

Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group
June 5, 2013, 9:00 am
Conference Call Record

Attending:

Reclamation: Heather Hermansen, Peter Crookston, Dave Speas
Fish and Wildlife Service: Kevin McAbee
Western Area Power Administration: Jerry Wilhite
Argonne National Labs: Kirk LaGory
Recovery Program: Tom Chart, Kevin Bestgen

Agenda:

- Service letter and base Flows

Hydrology:

Jerry Wilhite brought up Western's concerns about bypass flows. Reclamation made a commitment to bypass. Jerry indicated that the forecast is based on power plant capacity and Reclamation could have begun the ramp down on June 5 and not negatively impact meeting higher Yampa flows and still meet duration target. Heather indicated that Reclamation made a commitment to bypass and these considerations will be taken into account next year during the spring operation period.

Reclamation discussed the base flows with the Service and understands that the 40% requested in the letter is based on Reach 2, but the 1,100 cfs calculation is based on the Reach 1 average daily base flow. The Service understood and would like to move forward with that base flow. Reclamation agreed to begin decreasing Flaming Gorge beginning Friday, June 7 at 350 cfs/day downramp to 1,100 cfs base flows.

Service Letter and Base Flows:

The discussion began with the sampling differences seen between Reach 2 sampling quantities in the Service's letter and the sampling quantities in Reach 3 for Colorado pikeminnow. The 2000 Colorado pikeminnow sampling numbers were 31 pikeminnow in Reach 2 and 700 in Reach 3. Last year there were 2 pikeminnow sampled in Reach 2 and 293 in Reach 3. The Service reasserted how critical it is to preserve both reaches with an understanding that the timing of the sampling may be impacting the catch quantities in Reach 2.

This year the science is definitely in the grey area because the base flows will stay above 1,000 cfs but not reach 1700 cfs. There's also the smallmouth bass issue and young of year (YOY) predation concerns. Jerry discussed continued concerns with the current scientific ability to link numbers of young of year (yoy) Colorado pikeminnow to the flow magnitude. The current science doesn't identify a relationship between the July 15 to September 30 base flow and associated yoy pikeminnow numbers. Western is concerned with continuing to operate under a "more water is better" approach without answering some

of the outstanding uncertainties surrounding the relationships between backwater topography, flow magnitude and pikeminnow survival.

Kirk mentioned that the topography relationships from last year indicate an increase from 1000 cfs to 1800 cfs. The data needs to be reviewed annually. Argonne has 10 years of data showing 1 out of 9 years (2003) with counterintuitive decrease in area and volume coupled with higher flows. Argonne samples at the end of July and will report back in August with their findings, which will include a comparison of area and volume available at lower and higher releases.

The Service understands that its request is based on complex relationships and this year may be more of an anecdotal case. There is a synthesis report coming out that will increase understanding of the relationships between backwater topography, flow magnitude, nonnative predation and Colorado pikeminnow survival. The Service has 2-3 logical reasons to implement higher base flows this year.

Jerry Wilhite mentioned the largest contradiction in the Service's request is for higher flows to produce lower temperatures in order to disadvantage smallmouth bass (SMB). The BO requires Reclamation to release the warmest water possible and the Service is requesting cold water to disadvantage SMB. The Service acknowledges the trade off and is trying to balance the release of warm water that continues appropriate cueing of pikeminnow while delaying the SMB spawning to the extent possible. The group discussed the upcoming report and compared the LTSP as the kind of information needed to move forward on a scientific basis. Tom Chart mentioned that the current data shows managing base flows at 1,700 cfs in Reach 2 during the summer. Managing for these types of flows ties directly into Reclamation's need to balance hydrology, reservoir operations and ESA flow management. The group mentioned that the low pikeminnow numbers in 2012 could be related to the timing of the sampling because 2012 may have been a good year. The monitoring and discussion on these issues will continue.

Action Items:

Argonne will send out results of the floodplain topography analysis in August.

Reclamation will continue to look at the hydrology and reconvene the FGTWG if necessary during the summer.

The Recovery Program will communicate with UDWR regarding Stewart Lake management and lessons learned. It will also communicate with the Service and make sure additional monitoring is added for Escalanate this year.

The June 7, 2013 meeting was canceled.