

# Executive Committee Meeting

## *September 21, 2017*

### Meeting Materials:

Meeting Agenda

Meeting Minutes

Draft Taos Decisions

Questions from BWG to EC

Budget Process Presentation

USFWS Species Update for MRGESCP EC

MAT Recommendations for 2017

ScW Proposal



**Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Thursday, September 21, 2017**

9:00am – 4:15pm

**Conference Call Information:**

**Phone:** 866-564-9902 **Passcode:** 1965181

**Location:** U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
555 Broadway Blvd. NE #100, Albuquerque, NM 87102

**MEETING AGENDA**

- 8:30 – 9:00 **Arrival**
- 9:00 – 9:15 **Welcome, Introductions, and Review of Proposed Agenda**
- 9:15 – 9:35 **Housekeeping**
- **Decision:** Review and Approval of February 15, 2017 Meeting Minutes
  - **Decision:** Approval of FY15 Annual Report
- 9:35 – 9:50 **Summary and Review of April Retreat**
- **Decision:** Approval of April 2017 Retreat Minutes
- 9:50 – 10:05 **Program Manager Update** *D. Lee*
- New Staff
  - Newsletter
- 10:05 – 10:15 **Coordination Committee Update** *R. Billings & D. Campbell*
- 10:15 – 10:30 **Hydrology Update** *R. Gronewold & D. Gensler*
- 10:30 – 10:45 **Species Update** *J. Lusk and V. Ryan*
- 10:45 – 11:00 **MAT Update** *G. Haggerty*
- 11:00 – 11:15 **RGSM Data Acquisition Contract Update** *J. Bachus & J. Wilbur*
- 11:15 – 1:30 **By-laws Ad Hoc Group Update** *B. Grantham and D. Lee*
- Questions from group
  - Discussion
  - **Decision:** Amend the 2012 by-laws, with the understanding that the by-laws are still a work-in progress
  - **Decision:** Have the Bylaws ad hoc group continue to meet as need, as the EC makes decisions on Program structure and organization.
- 11:30 – 1:00 **Lunch (on own)**

1:00 – 2:00	<b>Budget Process</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation: Funding Agencies' Schedules and Processes</li> <li>• Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Timelines for input and partnering</li> <li>○ How to structure process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vetting of project recommendations</li> <li>▪ Coordination with permitting process</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Specifics on what funding agencies need when for proposed projects</li> <li>○ Appropriate funding requests for budgets</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<i>J. Dickey</i> <i>D. Lee (facilitator)</i>
2:20 – 2:30	<b>Break</b>	
2:30 – 3:30	<b>Discussion: Adaptive Management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary of discussions with signatories</li> <li>• Common understanding of AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Definition</li> <li>○ Components of an AM Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Vetting, use, and implementation of external reviews and recommendations</li> <li>• MRGESCP AM Planning</li> <li>• Coordination with 2016 BO Implementation</li> <li>➤ <b>Decision:</b> Formation of Adaptive Management Work Group</li> <li>➤ <b>Action:</b> Tasking AM Work Group to begin developing an AM Plan</li> </ul>	<i>D. Wegner (facilitator)</i>
3:30-4:00	<b>Discussion: Permitting Process</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeline</li> <li>• How to increase flexibility?</li> <li>• Possibilities to start permitting earlier?</li> <li>• Coordination with BO process and AM</li> </ul>	<i>D. Lee (facilitator)</i>
4:00 – 4:10	<b>Announcements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement of Marta Wood</li> <li>• WEST Open House</li> <li>• DBMS</li> <li>• Others?</li> </ul>	
4:10 – 4:15	<b>Meeting Summary and Next Steps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Decision:</b> Next Executive Committee Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Focus on Budget</li> <li>○ October 2017</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
4:15	<b>Adjourn</b>	

**Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program  
Executive Committee Meeting  
September 21, 2017 – 9:00am to 4:15pm**

**Bureau of Reclamation  
Conference Call information:  
Phone: 1-866-564-9902 Passcode: 1965181**

**Decisions**

- With a quorum present and no objections voiced, the February 15, 2017 EC meeting summary was approved for finalization with no changes.
- With a quorum present and no objections voiced, the FY2015 Program Annual Report was approved for finalization with no changes.
- With a quorum present and no objections voiced, the April 2017 EC Retreat summary was approved for finalization with no changes.
- With a quorum present and no objections voiced, the EC directed the By-laws ad hoc group to continue the by-laws revision process. Amendments will be presented to the EC for approval as they are completed.
- With a quorum present and no objections voiced, the EC approved the revisions to the Purpose statement (Section 1) of the by-laws.
- There was general agreement to clarify the “supermajority” voting option (as outlined in the by-laws) as 75% of the *full signatory membership* for now. The caveat is that the by-laws (and supermajority designation) can always be modified as needed.

**Actions**

- Debbie Lee will incorporate the EC’s decision to support all listed endangered species in the Middle Rio Grande into the Taos Key Decisions list.
- In a roundtable format, agency representatives expressed intentions to provide regular updates if/as appropriate for inclusion in the Program newsletter.
- Rick Billings will email a digital copy of ABCWUA’s Proposed Science Strategy to Debbie Lee for electronic distribution.
- Comments and feedback on the Data Acquisition Datasets are due to Jennifer Bachus and Jim Wilber by September 29. (The six (6) datasets are: (1) population monitoring data 1993-2013; (2) population estimation data 2006-2011; (3) spawning monitoring/egg data 2002-2013; (4) river intermittency analysis data; (5) replication studies data; and (6) mark/recapture studies data.)
- Dave Wegner and Julie Dickey will prepare information on additional funding opportunities (ex. over targets, non-federal lobbying, plus ups) and how that would interact within the budget timelines and schedules.
- Signatories are requested to provide their FY2018 Program Budgets/Program projects (and if possible/applicable their FY2017 actuals) to Debbie Lee by Friday, September 29.
- Brent Esplin and Jennifer Faler will determine the feasibility for the EC/CC to view already awarded contracts (either in full or in part). The concern is in regards to understanding any changes that might have occurred after the Scopes of Work (SOW) were submitted to Reclamation’s contracting office in order to ensure the next year’s SOWs are written accordingly.

- Grace Haggerty will supply Jennifer Faler with a list of specific project SOWs of concern that might have undergone changes after submittal by the work groups (specifically the genetics scope and population monitoring scope).
- Comments on the proposed general adaptive management timelines presented today should be provided to Debbie Lee.
- Both the federal and non-federal agencies will each designate three (3) EC representatives to form an interim Adaptive Management Development group. Member designations are to be submitted to Debbie Lee no later than Friday, September 29.
- Dave Campbell will email Debbie Lee with the Service's website link for information on the basic permitting guidelines for Region 2.
- Luc Moulson will send out a Doodle Poll to set the next EC meeting for early December.

### Requests/Recommendations

- The EC directed WEST to continue developing a Program newsletter every other month. In order to ensure a newsletter is provided in advance of each EC meeting, additional newsletters will be generated as appropriate to correspond with EC meeting schedules.
- It was suggested there be a standing EC agenda item for by-law revision progress and amendment approval.
- The EC tasked the By-laws subgroup with providing a recommendation on the use of "committee" versus "team" versus "work group" in the Program by-laws.
- It was requested that the *Budget Cycles and Potential MRGESCP Planning Opportunities* presentation be updated to reflect the clarification that Reclamation is currently preparing a budget for FY2018 and not budget request planning for FY2018.
- The EC requested that the practice of providing updated budget/project spreadsheets (to the CC and EC) on a regular basis be resumed.
- It was suggested that signatories make a concerted effort to reach out to local congressional staff with specific and strategic meeting invitations. It was noted that the meetings should be worthwhile and contain educational/outreach components.
- It was suggested that WEST pull together all Biological Opinions (BOs) that might contribute to the "big picture" for the Middle Rio Grande. There was a previous presentation to the EC on these BOs which WEST can build on.
- It was suggested that a subgroup of five (5) or six (6) EC members form an interim Adaptive Management Development group with the task of providing recommendations on how to form the full Adaptive Management Team (AMT) and move forward with developing an AM program. It was suggested the AMT descriptions captured in the Recovery Implementation Program (RIP) documents be used as guidance.
  - Additional tasks for the group include: (1) to "flesh" out the technical pieces (administrative and management) for inclusion in the By-laws; (2) provide strawman suggestions on how the Long-Term Plan (LTP) might interact/relate to AM; (3) propose how the use/implementation of external review might be included in the AM framework; and (4) provide recommendations to the full EC on how to use science and make decisions during this transition period before a full AM program is in place.

