

Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group
May 30, 2013, 10:00 am
Conference Call Record

Attending:

Reclamation: Heather Hermansen, Malcolm Wilson, Dave Speas, Peter Crookston
Fish and Wildlife Service: Kevin McAbee
Western Area Power Administration: Jerry Wilhite
Recovery Program: Tom Chart, Kevin Bestgen
UDWR: Matt Breen

Agenda:

- Hydrology in the Yampa Rivers
- Larval sampling update

Hydrology:

Heather Hermansen reported that the Yampa River forecast continues to decrease. The Yampa River forecast this morning shows flows at Jensen reaching a peak of 10,900 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. Reclamation is operating Flaming Gorge at power plant capacity through next week in an attempt to meet the forecasted rise in the Yampa River. Snow remains in the Yampa River Basin. Tower currently has 25 inches of SWE, Old Battle has 18.9 inches and Ripple Creek has 12.2 inches. The cold temperatures are sustaining the snow levels at high elevations.

Larval Sampling Efforts:

Gates at Stewart Lake opened at 7:00 last night. UDWR sees the two different peaks and is planning on latching onto one of them. There is some discomfort with the idea of keeping the gate open to wait for the influx of flows and then close the gate. Saturday evening is the predicted peak at Jensen. The plan is to close the gate on Saturday with Stewart Lake connecting for four days. The group asked if there was flexibility to open the gate again for the forecasted second pulse of the Yampa next week. This is a different flow scenario than last year. Last year the water didn't equalize. Yesterday the water equalized within a few hours. There is concern that opening the gates after they have been closed has potential to lose the accomplished entrainment. Kevin Bestgen indicated that the fish will choose to remain in wetland rather than riding the wave back out. His lab and field observations show fish remain in backwaters. It's not a situation where they will get on the outflow and flush back into the river. He advocates keeping the gates open longer or opening them a second time during the forecasted Yampa River pulse. If Stewart Lake closes the gates, should Flaming Gorge ramp down to base flows? There are other wetlands being studied this year that will likely not be maintained through the summer. The Service wasn't available to ask whether the plan is to pump water into the Above Brennan floodplain to maintain it over the summer. The group is interest in an update on Above Brennan once flows come up

on Saturday. There is a variety of habitat available that will provide short term benefit and assist in recovery of juveniles in the main channel. Real questions tied to LTSP and what Reclamation does with FG is tied to the recovery of the fish. The focus is on the LTSP and ROD objectives and the FG release pattern contributes to recovery. Dave Speas brought up base flows. Reclamation indicated that the FGTRWG received a letter from the Utah Field Office of the Service requesting 40% maximum release rate from Flaming Gorge through September 30 to assist the Colorado pikeminnow recruitment. The reports on adult Colorado pikeminnow from last year indicate lower numbers of fish. Reclamation released 1,300 and 1,100 cfs last year on top of Yampa River flows. The decrease in numbers is potentially caused not from releases but from the fire debris and low water year, which is out of Reclamation's control. There has been speculation in the past that larger fish are lost in relation to low flows in Desolation. Reclamation is planning on managing Flaming Gorge at 1,100 cfs releases through September 30, 2013, to assist the Colorado pikeminnow. It may mean a few feet in the reservoir during the moderately dry year but with a few average years the reservoir will recover. However, if conditions continue to be dry there will be point at which the tradeoff in reservoir elevation will be too great.

With the gate open at Stewart Lake it is a 24 hour operation. UDWR needs help and it would be easier. The decision needs to be made Saturday. The group is requesting flexibility to close gates Sunday with the potential to reopen the gates briefly during the secondary pulse. The Jensen gage is close to Stewart Lake and provides real time flow levels. UDWR indicated they would rather close and reopen the gates than leave them open, although it makes sense to close it and keep it closed. UDWR hasn't sampled light traps in the wetland and will wait for the information before making a decision.

Next Meetings:

June 1, 2013 at 12:00 p.m.

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

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