

MEETING SUMMARY

SMP Work Group Meeting

December 2, 2016

10:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Location: U.S. Forest Service Office, Delta, Colorado, Center Spruce Conference Room

Conference Call Line: 1-866-541-2318

Passcode: 6191202

Attendees: John Sottolare (Reclamation), Jenny Ward (Reclamation), Ken Leib (USGS), Barb Osmundson (FWS), Jedd Sondergard (BLM), Dave Kanzer (CRWCD), Steve Miller (CWCB), Allen Distel (BPWCD), Ed Suppes (UVWUA), Mike Baker (Public), Paul Kehmeier (Public) Charles McMurdy (Public)

Conference Call-In: Suzanne Paschke (USGS), Jude Thomas (USGS), Travis Schmidt (USGS), Theresa McGovern (NRCS)

Introductions and Discussion of Agenda

The agenda was accepted.

GENERAL UPDATES

Salinity Program 2015 and 2017 FOAs (John Sottolare)

John gave an update on the 2015 FOA projects. One project (Government Highline Canal East End Middle Reach 1A Lining Project) is in construction. All other projects are still developing and going through the NEPA process.

Another FOA will be released in 2017, with selection to occur in 2018. The draft schedule is as follows:

- June 26-28, 2017 – Pre-FOA Workshops
- August 14 – Release FOA
- August 22 – 24 – Workshops
- November 14 – Close FOA (91 days)
- December 5 – 7 – Application Review Committee completed
- January 15, 2018 – Selection completed
- November 5 – All cooperative agreements executed

The 2017 FOA will likely favor pressurized projects. It was requested that an engineer help in writing the pressurization requirements in the FOA to make sure what the FOA is asking for is logical/possible. John will try to have Mark Wernke available at the next pre-FOA workshop.

Critical Conservation Area Designation & RCPP Application (Dave Kanzer)

The public scoping meeting for the watershed plan EA was held in Delta last night. The EA is expected to be finished by Summer 2017. At this point, the Colorado River Water Conservation District (River District) can begin to spend money on infrastructure. The River District will also hire consultants on behalf of landowners to begin creating conservation activity plans to facilitate on-farm planning. The River District will not be replacing NRCS technical staff, but will be acting in their stead. This is designed to lift the load off the local NRCS offices.

The topic of the focus area boundaries was raised during the meeting last night. Watershed public law outlines that watershed programs are limited to 250,000 acres. If the River District applies for funding again, they could potentially identify a new watershed and develop a new plan. For the time being, the River District wants to stay within identified boundaries.

The River District will develop a Programmatic EA for developing a watershed plan. Then, project specific NEPA documentation will be completed for individual projects which are associated with the watershed plan. The River District will collaborate with Reclamation the NRCS to make sure there is no duplication of effort in completing NEPA.

There is a 2017 application process for funding cycle, and the River District should know more about this by the end of the month. They have requested \$10M, which would be in addition to the \$8M the River District currently has. Of that \$8M, 1/5M is going towards the watershed plan. There is interest in projects in the Surface Creek area, which is outside of the current focus areas. If entities want to pursue funding under a new watershed plan, the River District can work with them on that.

Selenium Task Force Items

The STF is still open to figuring new ways to reinvigorate the STF. There may be items in the Grand Valley which are not being addressed because the SMP was created by the Gunnison PBO, and therefore doesn't extend past the Gunnison River.

EPA Final Aquatic Life Criterion for Selenium (Barb Osmundson)

At the end of June 2016, the EPA finalized their new criteria for selenium. This is a criteria, and it does not become a regulation until the states adopt it, at which point it becomes part of the state's water quality standards. States often adopt EPA criteria, however they can also choose to make the standards stricter. States go through cycles of adopting water quality standards, so the timeline for states to adopt this criteria depends of where each state is in their adoption cycles.

For water quality, the current standard is 4.6 ug/L. Under the new criteria, the suggested standard is 3.1 ug/L for flowing water and 1.5 ug/L for ponded water. If fish tissue samples are available, the criteria for fish tissue overrides the water quality criteria. The standard is tiered because selenium is bioaccumulated and not just a water quality issue. Page 99 of the EPA criteria document describes the new suggested standards. Barb anticipates lawsuits whenever the States go to adopt the criteria. Criteria hasn't changed based on lawsuits, but lawsuits could change the rate Colorado requires adherence to new regulations.

Travis Schmidt has collected some data in the Gunnison, however he has not done an analysis on Selenium in the food web as he doesn't have all the data yet. He has completed a historical analysis going back to 1962 on 42 fish in the Gunnison River. He has evaluated water quality

data specifically in the Gunnison River. Based on the data he has so far, Selenium levels in prey fish are 3-4x's the standard values throughout the Colorado River Basin.