### Announcements

- The Minnow Action Team (MAT) is expected to meet next in January 2018.

- As of October 1, 2017 WEST will be taking over the Program's note taking services.
- The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has agreed to take over the management of the Program's Database Management System (DBMS). There will be a phased approach to the enhancement and overhaul of the database that is expected to begin by January 2018 and conclude in February 2019.
- WEST's Open House is tomorrow (Friday, September 22) from 3:00pm to 6:00pm.
- BEMP's Fall Field Tour is scheduled for October 26 from 10:00am to 1:00pm. The tour will include visits to three (3) sites in Belen. Invitations will be forthcoming.

**Next Meeting: TBD (early December), location TBD**

- Tentative Meeting Agenda Items: (1) Explanation of changes to the Population Monitoring SOW (Reclamation); (2) ABCWUA Draft Science Strategy; (3) Updates on the budget process; (4) permitting process.
- Future Agenda Items: (1) Clarification on how projects reach the EC (for discussion/approval) with specific explanation on how/why the Population Monitoring Group Study and the incorporation of Peer Review Recommendations for population monitoring missed the "queue" two (2) years in a row (2017/2018).

## Meeting Summary

**Introductions and Agenda Approval:**

- Brent Esplin brought the meeting to order. This is the first meeting of the Executive Committee (EC) since the Department of Interior (DOI) Federal Advisory Committee Act review over the summer. The last regular meeting of the EC was in February 2017. Introductions were made and the agenda was reviewed and approved with no changes.

**Approval of the February 15, 2017 EC Meeting Summary:**

- The February 15, 2017 EC meeting summary was approved for finalization with no changes.

**Approval of the FY2015 Annual Report:**

- The Program's FY2015 Annual Report was projected for brief review. In future reports, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) should be included in the list of federal fiscal agents (see report p. 6).
- With a quorum present and no objections voiced, the FY2015 Program Annual Report was approved for finalization with no changes.

**Summary and Review of April 2017 EC Retreat:**

- The key decisions from the April 2017 EC Retreat in Taos were reviewed.
  - One member recalled a decision to include all the listed species in the Middle Rio Grande. The decisions log will be updated accordingly.
- With a quorum present and no objections voiced, the April 2017 EC Retreat summary was approved for finalization with no changes.

**Program Manager Update:**

- In April, WEST hired Debbie Lee as the Program Manager. Additional staff was hired over the summer.
  - Dave Wegner was hired as the Program Science Coordinator. Mr. Wegner briefly shared his education and experience. His last formal posting was on U.S. House Committee on

Natural Resources as well as the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. One priority task for the Science Coordinator is to get an Adaptive Management (AM) framework developed and implemented.

- Julie Dickey is the new Program Assistant. Ms. Dickey briefly shared her education and experience. She will oversee the scheduling and facilitation of Program meetings, develop future annual reports, etc.
- Luc Moulson is a Project Coordinator who will develop the newsletters as well as assist in the planning and running of meetings. Mr. Moulson briefly shared his education and experience.
- *Additional Staff:* Mr. Wegner divides his time between Tucson, Arizona, and Durango, Colorado. He will be in Albuquerque as needed. WEST will hire a local Deputy Science Coordinator located in Albuquerque who will be involved in the work groups, adaptive management groups, and day-to-day Program operations.
- *Newsletter:* In order to focus EC meetings on the substantive discussions and decisions, Program and agency updates are being reported in a newsletter format. WEST will solicit updates but agencies are welcome to volunteer updates at any time. Requests for specific updates can also be submitted.
  - There was general agreement that the newsletter should be issued every other month. In order to ensure a newsletter is provided in advance of each EC meeting, additional newsletters will be generated as appropriate to correspond with EC meeting schedules.

#### **Coordination Committee (CC) Update:**

- The CC met in early September. During that meeting the intent of sunseting the CC was raised and attendees noted the value of the CC brought to the Program, and expressed the desire for the CC to continue. Recently, the CC has been involved with the development and review of the Scopes of Work (SOW) for the proposed FY2018 projects.
- *Science Strategy:* Over the past few months, there has been a lot of discussion around the issue of science, the need for “good” science, and focusing the Program as the science hub. The Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (ABCWUA) drafted a preliminary science strategy for consideration. Ideas on how the Program is unique and how it can improve operations are included in the document. If science is to drive the Program, this will be an important topic for future discussions. *Please note this is an agency perspective that has not been discussed at the CC yet.*

#### **Hydrology Update:**

- A detailed summary of the hydrology and operations for the spring and summer were shared.
  - Mother Nature provided a decently wet year for both agricultural and endangered species needs. Rio Grande Compact (Compact) article VII was lifted in the spring allowing the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) to store ~120,000 ac-ft in El Vado with little impact on the spawning flows. Additional storage occurred over the summer but only when the Rio Chama was at capacity. The MRGCD and Reclamation worked together to prevent a sharp descending limb. A small but consistent supply of water was provided to key spill locations (drains/wasteways) over the summer. The impact of this small but steady flow was shared with an example of the Los Chavez outfall that is now a shaded, vegetated, meandering wetland area (partly with thanks to a beaver dam).
  - Even with decent/good spring runoff, summer drying always remains a concern. Many of the fish would perish if not for the water management that occurs in the valley. The water deliveries and returns the MRGCD oversees help keep the main channel wet and lessen the amount of river miles that dry.

- There are no expected changes for the remainder of September or October. The MRGCD will continue water delivered through October 31 this year. This is a full irrigation seasons instead of the shortened seasons as in recent years. The positive take-away is that there has been good water supply for irrigators and it continues to help Reclamation with supplemental water release efficiency.
  - This year was the first time in a long time that there has been sufficient head in the ditches to allow the agricultural community to irrigate efficiently. Without sufficient head, there is not enough pressure to push the water down the field. This results in crop issues and irrigators end up using even more water. For example, this year irrigators were able to water a field in 24 hours compared to taking a full week to accomplish the same.
- New Mexico (NM) has an accrued Compact debit of 20,300 ac-ft for 2017. This is well below the 200,000 ac-ft debit that would put NM out of Compact compliance. The end-of-year Compact deliveries will occur in November and December. It is hoped that Article VII restrictions will be lifted early next year (2018) allowing for early storage.
  - The challenges associated with the sediment plug were briefly discussed including the increase in depletions. The 3-mile plug formed as snow melt runoff descended into the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (BDANWR). Plug removal was accomplished by cutting a through channel but it took four (4) weeks. It will take a coordinated effort to ensure another plug isn't formed. This means having "slower" Compact deliveries, avoiding overbanking flows, and monitoring.
- Reclamation shared that this was the second highest diversion year for the San Juan-Chama project since project construction (158,209 ac-ft as of September 19), only surpassed by diversions in 1979. Reclamation will be doing an After Action Report on the sediment plug to evaluate possible changes for any future plugs/actions. Reclamation will be determining possible FY2018 storage restrictions and planning efforts as early as possible.
- Attendees discussed the situational realities that the river is more efficient at lower flows and that higher flow years are less efficient (good species conditions but increased evaporation and more water delivery requirements). This could have implications for the future in terms of long-term population management in any given year.

### Species Update:

- *Rio Grande silvery minnow (minnow or RGSM):*
  - In July, the minnow population was recorded at 65 minnow/100m<sup>2</sup>. As expected, the current population level declined and is currently 42 minnow/100m<sup>2</sup>. It is a typical trend for the population to decline by late summer.
  - In response to a question on the possibility of "too many fish," it was shared that there is a carrying capacity that could impact the population but the decrease is expected given typical summer trends. There was approximately 20 miles of river drying so far this year.
  - The NM Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) continued monitoring this year following the larval surveys and spring work. Analyses could indicate if there are any noticeable or significant density differences between the reaches. Once available, the results will be presented to the EC.
- *Southwestern willow flycatcher (flycatcher or SWFL):*
  - Flycatcher data are still preliminary but final numbers are expected by late December. There were 357 territories this year with about 14 additional territories in the BDANWR. Flycatcher territories appear to have increased in response to the sediment plug so there is one positive outcome. In terms of recovery goals, the flycatcher populations are doing well. This is partly in response to the expansive overbanking which seems to encourage the birds to explore suitable habitat despite tendencies of site fidelity.



