

Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program
Science and Habitat Restoration Joint Meeting
June 21st, 2016 – 10:00am to 11:45am
Army Corps of Engineers

Decision Items:

- The April 19th ScW/HRW meetings notes were approved for finalization with no changes.

Action Items:

- Mick Porter will send the Statement of Objectives (SOO) for the RGSM Inundated Habitat and Life History Study to Alison Hutson for including language/paragraphs on the possibility of multiple spawning.
- Mike Marcus will send the 2001 List of Questions and the 2005 Subcommittee Transition Plans to individual ScW members to read and review for future discussions.
- A small subgroup will meet to discuss spawning/genetics needs, questions, review and update the existing RGSM Inundated Habitat and Life History Study. Potential participants include: Mick Porter, Alison Hutson, and Mike Marcus.
- Danielle Galloway will write a Habitat Assessment Activity Summary (or narrative) that includes:
 - 1. Total Habitat – what done, where at;
 - 2. Evaluation of Techniques – ex. channel versus floodplain;
 - 3. Habitat Monitoring Program for the Sevilleta site;
 - 4. Site Evolution Research – dynamic, changes, how can river processes use to renew sites, restart succession, how a minnow site can evolve into a flycatcher supporting site, etc.
- Please contact Rick Billings to express interest (volunteer) or put forward nominations for an interim Adaptive Management Team federal and non-federal co-chair.
- Mick Porter will discuss the suggestion of a non-Corps' ScW (Program) representative to the AM team and determine a possible selection and inclusion process.
- At the August EC meeting, Rick Billings will elevate the ScW/HRW suggestions to (1) form the AMT; and (2) consideration of stopping or “pausing” the stocking of fish to the river to determine what the “wild” fish population is doing.
- Alison Hutson will schedule an ISC meeting room for the July 19th ScW and HRW joint meeting.

FY2017 Activities and Project Recommendations:

- Suggested and proposed activities and projects for FY2017 included:
 - *RGSM Inundated Habitat and Life History Study*
 - *Population Monitoring Monthly Sampling Analysis*
 - Population sampling has occurred anywhere from every 2 weeks to every 2 months. An analysis of the population response (to changing environment) can be completed to assess the frequency of the monthly sampling and inform any potential changes.
 - Recruitment tracking has been a strong response, even given all the noise. Response variable and correlation can be picked out.
 - *Habitat Restoration:* (1) Total habitat – what done, where at; (2) Evaluate techniques – channel versus floodplain; (3) Habitat Monitoring Program for the Sevilleta site; (4) Site Evolution Research – dynamic, changes, how can river processes use to renew sites, restart succession, how a minnow site can evolve into a flycatcher supporting site.
 - *Data Synthesis:* Re-investigate the Data Synthesis recommendations.

Future Considerations:

- ScW and HRW discussed recommending the Program consider contracting out Review and Updating of the old Propagation Plan using the Genetics Peer Review as guidance. The contractor could identify (1) things essential to maintaining wild-type genetics; (2) what is the low-hanging fruit; (3) what is needed for matched/single pair spawning; (4) logistics and feasibility of other recommendations; etc.
- It was proposed the Program consider addressing the recommendation of stopping or “pausing” the stocking of fish to the river to determine what the “wild” fish population is doing. This recommendation comes from the Population Monitoring and Genetics Report. There was a decent spawn this spring which means this could be a good year to pause stocking and document the results.
 - If there is continued agreement at the July ScW/HRW meeting, this suggestion can be elevated to the EC at their August meeting.

