

# MEETING SUMMARY

## **SMP Work Group Meeting**

November 9, 2021

12:30 PM – 4:30 PM

Location: Remote meeting via Microsoft Teams

**Attendees:** Lesley McWhirter (Reclamation), Jenny Ward (Reclamation), Mark Wernke (Reclamation), Andrew Limbach (Reclamation), Ken Leib (USGS), Cory Williams (USGS), Suzanne Paschke (USGS), Creed Clayton (FWS), Jedd Sondergard (BLM), Dave Kanzer (CRWCD), Raquel Flinker (CRWCD), Jojo La (CWCB), Kenan Diker (CDPHE), Allen Distel (BPWCD), Cheryl DeJulio (UVWUA), Paul Kehmeier (DCD)

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## **Introductions and Discussion of Agenda**

The agenda was accepted, with the BLM's requested addition of the Crawford Clipper Ditch regulating reservoir.

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## **Science Team Update**

The Science Team met in September to review the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) FY22 SMP water quality monitoring plan. The proposed FY22 plan is very similar to the FY21 monitoring plan. The Science Team reviewed the data to see if any adjustments to the plan were necessary for FY22. One site on Squaw Gulch was added to the monitoring plan this year due to work being done on the Cimarron Canal. Lesley sent out the monitoring plan sites to the Workgroup members via a September 28 email and did not receive any comments. The final FY22 monitoring plan will be re-sent to the Workgroup members with this meeting summary. If any changes are needed, there may still be some time to adjust the monitoring plan.

There are still some questions as to whether the Squaw Gulch area should be included in the Salinity Control Program area. The USGS was successful in obtaining funds from the Salinity Control Forum to monitor Squaw Gulch for two years.

USGS rolled out a new format for their annual Se trends report for 2018/2019 which was completed this year. The new format contains the same information presented in the previous report format but has a significantly reduced review process; therefore, the new format represents a cost savings and an expedited process. The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) approved the new format, but because the official data release is in the form of comma-delimited Excel files, it is not user friendly so USGS provided formatted data tables and was asked to give a presentation to FWS and the SMP Workgroup summarizing the results. This presentation will be submitted by Reclamation to the FWS, along with a link to the website. This is the first time the data was presented in this way, and the USGS and Reclamation are open for feedback on this new format from the FWS and Workgroup.

A proposal was put forward to continue monitoring water levels in the 30 Well Network. There are limited funds available for this work. This data collection has occurred over the past seven years, and the USGS thinks it would be beneficial to continue this data collection. The USGS hasn't been monitoring water levels since the end of FY21 in September. This is the item USGS recommends as being a priority to continue funding in FY22.

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### **Next Generation Water Observing System (NGWOS) update**

The USGS installed a number of new gages in the Colorado River basin and will continue that effort this year. Sites for measuring snow levels have been added to the SNOTEL network. More than half of the new measuring equipment has been installed, and the other half will be installed next year. New efforts are being proposed, such as studies of groundwater/surface water interactions which would look at baseflow interactions and groundwater contributions to base flows. There are five focus areas for this work, including the Loutzenhizer watershed. The USGS identified places where there are existing wells to base their focus areas, especially areas with a baseflow supported system in the winter. The USGS is interested in about five to eight wells at each of the five focus areas. There are some proposals which would look at a subset of those existing wells near streams, instrumenting the wells to collect pressure and temperature data, and conducting stream monitoring to look at groundwater discharge and better understand baseflow.

If funding can be identified, there may be an opportunity to modify the FY22 annual monitoring plan proposal to contribute to the NGWOS monitoring. Ken said the USGS can put a proposed modified plan together and send it out to the Science Team for review. NGWOS funding might not be available until the first of next year so there may be a gap in data, or the SMP Workgroup could try to secure funds to do some water level data collection before the end of the year.

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### **Species Conservation Trust Fund (SCTF) update**

Jojo La informed the Workgroup she is leaving her current position with Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) on November 19. CWCB will get in touch with the SMP Workgroup regarding who the future CWCB contact will be for the Workgroup.

Jojo shared the funding CWCB requested for the SMP over the last 5 years:

- SB20-201: 80,000
- HB19-1259: 50,000
- SB17-202: 100,000
- HB16-1458: 250,000
- HB15-1277: 500,000

The SCTF funding originates from the Colorado severance tax. After some core programs receive funding from severance tax, the leftover funding is split between CWCB and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), and SMP funding comes out of the CWCB's portion. Over the years,

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there has been less funding available, and there was no funding available in 2021. The SMP has been a priority for the CWCB to fund over the years.

The Colorado General Assembly develops quarterly forecasts of funding which may be available during the next fiscal year, however these forecasts change frequently. In FY20-21, there was a negative revenue, so that is why there was no SCTF funding available. CWCB project managers were asked to extend current budgets for up to three years. For FY21-22, they are predicting a 620% increase in funding, but because of the FY20-21 negative revenue, the increase is not expected to be much. Currently, there is a forecast for \$105,800 in severance funds for the entire State of Colorado. The outlook is not as bad as the negative figure, but funding still hasn't returned to the pre-COVID levels.