- *Tamarisk leaf beetle (beetle):*
  - The flycatcher currently occupies a mixture of habitat – native vegetation and salt cedar (also known as tamarisk). BDANWR has an extensive salt cedar removal program underway that will hopefully result in the generation of native vegetation. However, there was a big influx of beetle this year and the impacts of the beetle remain of great concern. It appears that infested salt cedar did not refoliate this summer.
  - The Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program (BEMP) has been collecting beetle data and will be exploring the statistical implications of the field data.
  - In response to a question regarding the flycatcher population not in BDANWR, it was shared that the territories are randomly distributed with some in Belen, the Sevilleta, and Tiffany Fire area. Some individual birds were detected in the Albuquerque oxbow area and in Taos but there are no established territories in these areas. The Pueblo of Isleta (Isleta) did not monitor for flycatcher this year but the existing territories are assumed to remain. The Pueblo of Santa Ana (Santa Ana) had one nest detected but the eggs were preyed upon.
- *Yellow-billed cuckoo (cuckoo):*
  - The cuckoo populations fluctuate year to year. There were 356 cuckoo detections this year but the territory information will not be available until late December.
- *New Mexico meadow jumping mouse (mouse):*
  - Last year the mouse was detected within 36 photographs taken at 10 locations on BDANWR. Monitoring continues until mid-October when hibernation activities begin.

#### **Minnow Action Team (MAT) Update:**

- A printed copy of the MAT update was provided at the meeting. In a brief review, it was shared that the MAT met in April 2017 to discuss the spring forecasts and model predictions and to coordinate spring efforts. The group met again in June to discuss plans and preparations for summer drying.
  - The spring runoff recommendations were briefly reviewed. As conditions were expected to be good, the MAT had no recommended special operations or modifications.
  - At the June meeting, USACE and SWCA presented on water operations and overbank floodplain monitoring, respectively. Because individual agencies conducted the monitoring efforts there is a need to collect and consolidate the data.
  - The MAT is expected to convene again in January 2018.
- *Agency Efforts*
  - ISC has been completing monthly monitoring by boat to better determine numbers and location of larval fish. The results of this work, including any reach differences, are not available yet. ISC is also funding an otolith study in coordination with SWCA and the BioPark to determine actual spawning dates. This information will help inform the minnow spawning response to cues (actual spawn dates) and length/age calculations.
    - The otoliths were taken from larval fish collected on the floodplain at four (4) habitat restoration sites in Albuquerque. Otoliths from larval fish collected in the Isleta and San Acacia reaches may also be included.
    - The first of the SWCA reports is expected within the next several weeks. The otolith study will not be completed until next summer as there will be a hatchery study next spring to validate the field data.
  - There was no opportunity for the MRGCD to conduct the drain/outfall drying monitoring this year. However, this study could be implemented on short notice in the future.

#### **RGSM Data Acquisition Contract Update:**

- Since 1993, Reclamation has contracted minnow population monitoring and six (6) resulting datasets. However, the raw data was not requested (or required) prior to 2014. The Population Viability Analysis (PVA) group identified the need for these raw datasets for additional/future analyses. Since 2014 Reclamation has updated contract language to include raw data as part of contract deliverables. Four (4) years ago, Reclamation re-contracted with ASIR to get the raw data from 1993 to 2013. This effort is nearing completion and the draft datasets have been provided. The final datasets are expected in November.

#### **By-laws Ad Hoc Group Update:**

- The EC formed an ad hoc By-laws subgroup at the April Retreat. Tasked with reviewing and updating the 2012 Program By-laws, the group has begun reframing and reformatting the document. No substantive changes will be made without guidance from the EC.
- *Requested EC Feedback*
  1. *Purpose Statement*
    - The By-laws group reformatted the language of the Purpose Statement in Section 1. Language on the Program boundaries was added and the information on the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was removed.
    - With a quorum present and no objections voiced, the EC approved the revisions to the Purpose statement (Section 1) of the By-laws.
  2. *75% Supermajority Decisions*
    - The 2012 By-laws contain voting contingencies for the possibility of a decisional impasse. However, there is no specification whether the supermajority is 75% of the *full EC membership* or of the *EC quorum*.
    - It was noted that supermajority voting has never had to be implemented before.
    - Attendees discussed benefits and concerns with either approach.
      - Voting based on the EC quorum could provide incentive for attendance;
      - There is value in the diversity of views represented by the signatories; ensuring the discussions and decisions represent the greatest number of interests should be a priority; this approach supports using a supermajority of the full membership;
      - Concerns were raised that non-federal agencies “outnumber” the federal agencies; a supermajority of the EC quorum rewards regular attendance and “levels out” the imbalance;
      - Others countered that while the non-federal agencies might numerically outnumber the federal agencies, there is a perception that the federal agencies have a much stronger influence and there needs to be a safeguard that prevents a small number from being able to drive the Program without everyone’s input;
      - A supermajority based on a quorum could mean the ability to vote regardless of attendance instead of having to delay decisions until at 75% of the full membership is present;
      - It was suggested that an EC quorum of 50% can make consensus decisions and conduct regular business; but full membership should be called to address rare occasions of impasse;
    - There was general agreement to clarify the “supermajority” voting option in the by-laws as 75% of the *full EC membership* for now. The caveat is that the by-laws (and supermajority designation) can always be modified as needed.

### 3. *Definition of team, committee, and work group*

- The terms “team”, “committee”, and “work group” appear to be used interchangeably in the 2012 By-laws. The By-laws ad hoc group is requesting guidance on term usage and preference.
- It was suggested that there are two (2) different organizational levels: (1) a “committee” is a more permanent body that makes decisions or recommendations; it may or may not have a set duration; and (2) “teams” and “work groups” are short-term, task-based groups that exist only as needed/necessary.
- The EC tasked the By-laws ad hoc group with providing a recommendation on the use of “committee” versus “team” versus “work group” in the Program by-laws.

### 4. *Incremental Revisions and Approval*

- The By-laws ad hoc group would like to recommend that the 2012 By-laws be amended incrementally as EC decisions are made. Regular updates and section revisions can be provided to the EC as appropriate. Once updates have been made, the EC can then adopt a completed version.
  - While some concern was expressed with the risk of completing the revision piecemeal, there was general agreement that documents are easier to review incrementally through an iterative process.
- The EC directed the By-laws ad hoc group to continue the by-laws revision process. It was suggested there be a standing EC agenda item for by-law revision progress and amendment approval.

### **Budget Process:**

- Julie Dickey presented *Budget Cycles and Potential MRGESCP Planning Opportunities*. The purpose is to evaluate budget cycles and timelines to determine the potential for Program work planning and input into budget formulation.
- There are five (5) resource agencies that have been included in this presentation: Reclamation, USACE, ABCWUA, the MRGCD, and ISC. At the April retreat, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Ecological Services (ES) Division offered to investigate whether it could be a potential resource for funding. However, the Service’s ES Division does not have the opportunity to make budget requests and their budget is set for them.
  - Reclamation (DOI) is on a 3-year-out budget planning cycle.
  - USACE is a Department of Defense agency and is on a 2-year-out budget planning cycle.
  - The MRGCD has a Board of Directors that approves budgets and funding on an annual basis.
  - ISC has a Commission that reviews and approves state appropriations on an annual basis.
  - ABCWUA has a Board of Directors that reviews and approves the budget on an annual basis.
- *Timelines and Opportunities*
  - February to March (ISC)
  - March to May (Reclamation 1-year-out work planning)
  - June to October (Reclamation 3-year-out budget formulation input)
  - July to August (ISC)
  - August to October (MRGCD and ABCWUA)
  - October to March (USACE)
- *Discussions and Additional Opportunities*

