

Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group
May 17, 2013, 10:00 am
Conference Call Record

Attending:

Reclamation: Malcolm Wilson, Heather Hermansen, Dave Speas, Peter Crookston

Service: Kevin McAbee, Tildon Jones

Western: Jerry Wilhite, Kirk LaGory

Recovery Program: Tom Chart, Jana Mohrman, Kevin Bestgen

UDWR: Matt Breen

Hydrology and Proposal:

The current hydrology is in the moderately dry classification. Reclamation recommends operating in the moderately dry hydrologic condition and release water to benefit entrainment or for the moderately dry duration target. The floodplains will be operated this year to fill from the outlet. If operations are similar to last year then the group will be happy with the results. Once Flaming Gorge releases are increased and entrainment has occurred and the system is at a point of diminishing returns with the Yampa River decreasing, how do we communicate back that the gates are closed? There's a larval sampling communication list that includes Dave, Heather, the Service and the Stewart Lake contact at UDWR.

Larval Update:

The prediction on larval fish is tough to make this year because of cold water temperatures. No sucker larvae of any species have been caught in the traps to date. On schedule to continue trapping through the weekend and full bore next week. The biologists have less faith in seeing the fish because of the cold temperatures. It appears that the middle of next week earliest to expect them. Kevin Bestgen indicated that the river isn't close to average thermal conditions, which is unusual with flows like this. There are opposite conditions on the river this year with lower anticipated peak flows and lower temperatures. It is a unique situation. The group decided to save overtime hours for next weekend, not trap over the weekend and begin trapping again on Monday. Bruce Haines will confirm and verify captured larvae this year, which negates the need to wait for lab results. Uncertainty remains whether the Yampa has peaked and what we can expect with flows, snow, weather. Implementation of the LTSP requires patience and the use of daily operations information.

Kevin Bestgen discussed the natural entrainment process for the floodplains. Natural flood pulses decrease and then a new pulse in system attempts to raise the river stage. The pulses are significant and the secondary pulse could be important if at the right river stage. Having missed a few fish early in the year is not necessarily a miss because the reproductive season occurs over period of time with important river pulses occurring in middle or toward end of the Yampa River peak. Waiting for the

secondary pulses is beneficial because it means greater entrainment in the floodplains at higher densities of fish. The highest abundance doesn't occur within the first sighting. It's important to wait for a few days during the flow ramp up, although the tradeoff is that the Yampa is usually decreasing to base flows.

Floodplain Update:

The Escalante (Thunder Ranch) floodplain is currently filling with water through the outlet at lower flows than originally anticipated. Escalante is another wetland being studied this year that the Recovery Program weren't anticipating being available. The Service is comparing Escalante to Cliff Creek to see if the timing is similar. There were reports of carp dropping into the wetland at Escalante.

Stewart Lake: Last year there was clear identification where the experiment was lacking. This year UDWR has weir placement in Stewart Lake to keep out nonnatives and supplemental water when there is entrainment. Last year didn't receive any benefit because there were so many nonnatives. The goal this year is to keep out smarter nonnatives with the goal of keeping the larvae alive longer through the summer before releasing them back to the river. The weir excludes nonnatives in Stewart Lake, which are mostly adult carp. The weir is set at a quarter inch and connected to the cement structure rather than the canal. The weir excludes anything larger than ¼ inch from going into Stewart Lake. If native fish are caught in the weir they will be placed into the wetland. Have a large carp pit already dug so prepared to get rid of those guys. Once there has been a positive id on larvae and the wetland equalizes with river then the plan is to close the gates. Sampling is being done by the Service as part of their long-term modeling rather than by UDWR. The plan is to set additional traps when entrainment occurs.

Old Charlie: The Service hasn't received the permits from the tribe nor have they sent anything. The last communication with the tribe indicated there had been an election and the tribe was undergoing changing membership, which is creating a backlog in the system. The Service plans to look at Escalante Ranch rather than Old Charlie. There is the possibility that the permits could be approved but it's in the balance.

Above Brennan: The Service hasn't sampled Above Brennan to date in order to see if there is any connection. They are planning on setting traps tomorrow. Above Brennan is not a gated floodplain so there isn't a management strategy to be implemented similar to Stewart Lake or Old Charlie Wash.

Next meeting May 22, 2013.