Recommendations:

- In a joint session, ScW and HRW agreed to put forward the recommendation that the CC and EC consider forming and implementing the Adaptive Management Team (AMT) now.
 - *Reasons for Transitioning Now*
 - (1) both the Corps’ Adaptive Management contracted work and Genetics work will keep moving forward and the Program needs to continue to move forward as well;
 - (2) moving to the AMT provides opportunity to rebuild trust and restart “fresh”;
 - (3) provides a new venue to recruit previous participants, technical agency experts, and encourage (refresh) attendance and participation;
 - (4) current structure is not operating efficiently and doesn’t support best science practices; and
 - (5) with the Genetics and Augmentation group, the Program is funding something that it doesn’t have a say in.
 - *Recommended Structure Changes*
 - It will need to be made clear that the formation of the AMT will result in the “absorbing” or consolidating of all the existing (and previous) standing and ad hoc technical workgroups (ex. ScW, HRW, SWM, SAR, etc.). Those groups will cease to function independently (dissolve) outside of the AMT. However, the AMT will be able to form and dissolve task specific “ad hoc” subgroups as needed/necessary.
 - There needs to be clear directions on how the official merge will take place and expectations/objectives of the AMT.
 - It is also suggested the EC consider incorporating *all* existing working groups and committees. This includes the Minnow Action Team (MAT), Genetics and Propagation group, and the Population Monitoring group.
 - This is consistent with the EC request to have more updates and awareness on how Program money is being spent, especially the Genetics and Propagation workgroup while the Program is funding it.
 - It may take more time to transition these “independent” groups and have a period of overlapping interaction before finally integrating them and incorporating all of their activities.
 - To help the assimilation, the groups could put forward a communication plan describing how they will communicate with the AMT until joined. Having these separate groups continued to exist and more slowly merge with AMT (instead of a strict cut-off date) could offer opportunity for “knowledge transfer.”
 - Regarding potential AMT membership, it was suggested that AMT meeting agendas be clearly set and limited to 1 or 2 topics so that the appropriate agency technical participants can attend key meetings without having to attend all – as long as there is only 1 voting representative per meeting. Agencies would have to identify their experts in specific fields.

- *Chairperson*
 - It is acknowledged that the plan was to hire a Science Coordinator who would head up the AMT - be the chairperson and oversee the logistics. However, filling that position continues to be delayed and might not occur for several more months.
 - It was suggested that the newly formed AMT be headed by an interim federal and non-federal co-chair. It was also suggested that a call for interim co-chair volunteers be issued via email. If there is a lack of volunteers, Rick Billings and Danielle Galloway offered to transition their co-chair roles from ScW and HRW to the AMT in the interim.
- *Proposed Initial/Early Tasks*
 - Task 1: Retrospective Presentations on previous groups, successful activities, Program history, evolution, and activities.
 - Task 2: Over the last ~15 year, what are the questions that have been answered? And what are the questions to answer next?
- It was recommended that a non-Corps representative be an identified Point of Contact between the Corps' AM contract meetings and the AMT/standing workgroups until the Science Coordinator is in place.
 - The purpose of this is to provide periodic updates and communicate group thoughts/ideas back to the AM contractor. And to help ensure that, at the completion of the Corps' AM contract, there isn't "push back" that this is a Corps' project and not a Program project.

Next ScW Meeting: July 19th, 2016 from 10:00am to 12:00pm; location TBD (tentatively ISC)

- Tentative Agenda Items include: (1) Updates on Spring Runoff and Egg Collection efforts; (2) Program Updates – Spring Runoff and Egg Collections, Summer Hydrology Predictions, PASS; (3) FY2017 Projects – confirm list or add projects? activity summaries? Other contracting documents?; (3) Compilation and Review of Previous Program List of Questions – discussion; updating?

Full Meeting Notes

Introductions and Agenda Approval: Rick Billings brought the meeting to order and introductions were made.

Approval of Meeting Notes

- The April 19th ScW/HRW meetings notes were approved for finalization with no changes.

Action Item Review

- ✓ Rick Billings will ask the EC (at the April meeting) to delegate FY2017 funding/project decisions to the CC in order to meet the May contracting deadlines. – *complete*;
 - The CC can move forward on tasks related to the FY2017 budget and projects.
- ✓ Brian Hobbs will provide a “matrix” of Genetics Peer Review Report comments and provide them to the Science and Habitat Restoration workgroup members in advance of the Genetics Peer Review presentation on May 12th. – *complete*;
 - Comments were provided and discussed prior to the presentation. The final report should be available next month.
 - *Genetics and Propagation Discussion*
 - Attendees discussed how efforts should be prioritized from a recovery standpoint. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) has language that allows for use of “augmentation” and “propagation” in recovery efforts; but it was written at time when conservation efforts were just being developed.
 - The intended use of the genetics peer review is to help determine if the breeding programs can be improved and what can be done to move toward recovery by applying the best-available-science to the management. It will be a decision of the