- It was clarified that USACE, has historically had approximately \$2.5 million annually toward Program activities. Anything above and beyond (i.e., future projects) would need to be planned in advance and have a strong justification to be considered.
  - Additional details on the USACE funding processes were provided. Operations and Maintenance (O&M) money is provided as a “lump sum” which allows for some flexibility on how the money can be used throughout the year. Given the USACE’s authorization, the agency requests EC direction in reference to the Long-term Plan on proposed project funds already appropriated and received.
  - The USACE requests are developed and processed internally at the various levels of management (for regions and districts). Headquarters (HQ) provides the requests and justifications to Washington.
    - WRDAs (Water Resources Development Acts) generally (re)authorize new activities or operational changes that are added to the pool of existing activities. Expanded operation packages can be developed and submitted for consideration. WRDAs typically do not appropriate funds for USACE activities - project funding is provided through the annual appropriations process for the agency. Work packages (such as Cochiti Dam and the Program) have to compete (nationally) for funds. It was noted that each line item has to be justified but if the case is presented, changes are incorporated about 75% of the time. The USACE’s current authority is limited to planning and studies.
- For Reclamation, the Area Offices (AO) formulate their targets and office priorities. The targets for the Albuquerque AO (AAO) are going down due to several large project items that are underway. Congress can add “plus-up” money intended for certain funding categories. When those plus-ups come to a region, the agency distributes the funds among all the districts as needed/appropriate. Unless Washington decides to increase Reclamation funds, it is unlikely the AAO will have any target increases in the next few years.
  - It is possible for Reclamation to receive “walk-down” instructions specifying which programs are not to be affected by budget cuts. Reclamation can also submit “over-target” requests. Even if funding is unsuccessful, over-target requests can be a way to introduce the need/project.
- The support of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is important for raising awareness and educating Washington. There is so much competition and successful funding bids make their voices heard.
  - Individual agencies participate in congressional visits to raise awareness about agency and NM specific issues. But the last Program focused visit as a group was several years ago, around 2012. In contrast, the San Juan Recovery Implementation Program sends a group every year to lobby for funding. For lobbying to be successful, there has to be a strong Program that can be sold to Congress as a successful project.
- It was requested that the *Budget Cycles and Potential MRGESP Planning Opportunities* presentation be updated to reflect the clarification that Reclamation is currently preparing a “budget justification for FY2018” and not “budget request planning for FY2018.”
- In response to a question on potential changes in priorities, it was clarified that the federal agencies have some flexibility to adjust as appropriate and execute the highest priorities (at the agencies discretion) even if those have changed since the budget request was submitted.
- *Long-Term Plan (LTP)*

- While understanding the opportunities for input into different funding cycles is important, it was commented that the Program really needs a strong work plan that includes all the different projects and funding scales (short/long-term, small projects versus phased projects, etc.). Otherwise the Program will not be able to take advantage of every single opportunity when it arises. The LTP will define the purpose of the Program and future money requests. It is within WEST's scope of work to help the Program develop a LTP.
  - In response, it was shared that WEST will be work with each of the funding agencies to determine what each has already funded and what is in their queue.
- *Changes in Scopes of Work*
  - A concern was raised regarding potential changes to SOWs after submittal to Reclamation. The Program would like to see the awarded contracts (at least the technical portions) in order to better understand any changes that might have been included. The intent is to assist the Program moving forward as productively as possible by adjusting the next scopes appropriately. It is understood that some contracting information might remain confidential.
- *Interagency Agreements (IA)*
  - A concern was raised that IAs might have some budgetary implications or impacts on the resources for the larger group. Information on the IAs could help define the big picture and support a more productive process.
    - It was responded that the IAs have not been built yet but historic trends guide what can be expected in the future.
    - It was noted that this is not just an "academic exercise" - Program agencies may one day have to explain in a court of law how money was spent. Claiming ignorance isn't a defense. While the Program itself is not a part of the 2016 Reclamation and Partners Biological Opinion (BO), individual agencies are and there is crossover in projects. The Service's Genetics and Propagation and Augmentation work groups are included on the Program budget. They are also required by the BO. The Program and the BO are interwoven – not legally, but functionally. Success for both is therefore also interwoven.
      - One member expressed the opinion that, right or wrong, many agencies are concerned that BO obligations may be funded with money that had been intended for the larger basin purposes.
      - Reclamation is in process of developing a comprehensive implementation plan for the BO. Project managers have been assigned and are working diligently to get this necessary plan in place. The plan will be presented to the EC and updated regularly. Reclamation is committed to transparency and would like to have the support of the EC including coordination with certain parts of the BO.
  - One representative shared the opinion that it often appears that the only thing that seems to matter (to many signatories) is money.
    - It was acknowledged that many things (including water) are sadly simplified down to economic terms. In reality, water efficiency is not analogous to economics. But the economics permeate everything. The money is the euphemism for the information. This is not meant to be an insult or agitation, but is a result of a lack of better terminology and the need for information.
      - In an example, it was shared that many of the Service's studies are never shared with the Science Work Group (ScW). A black box of information is created when there is no feedback on how funding has been used, what the results were, how those results can further drive next steps, etc.

Transparency and access to information could be a key component of successful AM.

- *Budget Spreadsheets*
  - It was pointed out that the CC and EC used to receive regularly updated budget spreadsheets with appropriate details on the activities funded under the umbrella of the Program. The budget information (i.e., what is being spent where) is needed to justify other budget requests. Even knowing/understanding BEMP's and UNM's contributions helps to frame the level of input and contributions to the management of this ecological system. This is a very important component for reporting to congress.
  - The federal funding mechanism requires authorizing legislation and a LTP with listed items and priorities. The Program has not had a LTP since 2009. That plan should be the request for funding – how money will be applied every year and how each year builds on the next.

### **Adaptive Management (AM):**

- Mr. Wegner opened the afternoon session by praising the EC for how much work has been done in terms of building a successful program. All such programs evolve and it will take time to develop a successful AM program for the Rio Grande. Mr. Wegner shared a brief history of his involvement in and the evolution of other AM programs. The programs he highlighted have continued to evolve and refine how they use AM to this day. Successful AM programs understand that science is the driver (and the future); that the impacts/effects of actions cannot always be predicted; and that the program should incorporate all interested parties for the managing of the river's resources.
  - Groups develop AM programs for a variety of reasons: to enshrine the status quo; for political expediency; for legal requirements; to create a legacy and help agencies implement a resilient program; etc. A successful program will secure long-term support in terms of budgets and participation.
- *Three (3) Pillars for AM Implementation*
  1. quality, credible science;
    - When properly based on science, AM programs can be adjusted for emergency and unforeseen situations.
  2. clear understanding of the operational constraints, capacities, thresholds, and challenges (ex. moving water, location of sediment); and
  3. informed decision-making and agency management.
- *Summary of Discussions with Signatories*
  - Every federal water agency has some form of AM guidelines or directives. Conversations with Program signatories have highlighted several consistent themes:
    1. a desire for open communication and the ability to freely dialog and receive feedback;
    2. consistency in the Program – changes are going to happen, but good communications can lead to consistent approaches;
    3. transparency – including an understanding of where money is going and how it is being used and how decisions are being made. The large umbrella is “trust.” Many similar programs go through an “aging” process in terms of relationships and now is the time for this Program to implement a professional AM program. There has to be an openness to modifications as needed and appropriate (ex. climate change).
  - Mr. Wegner offered the opinion that the Program is actually poised to begin “pulling together.” In an analogy, he offered the comparison that the Program is the “hub” of a wheel with different spokes. It is ready for everyone to pull in the same direction and gain momentum.

- *AM Timeline*
  1. 8 to 12 months: AM Framework Development: identify major elements; determine processes for integrating science into the broad scope of the Program; layout the decision matrix; identify thresholds/challenges that have to be considered. A more definitive budget process should evolve during this stage.
  2. 12 to 18 months: AM Implementation Plan: develop an implementation plan including permitting and budget processes; determine how the River Integration Operations (RIO) can be integrated; determine how to implement the decision matrix.
  3. 18 to 24 months: Integration Action: lay out the definitive plan.
    - At each step, it is important that Program signatories educate Congress and build support. Education and outreach are critical to the justification of any plus-up requests. The federal role is their legal responsibilities. The non-federal agencies supply water to the agricultural community, farmers and ranchers. Tribes and Pueblos contribute cultural affinity. As Science Coordinator, Mr. Wegner considers the training of leadership and mentoring of people to be a key task.
- *Comments and Questions*
  - It was commented that there are multiple BOs that should be considered in the big picture and AM planning.
  - A good AM plan and a well-designed program can provide legal protection for those involved if challenged. Decisions are not made in a vacuum and a range of issues/perspectives are considered and documented. Decisions are supported and justified by the collective.
  - It was suggested an intermediary AM framework be put into place as soon as possible. It may take a while to understand the integration of the RIO, etc. It might be prudent to have an interim process to guide the near future.
- *Formation of an AM Work Group*
  - In response to a suggestion to form the AM work group now, it was recommended that a subgroup of five (5) or six (6) EC members form an interim AM Development group with the task of providing recommendations on how to form the full AM Team (AMT). It was suggested the AMT descriptions captured in the (RIP) documents be used as guidance.
    - Additional tasks for the group include: (1) to recommend the technical pieces (administrative and management) for inclusion in the by-laws; (2) provide strawman suggestions on how the LTP might interact/relate to AM; (3) propose how the use/implementation of external review might be included in the AM framework; and (4) provide recommendations to the full EC on how to use science and make decisions during this transition period before a full AM program is in place.
- *Coordination with 2016 BO Implementation*
  - The RIO is part of the AM process required in the 2016 BO. RIO is a process that allows for evaluation and adjustment of the Hydrobiological Objectives (HBO) in the BO, with an AM review commitment at 5-year intervals. The intent is for the RIO to be complementary to the Program's AM.
    - There are many elements to AM and to the 2016 BO including water management, habitat restoration, and river connectivity/fish passage. Reclamation's current approach is to address small "chunks" such as the minnow portion of the RIO and frame that first. This should integrate with the MAT and eventually with the Program.

