

**Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group**  
**June 4, 2013, 10:30 am**  
**Conference Call Record**

**Attending:**

Reclamation: Heather Hermansen, Peter Crookston  
Fish and Wildlife Service:  
Western Area Power Administration: Jerry Wilhite  
Argonne National Labs: Kirk LaGory  
Recovery Program: Tom Chart, Kevin Bestgen  
UDWR: Matt Breen, Joe Skorupski

**Agenda:**

- Hydrology in the Yampa Rivers
- Larval sampling update
- Service letter and base Flows

**Hydrology:**

Heather Hermansen reported that the Yampa River decreased below 4,000 cfs and flows at Jensen were below 8,300 cfs. Reclamation had opened the bypass tubes 1,000 cfs for a total release from Flaming Gorge of 5,500 cfs in an effort to augment Yampa River flows and push flows above 8,300 cfs at Jensen, Utah. The FG releases would likely reach Jensen by June 5 in conjunction with an increased Yampa River and that flows would again meet the 8,300 cfs moderately dry target. June 4<sup>th</sup> would unfortunately fall below the target, but Reclamation was planning on keeping releases at powerplant capacity through Friday to meet the moderately dry duration target. The current forecast indicates that Jensen will reach above 10,000 cfs on June 6<sup>th</sup> and that flows would be above the stage necessary to reopen the gates at Stewart Lake. Jerry Wilhite asked why Reclamation wouldn't decrease releases from Flaming Gorge on June 6 because it would take two days for the releases to reach Jensen and the moderately dry duration target would still be met. Heather indicated FG releases take one day to reach Jensen and the current rise at Jensen wouldn't reach the same level if releases were decreased early. Additionally, Reclamation is required to provide 2 days notice to the public before decreasing Flaming Gorge and the current plan is to decrease at a rate of 350 cfs/day to base flow levels of 1,100 cfs beginning on Friday, June 7, 2013.

Jerry also questioned the need to open the bypass tubes at all because the Yampa River forecast remained steady after the past decrease and the moderately dry duration target would be met without the need to use bypass to augment flows. Heather responded that Reclamation made a commitment early in the process to open the bypass if Jensen flows dropped below 8,300 cfs. The current increase in the Yampa includes the addition of the bypass releases and Jensen flows probably wouldn't be as high without the bypass releases. Kevin McAbee was unfortunately not on the call. Reclamation wanted some clarification on the 40% increase in base flows and whether that was calculated from Reach 1 or Reach 2 flow levels.

### **Larval Sampling Efforts:**

UDWR indicated the possibility to reopen Stewart Lake gates. Once the river stage increased above the current stage in Stewart Lake, UDWR would reopen the gates to entrain additional larvae. The plan was to manage the flows until they equalize and close the gates once river stage dropped below the stage in the wetland and negative flows were observed. Peter Crookston asked UDWR why they weren't using the inlet gates. He was out there a few days ago and noticed high water on the river side of the inlet gate and whether it makes sense to open the inlet gate and equalize flows that way. UDWR again indicated that they are not opening the inlet gates this year because the inlet doesn't entrain larval fish well. The flow is fast and perpendicular to the main channel. Additionally, the weir being used to capture nonnatives is only operated on the outlet gate. The goal this year is to entrain as many larvae as possible through the outlet gate and then fill Stewart Lake with Red Fleet water through the summer. Additionally, there's a drop at the inlet gate that was opened for a short period of time because of wiring that needed to be fixed otherwise there wouldn't have been any water against the inlet gate. UDWR indicated that the inlet gate doesn't provide a benefit for entrainment unless flows are above 11,000 cfs.

Matt indicated UDWR had an additional concern to consider because the first time the gates were opened there was very little water that flowed into the wetland. They are concerned about the water quality. There's the potential that the water quality will decrease quickly and fish won't survive. Joe checked on the water quality today, and didn't see that it would be an issue before the second rise out of the Yampa. The fish will likely make it through the second rise and water quality increases because of the Red Fleet water being pumped into the system.

Jerry expressed concerns that there are no long term benefits for larvae at Escalante because it's not gated. Kevin Bestgen indicated that Trina (UDWR) had surveyed Escalante and there is enough seepage to recharge the wetland and they had in fact seen northern pike survive in Escalante through the winter. Escalante is a complex channel and Kevin and Kirk were wondering about the areas that over-wintered the fish. Kevin is sure seepage occurred through the outlet and connects with surface water. Tildon observed that connection through the last Yampa peak. It is the Service's intention to sample Escalante through the summer. Old Charlie Wash is still the first site, but unfortunately is still not resolved with the tribes. The next place is Escalante. The gates were open at Old Charlie this year but the Service hasn't been on site at Old Charlie Wash because of access issues. Tildon unfortunately was not on the call because he would be able to answer questions related to entrainment and management of Old Charlie Wash in more detail. The group thought the ungated inlet connected at higher flows, possibly around 14,500 cfs.

Kevin Bestgen was reviewing the Tetratopography map for Escalante and noticed that the map covers the outlet channel. There is an opportunity for water to go from the east shoreline to the outlet channel. Pike overwintered near the seeps, but the exact location is unknown. It's interesting that it's connecting this year at low flows. Argonne's bathymetry and backwater study indicates the connection flows at Escalante are 11,500 cfs based on the topography at the outlet. The connecting flows at the inlets are higher than the outlet, but data still need to be completed. The thought is that Escalante's

minimum range for connection is 14,000 to 17,000 cfs. The amount of sand that remains at the inlet and hasn't been reworked this year because of the low flows is another issue because it serves as barrier to entrainment. This issue doesn't exist in the outlets because it's hard packed soil.

UDWR is planning on reopening Stewart Lake. The group was encouraged that there have been numerous accounts of high quantities of larvae this year.

The next meeting was scheduled for June 5 in order to discuss the Service's letter and base flow issues.

**Next Meetings:**

June 5, 2013 at 10:00 a.m.

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