- Program and EC to determine how to best incorporate recommendations – which recommendations, how and when to implement, etc.
- Attendees raised concerns that the Genetics and Propagation is being funded by the Program but the workgroup is not a Program group.
 - The group doesn't keep "official" notes and full notes are not available to others. The group does make decisions but there is a lack of administrative record.
 - It was suggested that this group be included in the Adaptive Management Team (AMT) once formed or there will be a structural/procedure breakdown.
 - Attendees also raised concerns with implementing recommendations without full-participation discussions and clear expectations on the intended outcome. Specific concerns included: cost effectiveness, poor final products, un-useful or unneeded information/data, etc.
 - In an example, it was shared that the Genetics Peer Review suggested the possibility of genotyping all parents. There is an effort this year to genotype 100 fish from each age class in the BioPark and Dexter. But this is 100 out of 5,000 – how is that information useful if it is not used to support a 1 to 1 breeding of the parents? A selective mating program needs known genotype prior to breeding and the involved fish must be tagged.
- ✓ Grace Haggerty will schedule an ISC conference room for the May 17th ScW and HRW joint meeting from 10:00am to 12:00pm. - *complete*

Workgroup Priority Projects for Next Year

- The Coordination Committee (CC) and Reclamation are working on FY2017 budgets and projects. Technical workgroups have been asked to supply proposed activities for 2017 for possible funding. A list of potential activities/projects is needed no later than September 2016.
 - *RGSM Inundated Habitat and Life History Study*
 - A few years ago, ScW discussed a study design to look at the silver minnow spawning cues. Also referred to as the "tank study," a contracting package was developed. However, some Program members raised concerns that a tank study would not reflect actual river conditions/responses. Counterarguments included that with limitations on take, low population numbers, access, catchability issues, and a lack of control on the river a comparable river study is impossible. Minnow Life History was a Priority 1 Activity for ScW and this study began the data collection pertaining to spawning cues, temperature, etc.
 - In part, the study was designed to explore if the minnow lay eggs in "batches?" Can/will they spawn later in the same season? Respawn? All in one shot? If respawning, is it a multiple spawning? How frequently do individuals "respawn?"
 - Additionally, the tank study was to help understand the numbers of fish that might spawn early (as early as April) and how the numbers of spawners change through the course of the season. This information can inform management decisions specifically for how to manage limited water.
 - Some attendees raised the idea of "monsoonal spawners" – could there be a different "strain" of silvery minnow that spawn with monsoonal cues? By only collecting eggs from the spring spawners, have we effectively "weeded out" these individuals? If this is the case, the current spawning program is ensuring that this group will not continue to exist.
 - A small subgroup of ScW members will meet to discuss spawning/genetics needs and questions; and to review and update the existing *RGSM Inundated Habitat and Life History Study* documents.