- There are legal requirements that the federal agencies have to abide by and those have to be acknowledged.
- The exchange of data and information can build relationships.
- In other programs, as AM plans are developed, permitting can become easier because the groups better understand what is needed and can begin to predict next steps. There is the ability to get expected work in the queue as soon as possible.

**Permitting Process:**

- There are many questions on how permitting is going to be accomplished for AM. To manage adaptively means to respond and adjust quickly but this cannot occur without a rapid-response permitting process. The Service was asked to identify any options or different approaches that could streamline the permitting process.
  - It was responded that permits are issued to the individuals doing the hands-on sampling for specific projects. All the necessary requirements have to be met and all the individuals prove qualification and go through the validation process for specific actions. That piece cannot be sped up. Research activities have to have thorough and documented research plans to secure permits. Reclamation and Partners have already completed consultation (for their 2016 BO) and they have an expedited permitting process for the identified people authorized for certain activities.
  - It can be very difficult to secure programmatic permitting and it would not actually cover the full spectrum of activities that a program like this does. There are situations where a federal agency sponsors a programmatic “coverage” but the project (and the associated activities) has to satisfy the criteria of approval. If applicable, then permitting can be expedited.
  - It was clarified that changes to a project (such as construction) may trigger a re-initiation of consultation. A permit is not needed unless there will be a physical handling, touching, or potential harassing of the listed animal(s) for a presumed benefit to the recovery and survival of the species. Attendees were referred to the Service’s website for information on the basic permitting guidelines for Region 2.
  - It was also suggested that applicants copy Dave Campbell on permitting requests to assist in oversight and guidance through the process.

**Announcements:**

- As of October 1, 2017 WEST will be taking over the Program’s note taking services. Marta Wood was acknowledged and thanked for her many years of note taking services provided to the Program.
- The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has agreed to take over the management of the Program’s Database Management System (DBMS).
  - There will be a phased approach to the enhancement and overhaul of the database. The USGS will take the database “as is” and begin hosting by the end of December 2017. Phase II is the enhancement and streamlining of the site. Phase III is the architect scoping for a useable (clear and concise) database with data integrity. And Phase IV is the actual overhaul with expected completion in February 2019.
- WEST’s Open House is tomorrow (Friday, September 22) from 3:00pm to 6:00pm.



- BEMP's Fall Field Tour is scheduled for October 26 from 10:00am to 1:00pm. The tour will include visits to three (3) sites in Belen. Invitations will be forthcoming.

#### Other Discussions:

- Yesterday at the non-federal meeting, attendees revisited the Population Monitoring Group Study (sampling SOW) and incorporation of the Genetics Peer Review Recommendations. Last year (2017 budget cycle) proponents for this study were informed that it had not been vetted/approved by the EC and it was therefore too late to include in Reclamation's contracting cycle. Specific edits and revisions submitted by Service representatives have been incorporated into the draft SOW. It will be distributed as a read ahead for the next EC meeting for review/approval and consideration in the FY2018 planning. There are also some concerns that the technical portions of the Population Monitoring contract may have been changed since the SOW was submitted.
  - It was responded that projects had to have been submitted back in April/May to be entered into the Reclamation acquisition plan spreadsheet. The contracting process then proceeds by July in order to achieve a January award. The Population Monitoring contract was intentionally awarded as a shorter contract consisting of a base year with one (1) option year to allow for incorporation of additional changes within two (2) years.
  - In explanation, it was shared that the Population Monitoring group met in the fall of 2016 and arrived at a consensus recommendations to incorporate certain Peer Review recommendations into the population monitoring SOW. Other peer review recommendations are still being discussed by the work group and are therefore not up for inclusion at this time.
    - The consensus agreement that is included in the existing contract was to drop the December and February monitoring (i.e., reduce the sampling months from nine (9) to seven (7)). In exchange, the number of sites sampled in April and October was increased from 20 to 30 – to explore statistical gain and precision. Other changes included dry site reporting (including and excluding the zero values in the analyses for comparison); dry site replacement; different Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) reporting – by age class, mesh size; and reporting RGSM detections by mesohabitat types at each site.
    - The same 20 sites have not been changed but there are options for additional sites at different times. This maintains the historical consistency with the dataset. These recommended changes address some of the concerns documented in the RGSM Population Monitoring Peer Review.
    - It was also shared that when the workgroup and Program have additional consensus recommendations based on the Peer Review, to provide those as soon as they are available.

#### Meeting Summary and Next Steps:

- After a summer hiatus, the Program has resumed regular meetings. The EC is looking decrease meeting frequency to every other month. The Program newsletter is intended to assist with information flow between meetings.
- The CC and work groups have been adding details and cost estimates for two (2) of the proposed FY2018 projects - *Development of High-throughput Genetic Markers for RGSM* and *RGSM Spawning Cue and Early Life History*. The USACE is exploring the possibility to incorporate the *Identifying Restoration Priorities for Threatened Tamarisk Dominated Habitat* project into an existing contract and the Population Monitoring Group will meet in October to review the *Re-analyses of Existing Data Collected During Population Monitoring of RGSM* scope.
- Due to scheduling conflicts in October, the next EC meeting will be set for early December.

**Next Meeting: TBD (early December), location TBD**

- Tentative Meeting Agenda Items: (1) Explanation of changes to the Population Monitoring SOW (Reclamation); (2) ABCWUA Draft Science Strategy; (3) Updates on the budget process; (4) permitting process.
- Future Agenda Items: (1) Clarification on how projects reach the EC (for discussion/approval) with specific explanation on how/why the Population Monitoring Group Study and the incorporation of Peer Review Recommendations for population monitoring had not been discussed at the EC level.

**Executive Committee Meeting Attendees  
September 21, 2017**

Attendees:*Representative*

Brent Esplin  
Janet Jarratt (P)  
Rick Billings (A)

*Organization*

Bureau of Reclamation  
Assessment Payers Association of the MRGCD  
Albuquerque/Bernalillo County  
Water Utility Authority  
Bureau of Reclamation  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District  
NM Interstate Stream Commission  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program  
NM Department of Game and Fish  
Pueblo of Santa Ana  
Pueblo of Isleta  
University of New Mexico  
NM Attorney General's Office

*Seat*

Federal co-chair  
Non-federal co-chair  
ABCWUA  
  
Reclamation  
USACE  
MRGCD  
NMISC  
USFWS  
BEMP  
NMDGF  
Santa Ana  
Isleta  
UNM  
NMAGO

*Others*

Jen Bachus  
Jim Wilber  
Ashley Rudolph  
Lynette Giesen  
Ryan Gronewold  
George MacDonell (A)  
David Campbell (A)  
Joel Lusk  
Vicki Ryan  
Kate Mendoza  
Anne Marken  
Grace Haggerty (A)  
Chris Shaw  
Deb Freeman  
Kyle Hardman  
Mike Marcus  
John Fleck  
Aljaz Praznik  
Julie Dickey

Bureau of Reclamation  
Bureau of Reclamation  
Bureau of Reclamation  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
ABCWUA  
MRGCD  
NMISC  
NMISC  
For NMISC  
BCC/Santa Fe  
for APA  
UNM Water Resources  
UNM Water Resources  
WEST, Inc./Program Assistant