If the new, stricter criteria is adopted, existing potholes for Salinity Control Program habitat replacement projects may suddenly be out of compliance.

2016 Annual Report Discussion

John emailed the final 2015 Annual Gunnison Basin PBO Report to the SMP Workgroup a couple months ago. Barb, Ken, and Lesley met to discuss the timing of the report. USGS does a Selenium trend report every year for SMP that is then submitted to FWS in Reclamation's annual report. In the past, we've tried to prepare a trend report without official publication, with the intent to roll it into a 5 year report which would be published. We've had to go back to publication of the annual reports based on the interpretation of USGS' fundamental science practices. This requires more review at higher levels, which then postpones its delivery date to Reclamation.

Barb feels comfortable with receiving an annual report from USGS, with no 5 year report needed. The annual report provides the necessary information. The Selenium trend is essential, but there is other information in the report which we might not need (such as the 85th percentile, etc). The recommendation is to continue with the annual USGS report in its current form, subject to discussion. The trend will be a 20 year moving window. The intent is to show that process is occurring. The report will also include a trend using all the data; however, there are cycles within the trend, so we need to look at more recent events as well because eventually the start-date "trend" will wash out and lose meaning.

The USGS is still on contract to complete the current 5 year report, so they will need to publish a few past annual reports. Once this is over, we will proceed with annual USGS reports. The FWS can be flexible as to when they receive the PBO report, as long as they receive a PBO report every year. Barb would like the 2016 PBO report once we have the USGS annual report to go with it.

John handed out a schematic of general selenium sampling sites which could serve as an example of how piping canals affects selenium loading. We may want to include something similar to this in our annual reports in the future. This schematic started a discussion on whether or not we could quantitatively, estimate selenium reductions in salinity projects. So far, selenium models have been able to give us a qualitative ranking on selenium loading per subbasin, but they have not worked well when trying to associate selenium reduction by canal miles. The Science Committee will look into if there is some way to show our progress other than just the trend.

Reclamation Science and Technology Grant (John Sottolare)

Reclamation has received a \$15,000 grant to investigate available technologies for in situ selenium removal from groundwater, and to identify locations within the study area best suited for a demonstration project. Work involved will include a literature search and site visits. This work will result in a scoping report. The goal is to decide on one or two areas where we could

potentially do a demonstration project. The funding source allows Reclamation to write a proposal and reapply for the grant in the event a demo project is identified.

Education and Outreach Updates

We need to reach out to County Commissioners and Planners, although we don't want to approach them until we have more specific information to give them (i.e. septic tanks increase selenium loading, etc).

Justyn Liff updates the SMP website. She will put the summaries from the SMP meeting on the website. We need to see if there is something more public friendly we could include on the site. We could look at the STF webpage and see if there is anything we could borrow.

Science/Research/Technical Team Updates

As part of the Cimmaron Canal Study, Reclamation and USGS took discharge measurements upstream and downstream of a 7-mile canal section to determine seepage loss. Results showed a loss of roughly 6 cfs. A groundwater salinity sample was taken to determine baseload. Using seepage loss and groundwater concentration, we were able to come up with a salt load number. It's still up in the air how much more data may be required before this number can be taken to the Salinity Control Forum.

We haven't collected selenium samples at Cimmaron below Squaw Creek since 2007. As this selenium would go directly into the Aspinall Unit, and there is not much of a selenium concern in the Gunnison directly below Aspinall, is this selenium a concern to us? The short answer is yes. The reason why selenium criteria is lower in ponds than rivers is because it changes species and is more bioavailable in ponds. Selenium loading into the Aspinall Unit would be a concern because it would bioaccumulate in biota which is then released from the reservoir.

The Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association completed their report on the lining of the EC Lateral. The report is with Reclamation and the Science Team for comments, and will be finalized by the end of the year.

The SC/temperature monitor at the state line gage has been funded through 2017, however we need to figure out how we can get it funded beyond 2017. Discrete sampling continues to be funded by The USGS National Water-quality Assessment Program (NAWQA), but that will not continue indefinitely.

CWCB will approve final payment on the fish tissue sampling JFA in the amount of \$20,000 even though the lab work has not been completed and reviewed the situation with the SMP group. Steve Miller wanted to make sure there was a way to ensure the testing and data reporting gets accomplished and asked members of the SMP Science Team to help make sure the results get to the right people. A status and schedule update memo will be provided by Travis Schmidt in May 2017.

Other Topics

None.

Schedule for next SMP Meeting

The Science team will meet in January 2017 to discuss questions on the annual reports. The next SMP Workgroup meeting will be held in February 2017.

ACTION ITEMS

- The Science Committee will look into whether there is some way to show our progress beyond the trend.
- Justyn Liff will put the SMP Meeting Summaries on the SMP Website.