

Flaming Gorge Working Group
Meeting Minutes
April 30, 2015

Participation

This meeting was held Thursday, April 30, 2015, at the Utah Department of Natural Resources building in Vernal, Utah. Attendees are listed below.

Purpose of Meeting

The purpose of these meetings (held in April and August) is to inform the public and other interested parties of Reclamation's current and future operational plans and to gather information from the public regarding specific resources associated with Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the river corridor below it. In addition, the meetings are used to coordinate activities and exchange information among agencies, water users, and other interested parties concerning the Green River.

Meeting Overview

Peter Crookston (USBR) called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. with 13 present in person and several participating via the online conference Webinar (see signup sheet for attendance). Presentations were given in the following order: Ashley Nielson of the National Weather Service Colorado River Forecast Center (CBRFC); Dave Speas, Bureau of Reclamation; and Heather Patno, Bureau of Reclamation. Before starting, all present introduced themselves and their affiliations.

Forecast Presentation – Ashley Nielson (CBRFC)

Ashley Nielson (CBRFC) and provided a review of fall and winter weather patterns in addition to characterizing spring snow pack conditions. She then described the April-July water supply forecast for the Upper Green and Yampa Rivers, and briefly discussed long term weather forecasts.

Q1: The 7-day forecast includes a chance for convective afternoon thunderstorms through the weekend and a potential storm system to arrive next week. Will this precipitation fall as rain or snow, and will it result in streamflow spikes?

A1: The precipitation will fall as rain due to warm temperatures. There is some potential for streamflow spikes due to runoff from both new precipitation (rainfall) and snow melt (rain-on-snow), but there is uncertainty in the magnitude and timing of convective storms.

Larval Trigger Study Plan – Dave Speas (USBR)

Dave Speas (USBR) discussed anticipated activities related to the Larval Trigger Study Plan (LTSP) and its 2015 implementation. The LTSP was implemented as part of the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program. The goal of the Recovery Program is to recover endangered fishes while water development proceeds in compliance with applicable Federal and State laws. It balances the Endangered Species Act with the Law of the River.

Q2: Why are biologists estimating two weeks for the first data of larvae observance?

A2: The estimate is based on 20-30 years of observations (since 1991-1992) which suggest a very close relationship between water temperatures and larval presence. Larvae are expected to appear relatively early this year due to exceptionally warm spring temperatures. The earliest observance of larvae occurred on May 16th, 2012 and 2015 conditions have been similar to date. Larval emergence is

predicted by Kevin Bestgen (Colorado State University) with a high level of accuracy. Kevin provides email notification to Reclamation up to one week in advance of larval emergence.

Q3: Can Reclamation provide notification to the public regarding the estimated timing of larval emergence as soon as possible? Every day of advanced notice is valuable to river users.

A3: Yes! Reclamation has distributed this information as soon as it's available in the past and will continue to do so. However, it should be noted that there is uncertainty in the timing of larval emergence. Razorback sucker are the first fish to appear in the system, so there are no other indicator species to reference. As a result, the emergence forecasts are dependent on CSU's temperature models.

Hydrology and Operations Presentation – Heather Patno (USBR)

Heather Patno presented the current conditions at Flaming Gorge Reservoir and described anticipated WY 2015 operations. The final Flaming Gorge operational plan will be based on the hydrologic classification resulting from the May 1st official forecast.

Q4: Is the anticipated 2015 baseflow release of 1250 cfs determined by Reclamation, or is it based on the Fish and Wildlife flow request?

A4: The estimated baseflow was determined by Reclamation as the release required to meet the winter elevation target. Reclamation has not yet received a flow request from Fish and Wildlife, but a request is forthcoming.

Q5: Given the heavy precipitation resulting from monsoons last fall, do anticipated 2015 operations, and particularly baseflow estimates, account for fall monsoons?

A5: Anticipated operations are based on runoff forecasts provided by the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center. Inflow forecasts generally do not explicitly consider inflows produced by monsoon events due to uncertainty in the timing, magnitude, and occurrence of such storms. While there is some operational flexibility, actual operations and baseflow releases will depend on both storage conditions and summer/fall runoff inflows. In 2015, releases were increased to accommodate runoff inflows and reduce storage to acceptable fall/winter levels.

Q6: Confirm that the anticipated 2015 spring operation of Flaming Gorge includes 7-8 days of bypass at 8,600 cfs, and that releases will be increased gradually and communicated with as much advance notice as possible?

A6: Confirmed by Reclamation.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Flaming Gorge Working Group was set for 11:00 am on Thursday, August 27th, 2015 at the new Utah Department of Natural Resources building in Vernal, Utah, located at 318 North Vernal Avenue.

Presentations

Colorado Basin River Forecast Center – Forecast Presentation

Reclamation - Larval Trigger Study Plan

Reclamation - Hydrology and Operations

Attendees

Name	Organization
Scott Neil	Bureau of Reclamation
Dave Speas	Bureau of Reclamation
Heather Patno	Bureau of Reclamation
John Morton	Bureau of Reclamation
Lee Traynham	Bureau of Reclamation
Peter Crookston	Bureau of Reclamation
Amee Baker	Bureau of Reclamation
Chris Watt	Bureau of Reclamation
Ashley Nielson	Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
Trina Hedrick	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
Matt Breen	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
Jerry Taylor	Lucerne Marina
Tildon Jones	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Webinar Attendees

Bill Schwartz	Bureau of Reclamation
Kevin McAbee	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Jana Mohrman	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Nancy Scheid	Western Area Power Administration