Debbie Lee	WEST, Inc./Program Manager
Luc Moulson	WEST, Inc./Project Coordinator
Dave Wegner	for WEST, Inc./Science Coordinator
Marta Wood	Alliant Environmental (note taker)

## TAOS DECISIONS (DRAFT)

1. Near Term:
  - Collaborative Program to continue to operate under 2012 Bylaws until such time as those are updated. This includes CC.
2. Bylaws. EC formed a Bylaws Subgroup to evaluate and prepare proposed updates to Bylaws. This effort will consider the content of the 2006 Bylaws and the 2012 Bylaw edits. Recommendations brought back to June EC meeting.
3. Short-term Priorities. Direct the Program Manager, with coordination with the Army Corps and AMT, to prioritize the AM recommendations for short-term implementation. This will include evaluating any overlap with scopes already vetted by Science/HR and the CC. Recommendations brought back to June EC meeting.
4. Budget. EC directed Program Manager to develop an out-year budget process that links to the timing of EC decision-making on budget recommendations (to facilitate timely input to federal agency budgetary process).
  - a. This includes a commitment by EC members to provide, in a timely manner, their respective budget information to Program Manager for development of the Collaborative Program budget.
  - b. Each agency (federal agencies, ISC and MRGCD) to provide a short description and timeline to Program Manager of their respective budget cycle.
  - c. There is a good faith effort on the part of the parties to implement consensus recommendations, while recognizing that consensus recommendations from EC on Collaborative Program budget requests do not guarantee that recommendations will, in fact, be funded because each EC member retains discretion in implementing its statutory authorities and based on availability of funding.
  - d. Develop an out-year budget to conform to the process developed and approved by the EC.
5. Adaptive Management Plan. EC directed Program Manager to proceed with development of an Adaptive Management Plan for consideration, refinement and approval by EC.

### Yet-to-be-determined:

- How the AMP will coalesce with the LTP (is it part of or does it become the LTP).
- The extent to which the BO actions (versus the monitor of those) are to be included in the LTP, if at all.

6. Cost-Share Flexibility. EC directed a legal group to evaluate whether flexibility exists under current authorities to recognize that the non-fed cost share is built into the new BO, including an examination of potential unintended consequences of adjusting this cost-share component.
7. Signatories have agreed to continue in the MRGESCP.

Questions from Bylaws Work Group to Executive Committee  
Presented at the September 21, 2017 Meeting

1. Approval of the revised purpose section 1.0 in the by-laws

Original Purpose:

“The Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program (Program) is established by this Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) as a collaborative effort consisting of federal, state, and local governmental entities, Indian Tribes and Pueblos, and non-governmental organizations.

The intent of Program participants is two-fold: first, to prevent extinction, preserve reproductive integrity, improve habitat, support scientific analysis, and promote recovery of the listed species within the Program area in a manner that benefits the ecological integrity, where feasible, of the Middle Rio Grande riverine and riparian ecosystem; and, second, to exercise creative and flexible options so that existing water uses continue and future water development proceeds in compliance with applicable federal and state laws. To achieve these ends, the Program may not impair state water rights or federal reserved water rights of individuals and entities; federal or other water rights of Indian nations and Indian individuals, or Indian trust assets; San Juan- Chama Project contractual rights; and the State of New Mexico’s ability to comply with Rio Grande Compact delivery obligations.<sup>1</sup>”

Revised Purpose:

“The Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program (Program) is a collaborative effort consisting of federal, state, and local governmental entities, Indian Tribes and Pueblos, and non-governmental organizations. The Program area includes the headwaters of the Rio Chama watershed and the Rio Grande, including tributaries, from the New Mexico-Colorado state line downstream to the elevation of the spillway crest of the Elephant Butte Reservoir at 4450 feet above mean sea level, excluding the land area reserved for the full pool of the Elephant Butte Reservoir. Indian Pueblo and Tribal lands and resources within the Program area will not be included in the Program without their express written consent of the affected Indian Pueblo or Tribe.

The Program’s purpose is to:

- a) prevent extinction, preserve reproductive integrity, improve habitat, support scientific analysis, and promote recovery of the Listed Species within the Program Area in a manner that benefits the ecological integrity, where feasible, of the Middle Rio Grande riverine and riparian ecosystem; and,

---

<sup>1</sup> Program Bylaws 2012. Section 1 Purpose.

- b) exercise creative and flexible options so that existing water uses continue and future water development proceeds in compliance with applicable federal and state laws.

To achieve these ends, the Program may not impair state water rights or federal reserved water rights of individuals and entities; federal or other water rights of Indian nations and Indian individuals, or Indian trust assets; San Juan- Chama Project contractual rights; and the State of New Mexico's ability to comply with Rio Grande Compact delivery obligations.”

- 2. The work group request clarification on whether a 75% supermajority for decision making when consensus cannot be reached refers to 75% of quorum or of full member ship.

“In lieu of consensus, the decision may be approved by a super majority (75%)<sup>2</sup>”

- 3. The work group requests definitions for teams, committees, and work groups.
- 4. The work group would like permission to continue meeting as the EC makes decisions on Program structure and organization that would need to be reflected in the Bylaws revisions to develop suggestions.

---

<sup>2</sup>Program Bylaws Amended April 2012. Section 5.3 Voting Procedures, Paragraph 3, Sentence 3.

## Budget Process Presentation

### Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program (Program)

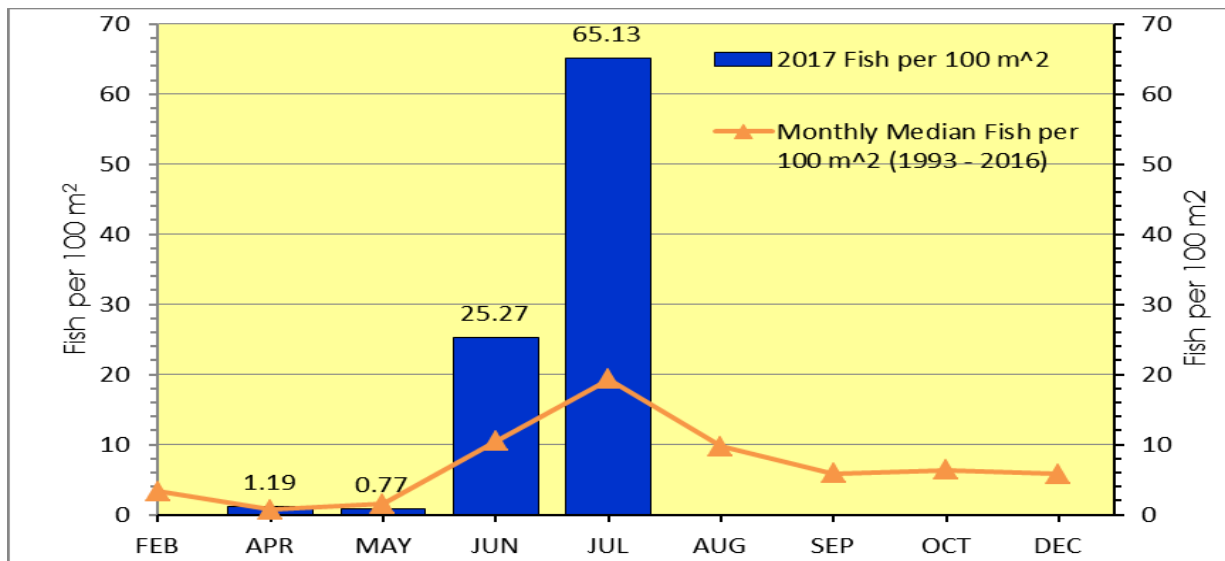
Currently, five signatories leverage funding that contributes to Program-related initiatives. Each offers the potential for Program input, but the budget process and timeline for each signatory varies. This presentation outlines each organization's budget process, as well as timelines for potential Program planning and input.

