SMP Work Group Meeting Minutes January 14, 2011

Attendees: Sonja Chavez de Baca (Se Task Force), Rick Krueger (FWS), Rich St.Jean (Shavano CD), Denis Reich (CSU CE), David Brown (USGS), Ken Leib (USGS), Mike Baker (USBR), Barb Osmundson (FWS), Theresa McGovern (NRCS), Charles McMurdy (Farm Bureau), Steve McCall (USBR), Dave Kanzer (CO River District), Steve Fletcher (UVWUA), Ed Suppes (UVWUA)

I. Subcommittee/Activity Updates:

Technical Review Subcommittee (Mike Baker): First meeting proposed January 24th – Technical Review Subcommittee Meeting (Delta, NRCS Conference Room). Charged with developing the selenium remediation implementation plan

Outreach Subcommittee (Sonja Chavez de Baca): Identified the need to get more outreach done with irrigation entities regarding PBO and SMP. To UVWUA has been the only irrigation entity closely involved with the SMP and PBO processes. The North Fork and Smith Fork sub-basins were identified as a priority followed by other irrigation entities in the lower Basin.

ACTION:

- Subcommittee will work through the conservation districts to get info to irrigators; and
- Handouts and informational brochures are to be developed focusing on: What are the PBO and SMP about? How do you get involved?

SIDE Note: USGS is developing load allocation for salt and selenium for sub-basins in the Lower Gunnison. The SMP Work Group hopes to have some information soon from the USGS to review.

Science and Research Subcommitte (Denis Reich):

Water-Quality Monitoring (Dave Kanzer): Reported that he believes the "18-mile Reach" can be de-listed based upon the data we have from the selenium trend study at Whitewater, Colorado which shows selenium concentration have been on a downward trend and are currently at 4.58 ppb. The River District is likely to make this request to the WQCD.

Dave also reported that the "15-mile reach" may be able to down-list because of reduced selenium concentrations.

Question: How good is our water-quality monitoring program?

Response: We have a good water-quality monitoring program which covers our basic monitoring needs, but there are areas where we would like to monitor if we had

more financial resources. The CRWCD and the STF continue to look for sources of funding to support on-going monitoring.

There is a proposal going to the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) to fund selenium implementation under the Species Conservation Trust Fund (SCTF). The funds would be strictly for the "Gunnison Basin Selenium Management Program" and could potentially fund piping, lining, and water-quality monitoring. We would need legislative support. Steve Miller (CWCB) can keep us apprised of this proposal.

"Canal to Wash" Study Proposal (Denis Reich): Purpose is to understand selenium fate and transport at the farm –level. They had a good meeting on January 13th. Big question the study hopes to answer: What are the biochemical pathways of selenium? The group needs to finalize the proposal scope and budget and find a suitable funding source. Group thought of pursuing NSF grant, but it may make more sense to go after USDA funding. Denis and Ken will continue to work on this.

Endangered Fish Monitoring (Barb Osmundson): Recovery Program folks have worked on developing a draft plan for monitoring the Gunnison River endangered fish; little work has been done on the Gunnison compared to other rivers. Going to look at how reoperation of the Aspinall Unit has affected endangered fish (habitat, flows, etc.). They will collect muscle plugs for the evaluation of selenium.

Barb put in a proposal to the FWS Environmental Contaminants Program for on refuge studies and off-refuge studies. She proposed to get muscle plugs samples analyzed for selenium from three different species in one reach and going to do another reach this summer (CDOW will collect the non-endangered fish samples: carp, roundtail chub and speckled dace which are selenium accumulators). Endangered species samples will be collected by the Recovery Program. Funds have not yet been released to Barb yet. This data will serve as baseline data for our SMP.

Why did Barb choose the identified surrogate species? In 1990 muscle plug samples were collected out of the Gunnison River with same surrogate species so we'll be able to compare. We need surrogate species because there are so few endangered river fishes caught during sampling events.

II. SMP Formulation Document (SMP PFD)

Handout: SMP – Implementation Plan Development, Basic Assumptions

Discussion focused on the identified selenium load reduction target. Stakeholders commented that the number of pounds is moving target based upon hydrology. The 8,600 lbs identified in the DRAFT Gunnison TMDL may be a "worst case scenario" because of the period of flow record used (Note: Period of record included one of the driest periods on record).

Question: What happens if EPA changes to fish-tissue based standard and how does that convert to a water-column standard concentration (i.e. if the water column standard becomes 2.0 ppb).

Homework Assignment: As preparation for the January 24th meeting, Mike Baker asked the group to review and become familiar with the evaluation techniques used in the initial NIWQP "Evaluation & Screening of Suggested Remediation Measures" and identify what remediation options need to be re-evaluated in more depth or up-dated as we formulate alternatives for the SMP Implementation Plan. Also, identify any new remediation options we haven't thought of.

Other comments on the Basic Planning Assumptions

- Changing language in the document where it identifies what the implementation plan "will NOT" be used for. Specifically, stakeholders suggested that the wording be changed to, "the implementation plan does not meet USBR "planning standards" and cannot be submitted to congress for authorization.
- Stakeholders indicated that they thought it was a "good idea" to have a plan/report that someone can take to congress and get it funded. USBR indicated that they would need to talk to upper level management as to what kind of plan level document can be used to get funding by stakeholders others than USBR.

Status of Program Formulation Document:

Steve sent out reminder on sections due, outline of the report. The first sections were due in December and the second set of sections are due in February.

The implementation plan will have structural and non-structural elements for reducing and preventing selenium loading.

Should we continue to do outreach to cities on PBO/SMP and WWU?

Members felt that a meeting with irrigators/water users was a priority at this time. Identified a need to bring them up to speed about the PBO and SMP (The UVWUA has been the only water provider participating in the SMP process up to this point).

Members discussed whether information developed by Del Smith concerning sources of non-agricultural seepage and deep percolation, Fred Fisher regarding pond seepage, or others that should be brought forward to irrigators about water use. We need to be relatively comfortable/certain about what information/facts we are bringing to the public.

Action: Mike will send out Del Smith report to entire Work Group.

Consistency with how we refer to different planning processes/documents

Need consistency with what we call different documents. For example, the "Plan Formulation Document (PFD)" describes the Se Management Program and the "Implementation Plan" lays out the "nuts and bolts" of how we will go about reducing selenium loads and concentrations (e.g. piping X number of miles of laterals).

III. Future meetings dates

SMP Work Group Meetings: March 4th (Delta USDA Service Center, NRCS Conference Room).

Technical Review Subcommittee Meeting: January 24th and February 11th. Purpose is to start to develop the "implementation plan." The group will be looking at selenium reduction techniques.