- *Population Monitoring Monthly Sampling Analysis*
 - Population sampling has occurred anywhere from every 2 weeks to every 2 months. An analysis of the population response (to changing environment) can be completed to assess the frequency of the monthly sampling and inform any potential changes.
 - When first introduced in ~2004, there were discussions and agreement to continue the monthly sampling until some relationship(s) with the October Index Sampling were identified/determined. Once relationship(s) were better understood, the monthly sampling could be “rolled back” to some other schedule.
 - The original intent was to continue the monthly monitoring only for the time to collect enough data for analysis. The monthly monitoring was then going to be cut back (reduced significantly or even abandoned) depending on the analysis. The idea was to have monthly data to determine population response to the changing environment. But there has not been a formal assessment of the monthly sampling with the acquired data.
 - Recruitment tracking has been a strong response, even given all the noise. Response variable and correlation can be picked out.
 - In terms of Adaptive Management, the science needs to be used to inform management decisions and if the monthly sampling is not providing data for management decisions, why is the money being spent?
 - *Genetics and Propagation Discussion*
 - It was pointed out that the genetics group is doing exactly as they were tasked to do. The problem is that we are asking the wrong questions. As a Program, we need to better recognize the appropriate questions to be asking.
 - Identifying (or updating) questions could be one of the first tasks for the AMT.
 - *Research Options*
 - Over the years, there have been many attempts at identifying and documenting “key questions” (ex. 2-page list from the early 2000s). Which questions (if any) have been answered in subsequent years?
 - It would be nice to have a catalog of completed projects through the years. (Attendees were directed to the Project Tracking Spreadsheets, the 2005 Workgroup Transition Plans, and the Annual Reports.)
- *Habitat Restoration*
 - (1) Total habitat – what’s been done, what is the total acreage, etc.
 - (2) Evaluate techniques – channel versus floodplain;
 - (3) Habitat Monitoring Program for the Sevilleta site; and
 - (4) Site Evolution Research – dynamic, changes, how can river processes use to renew sites, restart succession, how a minnow site can evolve into a flycatcher supporting site.
- *Data Synthesis*
 - Re-investigate the Data Synthesis recommendations. Data Synthesis was a Program priority but there has been no progress since it was going to fall to volunteer workgroup members to complete the undertaking – which is massive and overwhelming.
- *Other Projects*
 - There are previous lists of identified workgroup priority projects (see the Long-Term Plan) that can be reviewed for any additional project recommendations.
- Attendees discussed concerns regarding “best available science” determinations and process. There needs to be a clear administrative record that documents *all* the ideas, disagreements and responses, and discussions/conversations. The record should also capture the responsible entity/agency when decisions are made (ex. of permitting process; EC responsibility to oversee Program efficiency with funding/money).

Program Updates

- *Recovery Implementation Program (RIP) Update:*
 - There are no updates or significant changes at this time.
- *Next EC Meeting*
 - Originally, the EC cancelled their June meeting with the intention of meeting July 14th after the Draft Biological Opinion (BO) was available. However, subsequent delays in the expected Draft BO has resulted in a cancelation of the July EC meeting as well.
 - The Draft BO will not be out until mid-July so the EC co-chairs have scheduled the next meeting for August.
 - *07/19/16 Note: The release of the draft BO has subsequently been delayed further, expected late August.*
- *Program and Science Support (PASS):*
 - Proposals were originally due this Wednesday, June 22nd. But a pre-proposal conference only had one interested attendee who expressed concerns with potential conflicts of interest. Reclamation's Contracting Specialists are addressing the questions raised so the submittal date has been extended to July 6th.
 - The Conflict of Interest concern arises from the PASS duties to help write Program Scopes of Work and manage contracts that would then preclude the same contractor from bidding on other technical Program work in the future.
 - There might be a procedure or "firewall" that allows the agency to identify projects or studies that they want to bid on. Those would then have to be developed elsewhere in the Program. But the concern remains if the agency has any responsibilities with overseeing the budgeting process and annual workplans.
 - If no appropriate bids are submitted/received, the structure of the PASS contract could have to be revisited. At this time, the proposal review is still on track for the week of July 11th. This is dependent on receipt of appropriate bids.
 - Attendees discussed the intent to hire the Executive Director and then a Science Coordinator shortly after that. But given the current timeframes and delays, attendees began discussing how the Program could continue moving forward and setting up the new RIP (Recovery Implementation Program) structure instead of waiting indefinitely and losing more momentum.

Recommendation to form the Adaptive Management Team (AMT)

- In a joint session, ScW and HRW agreed to put forward the recommendation that the CC and EC consider forming and implementing the Adaptive Management Team (AMT) now.
 - The PASS contract was to be awarded by the end of July but there might be further delays now. And the contractor has up to 120 days to fill the Executive Director position. The Science Coordinator was going to be hired after that. The Science Coordinator is intended to head up the AMT (i.e., be the chairperson and oversee the logistics). Attendees support moving forward on Program structure changes now instead of indefinite waiting.
 - The Program "culture" has to change in order to get to a recovery-focus anyway, so why not start now?
 - *Reasons for Transitioning Now*
 - (1) both the Corps' Adaptive Management contracted work and Genetics work will keep moving forward and the Program needs to continue to move forward as well;
 - (2) moving to the AMT provides opportunity to rebuild trust and restart "fresh" by (3) providing a new venue to recruit previous participants, technical agency experts, and encourage (refresh) attendance and participation;
 - (4) current structure is not operating efficiently and doesn't support best science practices; and
 - (5) with the unaccountable ("outside") groups, the Program is funding things that it doesn't have a say in.