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
  - Energy and Water Development Appropriations
  - Two-year budget cycle
  - Potential Program input: April - October
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
  - Energy and Water Development Appropriations
  - Three-year budget cycle
  - Potential Program input: June - October
- Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District
  - Board of Directors budget approval
  - Annual budget cycle
  - Potential Program input: Fall
- New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission
  - Commission appropriation
  - Annual budget cycle
  - Potential Program input: February - April and July - August
- Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority
  - Board of Directors budget approval
  - Annual budget cycle
  - Potential Program input: Fall

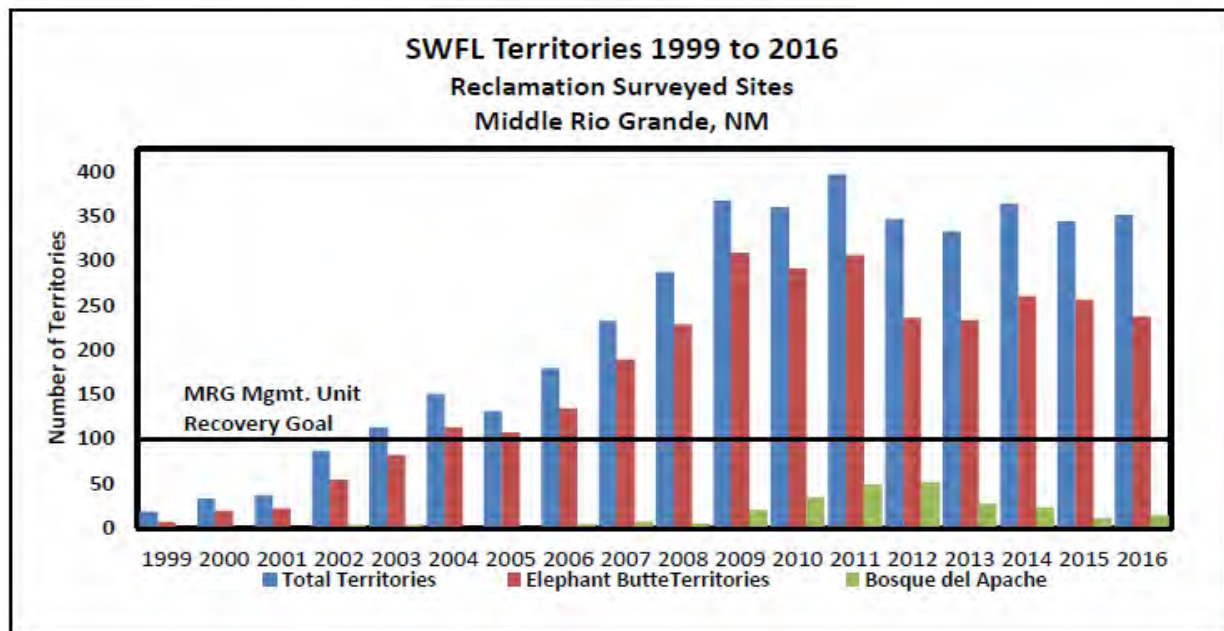


USFWS species update for MRGESCP Executive Committee  
September 21, 2017

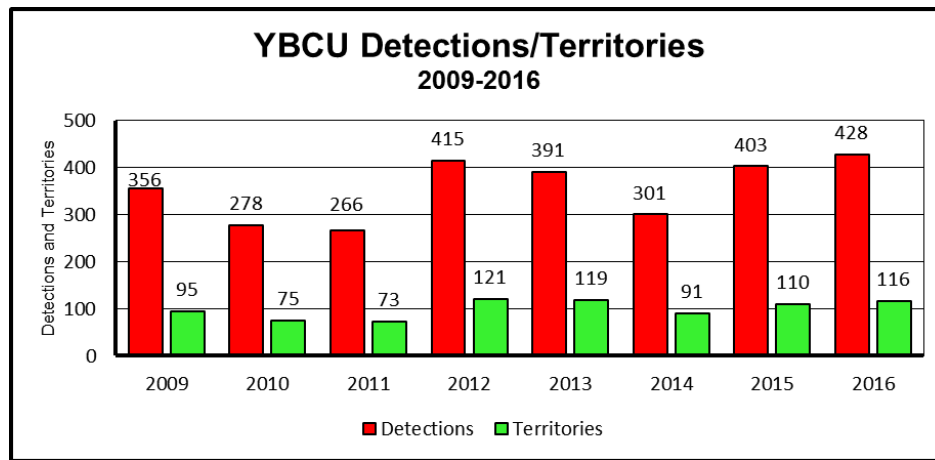
**Rio Grande Silvery Minnow (RGSM):** The RGSM Population Monitoring Program monitoring reported an overall density of 65.1 RGSM per 100 m<sup>2</sup> during July 2017. Densities of age-0, age-1, and age-2+ RGSMs were 63.6 (n=6,758), 1.5 (n=156), and ~0.1 (n=6) individuals per 100 m<sup>2</sup> sampled\*. (\*Source: Dudley, R.K., S. Platania, and G. White. 2017. Rio Grande Silvery Minnow Population Monitoring Results from July 2017. Reclamation Contract R17PC00028, MRGESCP Research Project, American Southwest Ichthyological Researchers, Albuquerque, NM).



**Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (SWFL):** There were 357 SWFL territories based on preliminary data from Reclamation surveys on the Middle Rio Grande (from Isleta Pueblo south boundary to Elephant Butte). 14 SWFL territories were detected within Bosque del Apache NWR (west of the levee). Flycatcher survey data are still being finalized for 2017. (Figure source: US Bureau of Reclamation).



Yellow-billed Cuckoo (YBCU or cuckoo): There were 356 cuckoo detections based on preliminary data from Reclamation surveys on the Middle Rio Grande (from Isleta Pueblo south boundary to Elephant Butte). Cuckoo survey data are being finalized for 2017. (Figure source: US Bureau of Reclamation).



New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse (mouse): To date (September 2017), the mouse was detected within 36 photographs taken at 10 locations on BdANWR. Monitoring continues until mid-October when hibernation activities begin. (Source: I&M–BdANWR; Note; only 9 of 10 locations of mouse detection are depicted on the map below).

**NM Meadow Jumping Mouse 2017 Locations**  
(updated September 8, 2017)





The Minnow Action Team (MAT) was established as an ad hoc group in 2013 to assist water and resource management agencies/entities and the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program in annual coordination, evaluation, and recommendations on water operations and species management to meet biological opinion and recovery goals for the Rio Grande silvery minnow. The MAT met in February, April, and June this year thus far to review the projections for runoff. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) in coordination with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NMISC), and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) presented the most probable runoff hydrographs at these meetings. Results of 2016 fisheries studies and preliminary results of 2017 fisheries studies were presented at the April and June meetings, respectively.

**In the April meeting the 2017 spring runoff recommendations were discussed following updates on hydrologic forecasts.** Article VII of the Rio Grande Compact was lifted on April 9 and is not expected to be back in effect until July. Storage in El Vado reservoir for MRGCD is expected to be up to 90,000 AF for the April forecast. Flood operations on the Rio Chama were in place to maintain safe channel capacity. A full supply of water is also expected to the San Juan-Chama Project (SJC) allowing for supplemental water supply leases to be available during summer to reduce drying in the lower reaches of the MRG. Flood operations are not expected to be in place for the mainstem of the Rio Grande, however, it may depend on weather conditions and when the majority of snowmelt runoff occurs. Flows at Central gage are expected to be above 4,000 cfs for at least a month from mid to late May through June. There is some indication that spawning may have occurred as flow increased in April, however, monitoring for eggs is generally not effective when flows are so high and habitat restoration monitoring has not begun.

The MAT recommends the following for Spring Runoff 2017:

- Maintain regular operating conditions for water operations with no modifications for spawning and recruitment operations.
- Agencies and entities conducting monitoring efforts could
  - monitor flows, water temperatures, floodplain inundation extent from Cochiti to EBR;
  - monitor occurrence of eggs, larvae, and adults in the main channel and inundated overbank; and,
  - evaluate the need to improve connection of floodplain to channel for receding flows.
  - agencies should discuss how they will share information gathered during this period (including surveys and photographs taken during flights)
- Meet in June to discuss results of spring runoff, modeled flows during summer periods, and potential drying and activities that may be associated with drying. The MAT may include in their discussion:
  - monitoring of drying and rescue efforts
  - use of supplemental water and water routing to minimize drying and learn about drying patterns following high runoff season
  - continuation of studies on utilizing drain outfalls as refugia
  - fish passage monitoring as flows recede (baseline fish tagging and detection)
  - habitat availability and use by silvery minnow

**During the June meeting, additional recommendations were provided to address use of supplemental water, drying, and monitoring efforts for 2017.** Water managers followed continuous changes in the weather in April through June and coordinated closely to enable storage of about 150,000 AF of native water in El Vado reservoir, moved San Juan Chama water from Heron and El Vado to Abiquiu for storage there, and provided significant and sustained flows through the Middle Rio Grande (4,000 to 5,000 cfs for 40+ days) and into Elephant Butte Reservoir. The presentation attached by the



Corps provides river discharge and reservoir storage results for up to the June 12 meeting. SWCA Environmental Inc. provided a summary of habitat and spawning study conducted from the beginning of May through June with funding from the NMISC and ABCWUA. The City of Albuquerque Biopark has not been successful at collecting many minnow eggs this year due to the high flows.