Because forecasting shows some revenue from severance tax for the SCTF, the Department of Natural Resources has asked CWCB for their priorities for FY22. Jojo indicated that she would like the SMP to be one of the top priorities and asked what our funding needs would be. There is no guarantee the funding need would be met by actual funding received. The Science Team will meet on Wednesday, November 17 at 3:30 PM to discuss potential priority projects. Jojo will develop an estimate of the funding amount which may potentially be available to aid in this discussion.

Creed asked if there are any fish tissue samples which might exist, and if there is a priority in getting them analyzed. Cory brought Natalie Day (USGS) onto the call. Natalie sampled every river in the Upper Colorado River Basin in 2017 and 2018. She collected 1,000 fish tissue samples for mercury and selenium. Prior to her sampling effort, only 2,000 total samples had ever previously been collected (from 1960 – 2012), so her effort represents a significant number of samples. The tissue samples were freeze-dried, and none of the samples have been analyzed. Natalie co-authored an article on her research to date, titled *Mercury and selenium concentrations in fishes of the Upper Colorado River Basin, southwestern United States: A retrospective assessment*. The article is available here:

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0226824>

Natalie said some of the fish tissue samples were collected from the Gunnison River and mainstem Colorado. She will look into how many samples were obtained from which species and will provide a cost estimate to get these sampled analyzed. Dave Kanzer requested Reclamation look into whether MOA funding could be used for some of this work. Creed indicated he thinks it would also be helpful to include fish samples in the Colorado River near Grand Junction, as well. The SMP could benefit from more fish tissue data, especially since the future EPA standard for selenium will be based on fish tissue.

Dave suggested now that we have achieved the delisting for water quality standards and impairment at Whitewater, the SMP could turn their focus onto recovery program issues, which has not been a focus with the exception of some data collection. Fish recovery is the secondary goal/objective of the SMP, so it may be time to turn our attention to this effort.

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## **Presentation of Annual Summary of 2018 and 2019 Dissolved Selenium Concentrations and Loads in the Lower Gunnison Basin**

Cory Williams presented the “SMP Annual Summary Data Releases: 2018 and 2019” presentation. It was requested that a horizontal line be added that corresponds to 4.6 µg/L in various graphs to show the selenium standard. Cory will provide an updated presentation to Lesley, and Lesley will send the revised PowerPoint to the SMP Workgroup along with the data release. The data release is citable, so any information included in the PowerPoint can be used by citing the data release.

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## **Other Topics**

### *Update on Crawford Clipper Ditch Company (CCDC) Seepage Issue*

The USGS did some water quality sampling and surveying to investigate the new seeps located on BLM land which began after CCDC’s new regulating reservoir was constructed. The seeps are coming from an area above the elevation of a new pipeline (the Clipper Center salinity control project) and below the elevation of the new regulating reservoir. The USGS won’t have the selenium data until December or January. Jedd is hopeful a meeting can be scheduled after the first of year to review this data, and eventually to confirm where the seeps are coming from. The USGS can do an informal presentation of the data. This would not be citable. Jenny will reach out to Ken Leib after the first of the year to verify when this data will be available and then send out a Doodle Poll to the SMP Workgroup to schedule this meeting.

### *Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment 319 Funding*

Kenan Diker announced the 2022 Request for Application for CDPHE 319 funding. There is ~\$1M available for implementation work, with ~\$400,000 available as water quality improvement funds. Selenium is one of the parameters that would be eligible for funding. This year, the Request for Application is also open for Watershed Plans (either development or updates). The Request for Application is open until December 31, 2021. Further information can be found at [www.npscolorado.com](http://www.npscolorado.com).

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## **Schedule for next SMP Meeting**

Lesley McWhirter is retiring from federal service at the end of this year. Mark Wernke and Jenny Ward are the Reclamation contacts moving forward for the time being. Jenny will send out a Doodle Poll to schedule the next SMP meeting once the USGS data on the seepage issue is available.

## **ACTION ITEMS**

- Lesley will send out the FY22 USGS monitoring plan again.
- The Science Team will meet on Wednesday, November 17, at 3:30 PM to discuss potential priority projects.
- Ken will prepare a proposed plan for NGWOS efforts and send it to the Science Team for review during the November 17 call.
- Jojo will develop an estimate of the funding amount which may potentially be available to aid in the November 17 discussion.
- Reclamation will check whether MOA funding could be used for some of the fish tissue analysis work.
- Natalie will look into how many fish tissue samples were obtained from which species in the Gunnison River and mainstem Colorado River, and will provide a cost estimate for getting these sampled analyzed.
- Cory will provide an updated 2018/2019 presentation to Lesley, and Lesley will send the PowerPoint to the SMP Workgroup along with a link to the data release. Reclamation will also send the presentation and the data release link to the FWS as part of its annual reporting requirement.
- Jenny will contact Ken in January 2022 to verify when the seep data will be available and then send a Doodle Poll to the SMP Workgroup to schedule this meeting.