- *Recommended Structure Changes*
 - It will need to be made clear that the formation of the AMT will result in the “absorbing” or consolidating of all the existing (and previous) standing and ad hoc technical workgroups (ex. ScW, HRW, SWM, SAR, etc.). Those groups will cease to function independently (dissolve) outside of the AMT. However, the AMT will be able to form task specific “ad hoc” subgroups as needed/necessary.
 - There needs to be clear directions on how the official merge will take place and expectations/objectives of the AMT.
 - It is also suggested the EC consider incorporating *all* existing working groups and committees. This includes the Minnow Action Team (MAT), Genetics and Propagation group, and the Population Monitoring group.
 - This is consistent with the EC request to have more updates and awareness on how Program money is being spent, especially the Genetics and Propagation workgroup while the Program is funding it.
 - It may take more time to transition these “independent” groups and have a period of overlapping interaction before finally integrating them and incorporating all of their activities.
 - To help the assimilation, the groups could put forward a communication plan describing how they will communicate with the AMT until joined. Having these separate groups continued to exist and more slowly merge with AMT (instead of a strict cut-off date) could offer opportunity for “knowledge transfer.”
 - *Details on the Existing Genetics and Propagation Workgroup*
 - The Genetics and Propagation Workgroup meet twice a year. The agendas could be described as fairly “generic” in that they consist mostly of updates and don’t usually contain genetics discussions. Decisions are made without official documentation (i.e., no formal notes exist). Typically involvement is UNM, FWS (Fisheries, ES, and Dexter), the BioPark, and ISC; however, the BioPark and ISC don’t have an official vote so there is no process to discuss disagreements with the annual tasks or Genetics and Propagation Plan.
 - The annual plans are basically the same format: as many fish as possible are needed in the river, any “extra” fish go to Big Bend, etc. There are no real discussions or exploration of the science and how to advance the species toward recovery.
 - Some attendees shared the opinion that the Genetics and Propagation group should be an equal participation group (not just a sub-set group) that is under the umbrella of the Program and with the same oversight.
 - Attendees briefly questioned if/how this group might incorporate the Genetics Peer Review recommendations (hopefully the final report will be available by the August EC meeting).
 - It was suggested the Genetics Peer Review be used to develop a Genetics Management Plan with a full suite of clear and available options (including if/then options).
 - This task could be contracted out – to update the old Propagation Plan with guidance from the genetics peer review. The revised plan could include specifics on: identifying what is essential to maintaining wild-type genetics, what is the low-hanging fruit, what is needed for matched/single pair spawning, logistics, etc.
 - It was proposed the Program consider addressing the recommendation of stopping or “pausing” the stocking of fish to the river to determine what the “wild” fish

