

Because of the workload associated with that document, we were unable to move ahead on the broader outreach effort discussed at the last AMWG meeting in July. In supporting that EA, we learned a lot about what it will take to put together an outreach program, including the various perceptions by the AMWG members as to the effectiveness and desired products and outcomes.

First of all, I discovered that it is difficult to get everyone involved, especially to produce products. As we have mentioned in the past, members are really busy. The most realistic option continues to be getting a steering committee together from the AMWG to provide general direction with the Bureau of Reclamation's Public Affairs Office in Salt Lake City taking the lead on actual product development. This was discussed in the July 2002 meeting and certainly verified by the experiences that followed related to the experimental flow outreach work. I believe it would be best if we had a Chair of the Outreach Committee from the AMWG membership. I'm not sure how effective it is for me, as Reclamation staff, to both be a de facto chair and staff for the outreach purpose. I think there would be better ownership and participation within AMWG if that chair function came from the AMWG.

For example, we initially talked about doing an AMWG newsletter that would discuss the proposed experiment and provide the public with information on the EA. This product would have facilitated public involvement actions and would have helped meet the public involvement test of the National Environmental Policy Act process. We were never able to get more than a couple AMWG members at a time on any conference calls to talk about a newsletter. Then, we discovered that the AMWG members envisioned a product that was different from each other's views and were also different than what the action agencies envisioned.

The Reclamation Public Affairs Office is best positioned to provide staff to produce materials including publications, web pages, and video productions. Other federal and state partners again said they were not so positioned, nor are the non-government and tribal members. However, the impact of the experimental flows EA also demonstrated that it is difficult for my office to simultaneously support a NEPA action and an AMWG outreach initiative. Priorities will have to be established.

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The second lesson we learned is that we have to break out AMWG “outreach” activities from those that are “public involvement” activities conducted by the action agencies in a NEPA process.

Another lesson is that it is difficult for AMWG members to participate outside of their scope of employment or the organization they represent. Members feel it is presumptive to categorize one person as representing a broad-brush spectrum. While not a stumbling block in conducting an outreach program, it was an unexpected surprise to me. As we begin a true outreach program, we have to identify the limits in representation and our options. For instance, I assumed we’d have members who could speak for all “recreational” interests or all “environmental” interests. That isn’t the case and, apparently isn’t fair to assume either.

As we worked on the EA’s public involvement, we quickly discovered that it would be Reclamation’s responsibility to work with the National Park Service and the USGS to produce the outreach products, conduct the open houses, receive the comments, and analyze those comments. We were the “action” agencies, had the responsibility, and it was awkward and/or inappropriate for the AMWG members to assume that responsibility. We have to separate public involvement actions that are the functions and responsibilities of the “action” agencies from the general informational and educational outreach that the AMWG may wish to undertake.

So, where does this leave us now? Two things come to mind. As new EA’s move along, such as the upcoming one on the installation and testing of temperature modification devices, the action agencies will have to undertake public outreach and involvement actions. Those jobs will impact our public affairs workload.

Second, the AMWG needs to better determine what expectations its has for outreach and then depend upon Reclamation, with support as is available from National Park Service and USGS, to produce the materials.

At the July 2002 AMWG meeting, some members indicated an interest in serving on a subcommittee for outreach. Members agreed that it would take personal investment of time by the AMWG, coupled with inclusion in the Adaptive Management Program budget, to undertake an outreach program. Because of the time spent on the experimental flows EA and resulting delay in the outreach work, there is an opportunity for all AMWG members to reconsider their interest and availability and become part of the outreach committee.

Reclamation’s Public Affairs Office is willing to host a meeting to be chaired by an AMWG Outreach Chairperson for that self-selected committee in Phoenix during the week of May 12th to begin the process of identifying outreach objectives, determining time lines for product and program development, determine costs, and plan for inclusion in the current and out-year budgets for these projects. The results of this meeting would be presented at the July AMWG meeting and work will commence. I would like to work with that Chair in finalizing the date, location, and agenda.

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