

**DOLORES RIVER DIALOGUE  
STEERING COMMITTEE**

**Sept. 6, 2011**

**4 pages**

**Present:** Don Magnuson, Montezuma Valley Irrigation Company; Mike Preston, Dolores Water Conservancy District; Amber Kelley, San Juan Citizens Alliance; David Graf, Division of Parks and Wildlife; Vern Harrell, Bureau of Reclamation. Contract staff: Marsha Porter-Norton, facilitator; Gail Binkly, recorder. Guests: Jay Loschert, American Whitewater.

**Agenda:** The agenda was approved with no changes.

**Update on “A Way Forward” and new Implementation Team:** Mike reported that the Oversight Panel had its second meeting with the native-fish researchers, who presented their final findings. After discussion, the panel decided to establish an Implementation Team to bring together parties that can act on the opportunities laid out in the report. All the key institutions involved in management of the Lower Dolores are represented, as well as the environmental and recreational communities: the DWCD (represented by Mike), MVIC (Don), BOR (Vern), BLM/San Juan Public Lands Center (Shauna Jensen), SJCA (Amber), PAW (David), The Nature Conservancy (Peter Mueller), Trout Unlimited (Matt Clark) and American Whitewater (Nathan Fey).

Mike presented a brief executive summary and table of contents for the scientists’ final report and went over the opportunities the scientists had listed. He said at the team’s first meeting, Ed Warner of the BOR noted there is much that can be done within existing flexibility as long as everybody is in agreement with the measures proposed. If there is opposition, that tends to trigger a NEPA process. A NEPA process will be necessary anyway at some point if significant changes are recommended, but the Implementation Team is presently trying to use existing flexibility to test opportunities and see what can be achieved through a learning-by-doing process.

Mike said a number of the scientists’ recommended opportunities are related to the annual spill, so David designed hydrographs to address opportunities for small, medium and large spill years. One of the factors that has emerged as significant for managing both native and non-native fishes is temperature. David developed hydrographs around each of four spill thresholds designed to maximize benefits to the fishery. One of his goals was to better mimic the natural hydrograph. The other was to elongate the spill to keep the “fish clock” turned off as long as possible.

David said he tried to be cognizant of rafting-flow needs, but his hydrographs were oriented toward native-fish survival and, to some degree, geomorphology. He said the team had a thorough discussion about the scenario for a spill of 25,000 acre-feet, and Nathan suggested changes to improve rafting opportunities.

David and Mike said the team agreed there is a need for real-time temperature monitoring. Real-time temperature telemetry could be added to the Slickrock gauge, and temperature monitoring is available at the dam and could be reconnected. There is still a need for data at key points between the dam and Slickrock. No one thinks much money will be required to provide

the real-time temperature monitoring. Mike said the team also wants to look at real habitat potential and link that to temperature monitoring.

Mike said he is going to ask Vern to create an alternative hydrograph folding in the elements of rafting and the fish clock and taking into account the call water stored for MVIC. Nathan was also going to provide alternative hydrographs that would offer more-raftable flows.

**Future role of the DRD/DRD-SC and Science and Hydrology Committees:** Marsha said the development of the IT is impressive and exciting, but it raises the question of the role of the DRD and DRD-SC. The DRD was created to do what the IT is now doing – hammering out consensus regarding do-able alternatives to benefit the downstream environment. She said it's important not to duplicate efforts or create unnecessary meetings, but there may be a role for the DRD and DRD-SC in other areas.

After discussion, the group agreed there is a continuing role for DRD in areas such as:

- **Education.** The group agreed the DRD structure is ideal for outreach and public education, and the Web site remains a clearinghouse for information. The public needs to be informed of efforts and progress on the Lower Dolores, especially if significant changes are to be made
- **Vetting proposals.** If someone not on the IT has an idea for improving the downstream environment, the DRD-SC has the Framework Proposal Process in place.
- **Administration.** The DRD-SC's function of seeking and managing funds would not be appropriate for the IT. Also, the IT will not want to create the agenda for full DRD meetings.
- **Science.** It was agreed there is still a role for DRD science to supplement monitoring and evaluation.
- **Coordination of different groups.**

David said the IT is doing what people always thought the DRD was going to do, but it took this long to bring all the pieces together. He thinks the DRD will be critical to maintaining the momentum.

The group agreed the DRD-SC may not need to meet monthly because the intensive work is now within the IT, and many of the same people on the SC also serve on the IT. It was also agreed that the full DRD should continue to meet twice a year. Marsha said she will write a short summary of the proposed future role of the SC to bring to the meeting of the DRD and LDWG on Sept. 28.

The role of the Hydrology Committee was also discussed, and it was agreed that it remains important but should meet only as needed.

**Predictability of managed releases (spills) for rafting:** Jay raised the issue of predictability of spills, saying that remains a big concern for rafters. He asked whether it is the IT's goal to establish specific guidelines for the four different spill scenarios and to provide a predictable set of hydrographs. This would enable boaters to know what their season would be.