- population is doing. This recommendation comes from the Population Monitoring and Genetics Report. There was a decent spawn this spring which means this could be a good year to pause stocking and document the results.
- If there is continued agreement at the July ScW/HRW meeting, this suggestion can be elevated to the EC at their August meeting.
 - Other programs typically stock 25% of the assumed population. This “low” number buffer against extinction but does not overwhelm the wild population and genetics.
 - *Monitoring Questions*
 - Other considerations should include addressing the “catchability” issues raised in the peer review - if only young-of-year are being caught, population numbers could be on the low side. New methodologies should be explored to ensure representative samples.
 - This year at the monitoring sites, hauls were documented as having 1 marked fish out of 100. But the latest ASIR data indicates 50 marked to 50 wild. There are discrepancies and to better the genetics and propagations will require a more accurate understanding on what the population in the river really is.
 - Some attendees pointed out that Program funding and basic tasks are currently controlled/impacted by the 2003 BO and can be expected to change in response to the new BO. No individual “groups” can decide to not comply with the specifications and requirements of the BO.
 - Some attendees expressed concern that regulations and requirements should be based on best-available-science. As long as the AMT is also focused on the best-available-science then any discrepancies should become readily apparent.
 - You can quit doing things in a BO if the science shows it is no longer working.
 - There should be a strong documentation (administrative record) process used to identify activities/tasks that are no longer based on best-available-science. As involved partners, the Service could then provide written agreement (or sign off) on the changes. But it has to be backed by a strong administrative record.
 - *AMT Membership (Participation)*
 - Regarding potential AMT membership, it was suggested that AMT meeting agendas be clearly set and limited to 1 or 2 topics so that the appropriate agency technical participants can attend key meetings without having to attend all meetings – as long as there is only 1 voting representative per meeting.
 - Agencies would have to identify their experts in specific fields.
 - During the transition to the AMT, the Program could focus on recruiting previous workgroup participants and encourage past, current, and new individuals to attend.
 - *Chairperson*
 - It is acknowledged that the plan was to hire a Science Coordinator who would head up the AMT - be the chairperson and oversee the logistics. However, filling that position continues to be delayed and might not occur for several more months.
 - It was suggested that the newly formed AMT be headed by an interim federal and non-federal co-chair. It was also suggested that a call for interim co-chair volunteers be issued via email. If there is a lack of volunteers, Rick Billings and Danielle Galloway offered to transition their co-chair roles from ScW and HRW to the AMT in the interim.

- *Proposed Initial/Early Tasks*
 - Task 1: Retrospective Presentations on previous groups, successful activities, Program history, evolution, and activities.
 - This could be an appropriate way to “catch up” new participants on previous history and activities, share historical knowledge and progress, etc.
 - Task 2: Over the last ~15 year, what are the questions that have been answered? And what are the questions to answer next?
- It was recommended that a non-Corps representative be an identified Point of Contact between the Corps’ AM contract meetings and the AMT/standing workgroups until the Science Coordinator is in place.
 - The purpose of this is to provide periodic updates and communicate group thoughts/ideas back to the AM contractor. And to help ensure that, at the completion of the Corps’ AM contract, there isn’t “push back” that this is a Corps’ project and not a Program project.

Next ScW Meeting: July 19th, 2016 from 10:00am to 12:00pm; location TBD (tentatively ISC)

- Tentative Agenda Items include: (1) Updates on Spring Runoff and Egg Collection efforts; (2) Program Updates – Spring Runoff and Egg Collections, Summer Hydrology Predictions, PASS; (3) FY2017 Projects – confirm list or add projects? activity summaries? Other contracting documents?; (3) Compilation and Review of Previous Program List of Questions – discussion; updating?

**Science and Habitat Restoration Joint Work Group Meeting
June 21st, 2016 Meeting Attendees**

	NAME	AFFILIATION	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS	Primary, Alternate, Other
1	Dana Price	USACE	505-342-3378	dana.m.price@usace.army.mil	P – ScW Co-Chair
2	Brooke Wyman	MRGCD	505-247-0234	brooke@mrgcd.com	P – ScW Co-Chair
3	Danielle Galloway	USACE	505-342-3661	danielle.a.galloway@usace.army.mil	P – HRW Co-Chair
4	Rick Billings	ABCWUA	505-259-0535	rbillings@abcwua.org	P – HRW Co-Chair
5	Michael Porter	USACE	505-342-3264	michael.d.porter@usace.arm.mil	A - HRW
6	Brian Hobbs	Reclamation	505-462-3566	bhobbs@usbr.gov	P – ScW/HRW
7	Mike Marcus	For APA	505-379-6891	mdmenv@gmail.com	P - ScW
8	Ann Demint	Reclamation	505-462-3654	ademint@usbr.gov	O
9	Allison Hutson	ISC/LLSMR	505-841-5201	alison.hutson@state.nm.us	P - ScW
10	Malia Volke	NMDGF	505-476-8160	malia.volke@state.nm.us	P - ScW
11	Marta Wood	Alliant Env.	505-259-6098	mwood@alliantenv.com	O – note taker