

SMP Technical Review Subcommittee (Meeting #1) – January 24th, 2011

Attendees: Sonja Chavez de Baca (STF), Ken Leib (USGS), Steve Fletcher (UVWUA), Kristie Martin (Delta CD), Steve McCall (USBR), Ralph D’Alessandro (Delta CD), Dave Kanzer (CRWCD), Denis Reich (CSU CE), Tom Grett (Shavano CD), Dale Woodbury (NRCS – Montrose), Barb Osmundson (FWS), Mike Baker (USBR)

Purpose: Plan to reduce selenium as measured in the Gunnison River at Whitewater in order to meet the requirements of the Gunnison River Basin PBO.

I. What are we doing? How are we doing it? Mike Baker (USBR contractor, planning leader): Mike discussed the purpose of the subcommittee and gave a summary of the different subcommittees.

Dave Kanzer (CRWCD): Expressed a concern over how we are going about the development of the implementation plan in that it has legal implications in terms of commitments from the stakeholders. Specifically, there was a concern with using a specific “number of pounds of selenium to be reduced” (e.g. 8600 lb figure). Dave felt that this was not the correct number to be using in the first place since this number was developed using a five year hydrology period which covered a severe drought period for the Gunnison River. Dave also felt that the Selenium Task Force Lower Gunnison Se Watershed Plan should serve as the document which outlines the specifics of how we are going to reduce selenium loads and what the target is. Dave stated that the SMP Program Formulation Document was described to stakeholders as a guidance document which would not “bind, tie, or commit” any of the MOU signatories to anything other than to participating in the development of the SMP Program Formulation Document (PFD).

Ken Leib (USGS): Presented information on the decreasing selenium load reduction trend at Whitewater, Colorado. Both the NIWQP regression analysis and the TMDL regression analysis methods appear to be valid in both wet and dry years in predicting selenium load reduction needed: there is a ± 500 lbs difference between both methods. Ken noted that the linear regression line says that if we start from where we are at today (i.e. current load and concentration), we would theoretically only have to reduce approximately 2,000 lbs in order to meet the 4.6 ppb standard in average flow years (e.g. 2,400 cfs for the 1986-2008 time period) or above average flow years.

GROUP CONSENSUS 1: The subcommittee suggested that “descriptive” selenium reduction measures be in the PFD and the “nuts and bolts” of the implementation plan in the STF watershed plan / SMP Long-Range Plan. The Subcommittee does not know if this will be acceptable to the FWS. Barb Osmundson (FWS) will discuss our suggestion and concerns with Patty Schrader-Gelatt of

the FWS. The SMP TR subcommittee will continue moving forward with developing the detailed implementation plan.

GROUP CONSENSUS 2: We need to be thinking in terms of a load reduction target based upon our selenium load today. If we go with the 2008 data, we are starting with a target of **approximately 6,600 lbs** (base upon empirical analytical data). This may be a more realistic starting goal for this group. We need to predict our future remediation activities based upon the selenium trend.

Action: This should be a priority for the next subcommittee meeting.

Sufficient progress under the PBO (including the SMP) is tied to the recovery goals.

The TR Subcommittee should look at what the Recovery Program RIPRAP is doing/not doing in terms of addressing factors affecting fish recovery. In other words, we the SMP TR Subcommittee will look at water-quality and other related SMP activities not currently addressed by the Recovery Program (RP) that will help fish meet recovery goals.

Action: Barb Osmundson will bring a copy of Recovery Program draft plan so our group can get an idea of what they are doing.

Question: What are the recovery goals for the Gunnison River?

Response (Barb): They don't have separate goals for Gunnison River. They are tied to the Colorado River goals. The RP will collect muscle plugs while doing their sampling so that we can monitor selenium concentration in endangered river fish and other fish and compare the data to 1992 National Irrigation Water-Quality Program data.

Question: Do we focus on the population of fish vs. a load reduction number or concentration target?

Response (General consensus among group): No, we can't get away from working with load reduction numbers.

II. Conversation w/Steve Miller (CWCB): Use of Species Conservation Trust Funds for canal to wash or other projects.

The "soil health program" concept being developed by Painted Sky will theoretically reduce deep percolation through irrigation water management and improved soil health, reduce nutrient loading from fertilizers by maintaining soil organic matter, improve on-farm irrigation, reduce selenium and salinity loading, improve crop yield, etc.

Question: How does the soil health program tie to basin study for salinity?

Response (Dave Kanzer): The soil health program ties in closely with the Lower Gunnison Comprehensive Salinity Study. The STF and the SMP Science and Research subcommittee want to

collect Se geochemistry data along-side salinity data being collected during the Comprehensive Salinity Study. Steve Miller agreed and expressed the importance of looking at selenium and salinity since remediation activities under both programs are mutually beneficial. Steve expressed that it would be a waste of financial resources and time to have two separate programs looking at issue which are so closely related. A Se program could provide additional funding which would benefit the salt reduction program.

What are our science/research needs? (Steve Miller): Steve requested a concept paper from the SMP Work Group to take to the Salinity Program Work Group meeting to *discuss* with them. The document needs to emphasize how we can “add/enhance” the salinity comprehensive study by working together. Dave Kanzer expressed that it was his opinion that both the selenium and salinity programs needed to get at the “groundwater issue.”

III. Work on educating other irrigation companies and water districts.

Concern: We need to maintain a concerted continuous push/effort to conduct good education and outreach and to ensure that we keep all stakeholders involved and informed. It was noted that up to this point we have been missing the involvement of irrigation companies and water districts (Note: UVWUA only entity closely involved at this point). The education/outreach subcommittee is having a conference call on Wednesday (1-26-11) to discuss options for outreach including possibly conducting organized “open houses”.

Some stakeholders expressed a need for the outreach subcommittee to make sure water providers/stakeholders understand the reality that there is a regulatory “hammer” AND that there is an incentive for water providers and users (farmers) to do something now and be involved.

IV. Next Meeting of the Technical Review Committee & Final Thoughts

Much worthy discussion took place today on a variety of important issues; however there was insufficient time to tackle the proposed agenda for the day. That agenda may be the prime focus of the next Technical Review Subcommittee meeting on February 11 (Delta USDA Service Center, NRCS Conference Room).