Vern said there probably would be specific guidelines for spills of 100,00 AF or above but not for smaller spills. Vern said in small-spill years it will be easier to aid the native fish than to provide boatable flows. He said it is not the BOR's job to assess the risk involved in the different flow scenarios or to worry about whether the reservoir is filled, but he knows that the question of risk is extremely important to the community and the DWCD board.

Mike said the smaller the spill, the less predictable it will be. He said DWCD's main priority is filling the reservoir. Hydrologist Ken Curtis will try to define the risk involved in these different opportunities; for a spill of 25,000 AF, the risk could be fairly substantial. Mike said risk must be shared and not placed solely on the irrigators. He agreed with Vern that the DWCD board would have concerns about not filling the reservoir because of spill-management decisions to benefit native fish or rafters.

Don said MVIC would like to get to a point where there are generalizations about what can be expected at certain spill levels. There would have to be adjustments each year, but rafters would have a general idea what the spill would be.

David agreed but said there are many variables to be taken into account. He said if there are three years with good spawning followed by a small-spill year, maybe that spill could be focused on rafting. Right now, however, the status of the fish remains precarious. Four of the last five years have had small, uncertain spills. Amber said management will have to be considered in a five- to 10-year context. Even if there is the same amount of water available in two different years, the scenario may not be the same.

It was agreed that information about the rationale behind spill management needs to be communicated to boaters. Marsha said the DRD could perhaps fill that role, by organizing an informational forum for rafters.

**DRD-LDWG meeting:** The agenda for the Sept. 28 was discussed. The meeting will be at 5:30 p.m. at the DWCD offices. It was agreed that agenda items will include updates on "A Way Forward" and the legislative effort, the connection to planning for the Lower Dolores River corridor, and Chester Anderson's 319 Watershed Study. Members of the Dolores River Restoration Partnership will be invited too.

**Request by American Whitewater to serve on the DRD-SC:** Jay said his role is to represent the local boating community at these meetings and communicate back to the boaters. He believes there is value in his serving on the SC because he would have the most update-to-date information to communicate to the boating community. He said boaters have an important role in Lower Dolores management because of initial Project documents, and there has been some miscommunication and a lack of clarity about what the boating community wants. This is an opportunity to fix that problem. Jay said DRAG (Dolores River Action Group) is defunct and has been replaced by Lower Dolores Boating Advocates.

Marsha said when the DRD was reorganized it was stated that members could be added to the DRD-SC as needed. David noted that when the SC was formed there was a real attempt to streamline it, and boaters and TU were to be represented by the SJCA.

Amber said theoretically she does provide that representation, but it isn't always easy. She sees value in those entities having their own voice.

David said he thinks Jay is right that his presence on the SC would facilitate communication with local boaters. He said TU will likely also ask to be included on the SC. Marsha said it seems logical to have both boaters and anglers represented, since trout and rafting are cited as obligations in the Project contracts. The group agreed. Marsha will talk to Matt Clark about representing TU.

**Slickrock Gauge funding:** Mike said he is not aware of any money being pledged toward the gauge since the topic was discussed at the last DRD-SC meeting. He reiterated that the DWCD board would like DWCD's share of the funding to shrink from 80 percent to 20 percent, leaving \$12,960 to be provided by other entities. Mike said his board will adopt its budget in December.

David asked about seeking funding from Southwestern Water Conservation District and from the entity that funds the Bedrock gauge. Mike said he will check into those possibilities. David will make an official request to the DOW for a contribution toward the gauge.

Jay said local boaters are having a fundraiser this fall, but it will be their first and he can't promise to deliver any funds toward the gauge. He does not expect much of a contribution from American Whitewater, either.

Vern said if the San Juan Public Lands, as the other Federal participant makes a contribution to the gage, he would seek a matching amount from the USBR.

This will be kept as an agenda item.

**SWCD grant:** Marsha said as part of the DRD core funding, a grant was written for \$15,000 for 2011 and 2012, and it was accepted. The grant carries a requirement for an equal commitment from partners. She would like to bring back a revised budget at the next meeting. She said with the role of the Science Committee and DRD-SC changing, the DRD budget will shrink, and this could free up some funds for the IT.

Mike said facilitation for the DRD and the Legislative Committee has been very valuable. Amber said this winter the Leg Comm will probably be meeting frequently again. Marsha said she will try to budget for that.

**August minutes:** The minutes from Aug. 2 were approved with no changes.

**Information:** Marsha said she provided information about the DRD to the Watershed Assembly for their database.

Mike said Marsha is frequently called on to organize information about the work of the DRD and its various committees, and some resources needed to be provided for that kind of work.

Marsha said she could put together an informational packet on the DRD's work plan to be sent to 50-100 key local leaders. Mike said he would like to have some informational literature to offer at "Water 101". Marsha will put some thought into that.

**Next meeting:** The next meeting will be Tuesday, Nov. 1, at 9 a.m.