Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group
May 22, 2013, 1:30 pm
Conference Call Record

Attending:

Reclamation: Heather Hermansen, Dave Speas, Peter Crookston
Fish and Wildlife Service: Amadeus Guy, Dave Schnoor
Western Area Power Administration: Jerry Wilhite, Clayton Palmer
Argonne National Laboratories: Kirk LaGory
Recovery Program: Tom Chart, Jana Mohrman, Kevin Bestgen
UDWR: Matt Breen

Agenda:

- Hydrology in the Green and Yampa Rivers
- Larval sampling update
- Schedule next call

Hydrology:

Heather Hermansen reported that flows at Jensen, Utah have already met or exceeded 8,300 cfs for 6 days this year. Recent storms have slightly increased snowpack at high elevation sites. Tower currently has 32 inches of SWE, Old Battle has 24.8 inches and Ripple Creek has 19 inches. The cold temperatures have decreased Yampa River flows. The weather is expected to be warm and dry over Memorial Day Weekend and the forecast is for an increase in Yampa flows sustained between 6,500-7,500 cfs next week. The flows at Jensen, Utah may be above 10,000 cfs if larval presence is detected and Flaming Gorge Dam releases are increased to powerplant capacity.

Clayton Palmer from Western questioned whether powerplant capacity is necessary or whether meeting the 8,300 cfs to achieve entrainment at Stewart Lake at a lower Flaming Gorge release level would suffice. Heather indicated that Flaming Gorge Dam was operated in the 1990s in an effort to time releases and follow Yampa River flows. It was determined that Flaming Gorge Dam releases were more efficient going up to powerplant capacity and staying there because of the variability in Yampa River flows. Additionally, the discussion of monitoring and releasing at levels to achieve targeted floodplains was centered on utilizing bypass releases. Reclamation is open to the possibility of spring releases less than powerplant capacity. Similar to last year, this is the kind of information that will be communicated by the group on a daily basis once larval presence has been determined.

Kevin Bestgen commented that the higher flows provide more benefit than just entraining larvae. First, the “target” is a range, not a minimum. Just reaching connecting flows with wetlands is not adequate, and flows above the minimum provide more flow into the wetlands, regardless of whether they are flow through or single-breach wetland types. Second, Stewart Lake is not the only target here; we are trying to benefit all wetlands . Old Charlie Wash is still in the mix, Escalante may be, and with a bit more water Above Brennan may also be. Thus, any decisions about flow levels need to take into account all wetlands in the mix, and most importantly, what the Yampa is going to do. Third, this is a very different

year than last. The gates at Stewart were closed and flows at the Gorge shut down when the peak was reached because there was no hope that the Yampa might rise again. That may not be true this year; it is still snowing up high. So any decisions about when flows get shut down, when gates get closed, etc., need to be made with Yampa forecasts at the forefront. Finally, even though we are in the LTSP evaluation period, fish recovery and other habitat needs to be considered. Thus, targeting the suite of wetlands out there, not just Stewart, is important. So is sediment movement, and backwater formation, etc. We are still operating under ROD flows, with slight modifications that are encapsulated by the LTSP. Dave Speas had similar comments and concurred with Kevin's description of the benefits.

Larval Sampling Efforts:

Amadeus Guy reported there have been no larval suckers of any kind. When they were sampling Saturday they did catch cyprinid larvae but not razorback sucker larvae. Traps are set at Escalante and Cliff Creek, and tomorrow they are setting the trap at the Stewart Lake outlet. They visited Above Brennan Monday morning when flows were about 9,500 cfs at Jensen, but an earthen beaver dam has breached the outlet or it would be flooding. Tomorrow is the first time the Service will sample traps at the Stewart Lake outlet.

Kevin Besten remarked that based on flows the larvae should have emerged, but based on temperatures emergence is quite a way off. The water temperatures have been cold. If you look at degree days at or above 15 degrees C since January the mean is 880 days before emergence and this year there have been 774 days, at least 5 days more days at 15 degrees is needed.

Matt Breen was asked to clarify whether they would be operating using only the outlet works or a flow through operation. The flow through operation has the potential to entrain more larvae in Stewart Lake. Matt Breen clarified that the management plan is to use the outlet gate and not the inlet gate. Once the observed flows are less than river flows the plan is to shut the gate.

Dave Speas asked whether Aaron Webber was the best contact for LTSP communication this year or whether Tildon Jones should be added to the list as a backup. Amadeus works with both of them and would discuss it with them.

FGTWG Proposal:

Heather Hermansen discussed the most recent version of the FGTWG proposal that incorporates language reflecting the discussion during the last meeting that Flaming Gorge Dam releases would be decreased once the floodplain gates had been shut. The moderately dry classification is 7 to 14 days and not 1 to 7 days as currently written in the proposal. Kevin McAbee from the Service was not available to comment on the proposal to finalize it.

Next Meeting:

May 28, 2013 at 10:00 a.m.