

Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group
May 28, 2013, 10:00 am
Conference Call Record

Attending:

Reclamation: Heather Hermansen, Malcolm Wilson, 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, Kevin Bestgen
UDWR: Matt Breen

Agenda:

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

Hydrology:

Heather Hermansen reported that the Yampa River forecast had decreased from yesterday. It looked like the Yampa River might provide flows above 8,300 cfs on Wednesday, but the new forecast is for flows steady between 7,000 cfs to 7,500 cfs. The Yampa River forecast this morning shows flows at Jensen reaching a peak of 11,600 cfs on Saturday, June 1. Current operations are for Flaming Gorge releases at power plant capacity for seven days but no more than 14 days in accordance with the moderately dry duration target. The Yampa River forecast decreases early next week and with another slight increase around June 6. Snow remains in the Yampa River Basin. Tower currently has 25 inches of SWE, Old Battle has 19.6 inches and Ripple Creek has 12.7 inches.

Larval Sampling Efforts:

Amadeus reported ongoing sampling efforts at Cliff Creek and Escalante (Thunder Ranch). Escalante is filling and they are finding larvae going into the wetland. They will continue sampling and are interested to see if RZ get all the way into wetland. There's also sampling at the backwater Walker Hollow and the Stewart Lake floodplain. Above Brennan currently has a 2 foot high earthen beaver dam across channel that is hindering 9,500 cfs connection flows without the dam. They are interested to see whether connection occurs with at the higher forecasted magnitudes. There is no update on Old Charlie Wash about whether the Service has access to trap at the floodplain. In order to carry through the science related to the LTSP, sampling will be shifted to Escalante.

Matt Breen indicated that with the predicted flows of 11,600 cfs Stewart Lake would have water at the inlet gate. The inlet gate spills over at 8,000 cfs. There was a question about whether Stewart Lake could be used as a flow through wetland this year. Matt Breen indicated that the UDWR plan is to stick with controlling the outlet gate and keep the inlet gate up. Matt also indicated that at flows around 11,600 cfs there is marginal effectiveness in filling from the top. Stewart Lake had good entrainment

last year using the outlet gate with excellent entrainment just over 10,000 cfs. UDWR anticipates that at current predicted flows it will work well again this year. Matt is waiting to open the outlet gate when the Amadeus reports higher densities of fish. Amadeus didn't pick up any RZ this morning at Stewart Lake, but reported the channel is filling.

UDWR and the Service both agree that there will be a similar operation to last year using the outlet gates to back water into the floodplains. It is imperative that they have densities of fish in the area otherwise entrainment will not be successful. The plan is for continued light trapping over the next few days at the previously mentioned backwaters and floodplains. Amadeus has been setting traps at the outlets for a week and will continue to set traps at Stewart Lake. Right now he is trapping close to the gate, but with the long channel from the river to the gate he will start trapping all the way up the channel to see if there are RZ anywhere along the channel.

The group discussed the communication plan and process for informing Reclamation when the Stewart Lake gate has been shut. Joe Skorupski will give Heather and Dave a call when the gate is shut. People are aware of who needs to know. Everyone got messages yesterday. Amadeus has been added to the list and there's good redundancy in communication. There was further discussion regarding whether shutting the gate at Stewart Lake should be the trigger for decreasing releases from Flaming Gorge, especially with the other floodplains that are being sampled and studied this year. Kevin Bestgen indicated that the most important part of the entrainment is keeping track of Yampa River pulses. The Yampa River may decrease and drain some of the flow, but the floodplains act like strainers and every pulse results in new fish. The best possible operation would be a stable release out of FG until the Yampa River is forecasted to continue to decline. The current plan for FG operations is to maintain power plant releases through June 6 in an attempt to catch the predicted pulse from the Yampa River.

The biologists are expecting good production for 10 days to 2 weeks and benefits to entrainment at higher densities. Amadeus reported that current numbers in traps range from 50 to 100 fish, which is much higher than the densities seen than last year, which were around 30 fish. The most upstream point is Escalante and then Cliff Creek and Amadeus is seeing most of the RZ towards mouth of backwaters. He indicated that today's trapping showed fish moving into the backwaters and wetlands. He hasn't detected RZ at the Stewart Lake outlet or Walker Hollow, but pointed out that for Stewart Lake traps were not set at mouth of river. He will reestablish traps through the channel and track it.

Kevin Bestgen questioned whether the Stewart Lake outlet gate should be opened up today with larval numbers they are reporting. Matt indicated that it depends on whether the flows go down again and drain Stewart Lake. If everything works out perfectly then it makes sense. Tom Chart discussed that the forecast is for stable or increasing flows through Saturday so sounds reasonable to open Stewart Lake now. It makes sense for fish entrainment and getting more water into the wetland without having to use as much Redfleet water. Matt is going to wait on Amadeus' results tomorrow indicating larvae per trap numbers through the whole channel before the Stewart Lake gate is opened.

Next Meetings:

May 30, 2013 at 10:00 a.m.

June 4, 2013 at 10:30 a.m.

June 7, 2013 at 10:00 a.m.