June meeting recommendations for Summer/Fall 2017:

- Use up to 18,000 AF of supplemental water strategically to reduce drying from July to October in the San Acacia and Isleta reaches (July-Oct (90 days) average range of between 50-150 cfs/day or 100-300 AF/day). This would provide some supplemental water to be carried over to 2018.
- Maintain continuous flows in Albuquerque reach.
- Monitor drying sections of the river in San Acacia and Isleta reaches and support USFWS activities to salvage and move silvery minnow from sections that are dry to areas that are more likely to remain wet this summer.
- Evaluate as pilot study the survival of YOY and possibly density dependence.
- Monitor Isleta reach select return outfalls as potential refugia with emphasis on flows from the Los Chavez wasteway.
- Quantify habitat extent, gains and losses during summer months in the river channel as agency staff/contractors are available (e.g., River Eyes).
- Obtain LiDAR, photomimagery, and other data and compile for 2018 runoff.

**During a small group meeting held on June 21<sup>st</sup> two recommendations for monitoring projects and one study were developed.**

The discussed projects and study are as follows:

- In the Albuquerque reach ISC with SWCA biologists are conducting monitoring near HR sites to characterize YOY survival. Funding has been secured for three or four months of monitoring. Data will be utilized to fill in the population monitoring data for YOY.
- In the Isleta reach it was proposed that monitoring be conducted at the Los Chavez Wasteway to determine the value of continuous discharge of small volumes of water out of MRGCD wasteways during periods of river drying. Drying did not appear imminent during the 2017 irrigation season and monitoring was not implemented. The MRGCD has consistently discharged between 2-4 cfs out of Los Chavez Wasteway since the beginning of August.
- This summer otoliths (An **otolith** (οτο-, oto-, ear + λιθος, lithos, a stone), also called **statoconium** or **otoconium** or **statolith**, is a calcium carbonate structure in the saccule or utricle of the inner ear, specifically in the vestibular labyrinth of vertebrates) from the 2017 larval fish samples stored at UNM are being examined to obtain their age, in days! In the spring otoliths of larval fish spawned in the hatchery will be examined as a validation study to the river specimens. The work is funded by the ISC and will be done by SWCA, Service, Biopark and ISC personnel.

**Status of Hydrologic Conditions:**

- As of September 15<sup>th</sup>, there is 20.72 dry river miles in the San Acacia reach and zero dry miles in the Isleta reach.
- As of September 15<sup>th</sup>, in the Isleta reach there has been 2.37 unique river miles of drying and in the San Acacia reach there has been 21.31 unique river miles of drying. This year's dried extent has essentially stretched from the pump site at BDA south boundary to a mile or so above Brown Arroyo.

- A sediment plug approximately 1.5 miles long formed during high flows in the BDA area that complicated operations in the San Acacia reach. The plug was removed by Reclamation in September.
- As of September 18<sup>th</sup>, Reclamation has released 12,149 AF of the 18,000 AF of supplemental water for the minnow.

# Science Workgroup Proposal

Prepared by Rick Billings, Water Authority  
September 21, 2017

## Discussion

The Collaborative Program desires to use science more effectively to adaptively manage water, sediment, personnel and financial resources to meet the needs of the people, wildlife, and their habitats in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. The Program is moving towards using Adaptive Management of natural resources as a “driver” within the Program. This was agreed to at the Collaborative Program Retreat in April, 2017. Recent peer reviews, workshops and independent panel reviews have provided recommendations for how the Program could improve the use of best available science and modify how natural resources are managed for optimum and sustained use. While the many uncertainties with current scientific efforts have been elaborated, it is also necessary to address optimal management or sustained use of resources.

Scientists within the Program should seek more opportunities of providing technical alternatives and interpretations to the Executive Committee (EC). The scientific community within the Program will use Adaptive Management to improve the quality, timeliness, cost-benefit analysis and communication of the science to stakeholders, water management individuals and entities.

Strategy is defined herein as the art and science of planning and marshalling resources for their most efficient and effective use. A strategy is implemented to bring about a desired future, such as achievement of a goal or solution to a problem. The suggested program strategy is to use structured decision making informed by scientific information and results from adaptive management. The following are suggestions for improving the science within the Program and developing a strategy that can be implemented and adhered to.

## Science Workgroup

In the short term, a series of meetings of biologists and related scientists (statisticians, geneticist, and hydrologists) is proposed to determine the structure and completion of a science strategy for the Program. The newly hired Science Coordinator or team of outside scientists, if available, should also participate, and a rapid “state of the science” for the endangered species should be determined. It is understood that endangered species are not the only resource being managed within the Program. Water, sediment, personnel and financial resources are being managed as well. This information would then be summarized and reported to the EC.

### Purpose

The science group will review contracted work and work by Program scientists. Presentations on this work will be given to the science group and the EC (if needed) quarterly or annually. Contracted work should include funds and requirements for reports and data analysis to be presented to Program scientists and the EC.

Methods, alternatives and actual policies for using adaptive management and implementing the results will be discussed within the program as one aspect of a scientific strategy.

### Science Group Activities

The science workgroup will hold annual meetings for “State of the Science”, inviting all stakeholders, water management individuals and entities within the Middle Rio Grande area.

The Program will hold one meeting annually with the Executive Committee on “State of The Science”, to include recommendations and alternatives. Non-biological constraints to these recommendations and alternatives should be carefully considered, understanding that answering questions is easier than coming up with solutions.

Complete a “State of the Data” meeting to consider if methods of collection, storage, distribution and analysis of data are working, as needed or requested.

The science group will prioritize ongoing and suggested studies. This is currently done by evaluating potential work within the existing science or habitat restoration work groups. Example scopes of work are then written by these groups and the potential work is then evaluated by the Coordination Committee for financial and planning needs of the Program, then a suggestion for acceptance of the potential work is sent to the EC. Ongoing monitoring for fish, birds and genetics is generally budgeted first.

Science panels – how do we use that technique for periodic review and suggestions? Recent workshops, expert panels and other avenues have helped the Program and indicated potential areas for improvement or modification of technical efforts. Most resource management and other programs use these events to improve evidence-based decision making.

### Science Related Work

Share data and analysis responsibilities with all Program scientists. While admittedly difficult, the first step would be to have all scientific data available to all Program scientists within a suitable data base in the same format. While understanding the importance of agency and stakeholder interpretations, everyone using the same data would be an important starting point.

The science group will review contracted work and work by Program scientists. Presentations on this work will be given to the science group and the EC (if needed) quarterly or annually. Contracted work should include funds and requirements for reports and data analysis to be presented to Program scientists and the EC.

Training scientific staff periodically or using outside experts for a short period of time to do “workshops” is recommended. Consideration for training might include statistical analysis, sampling design, models and modeling and other technical work. This would be presented by academics, consultants or others under contract.

Moving more work to published manuscripts.

Define the role of the Science Coordinator, and how that process is working.

## **Collaborative Program Activities**

The program will draft a report on Adaptive Management efforts in the Program and elsewhere. A periodic review of how Adaptive Management is or is not serving the Program should be conducted. In particular, how is the learning component being conducted, and how are management decisions being implemented using technical information and alternatives.

Review science ethics directions from agencies and science groups and incorporate these into the Program if necessary.

Evaluate the need for data synthesis, or the need for that type of work within the Program. The Program has been criticized for not completing data synthesis of existing data. Synthesis may point out opportunities for additional work or different approaches.

## **Presentations to the Executive Committee**

Determine the level of communication and leadership skills needed for the science group to better contribute and help provide more “guidance” for the Program.

Determine the frequency and content (i.e., oral or visual presentations, written reports) for EC reporting.

How the science should be evaluated and presented to the EC is the next requirement. If necessary, these funds and activities should be included in the contracts for work with the program, as should time for participating in the annual “State of the Science” meetings or for presentations to other groups.

Prioritization of needed studies, monitoring, reporting or other concerns is then determined within the strategy. A serious evaluation of Program economics and budgets, real and proposed, should then occur.