**Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group**

**March 20, 2014, 2:00pm**

**Conference Call Record**

**Attending:**

UCRIP: Tom Chart, Jana Mohrman, Kevin McAbee, Kevin Bestgen, Tildon Jones

UDWR: Matt Breen

Reclamation: Heather Patno, Dave Speas, Malcolm Wilson

Western: Jerry Wilhite

Argonne National Labs: Kirk LaGory

**Agenda:**

* Forecasts and hydrology in the Green and Yampa River Basins
* Proposed spring flow operations discussion (FGTWG)

**Overview:**

The primary purpose of the call was to review floodplain management plans and finalize proposed spring operations to implement the Recovery Program’s research request (LTSP) and managing floodplains for endangered fish during the spring and base flow period under current forecast conditions. Heather Patno led the meeting.

**Hydrology Discussion:**

Heather Patno reviewed current forecast and snowpack conditions. spring and summer/fall basin hydrology and Flaming Gorge reservoir operations information. The March forecast for unregulated inflow to Flaming Gorge during the April – July season is 1,430 kaf (~25% exceedance or 146% of 30-year average) and continues to trend up. This forecast corresponds to the Moderately Wet hydrologic classification. The Yampa River at Maybell and Little Snake at Lily forecast for April-July season is 1,500 kaf (~32% exceedance or 121% of 30-year average), fell into the average (above median) hydrologic classification. Forecasts continue to increase and Reclamation recommends operating in the average wet to moderately wet hydrologic classification for the spring season. Heather calculates thirteen days at powerplant capacity and eighteen days at bypass capacity for a total of 31 days at powerplant capacity and a base flow of 1,925 cfs through the winter and into next spring. Similarly, real time information on observed Yampa River flows and larval presence would guide operational releases.

Hydrologic comparison years for Flaming Gorge unregulated inflow and Yampa River at Deerlodge Park are 1993, 2006 and 2008. The Recovery Program request mimics the request in 2011, which looked at different studies. The request implements the Larval Trigger Study Plan and looks at the mechanics and specificity matrix for hydrology. There is no specific study at the Stirrup Floodplain. The potential for burbot entrainment exists if spills are hydrologically required and presence of burbot exists in the spillway.

Larval emergence is sensitive to temperature. The timing is hard to predict with increased releases between 1,600 cfs to powerplant capacity. Observations on historic data push back emergence time 2-3 days. This will result in flows that will impact the spawning bar and are unlikely to happen.

**Proposed Spring Operations**:

Reclamation proposes similar operations to last year with the potential to bypass up to 8,600 cfs for approximately eighteen days. Similarly, real time information on observed Yampa River flows and larval presence would guide operational releases.

**Floodplain Discussion:**

Tildon Jones reported on the Johnson Bottom floodplain at the refuge. The Provo construction office is clearing out the wetland and breach. The intent is to manage Johnson Bottom similar to Stewart Lake but at flows around 15,000 cfs. Stewart Lake floods at lower flow levels. Flooding this year is expected and construction will occur around February 2015. The flooding will occur over breach and not through the canal breach. The plan is to move water and dry out the wetland in the summer. The grant money includes pumping equipment to put the pump in the river to top off the wetland in dry years.

Tildon Jones reported that Old Charlie Wash is not part of the Ouray Wildlife Refuge and the Service leased the land from the Utes. Discussions with the tribe indicate no access again this year. There’s a new manager, Sonya Jahrsdoerfer, who indicates that other ESA issues are driving the bus.

Tom Chart and Kevin Bestgen indicated that larval collections in 2013 and 2012 were above average and that catch efficiency likely improves with lower flow conditions. Kevin did not expect that the duration of the presence of larvae would increase appreciably as the Green River population increases, but spawning in tributaries could influence that. There were razorback sucker larvae present in the White River in 2011, and ripe adults in 2012 and 2013, but presence of larvae was not documented due to lack of sampling. Lower Green River captures of razorback sucker larvae occur earlier than in the middle Green River and are increasing in abundance there, as over 3,500 larvae were captured in 2012.

**Recommendation:**

Reclamation, the Service and Western agreed to the proposed plan for spring operations. The group recommends similar operations to last year while implementing improved management strategies and maintaining wetlands through the summer. Additional discussion on floodplain availability at various flow levels to achieve LTSP targets and a predictive analysis on larval presence is schedule for the next meeting.

**Next Steps:**

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, April 22, at 2:00 p.m.