

**DOLORES RIVER DIALOGUE
STEERING COMMITTEE
March 1, 2011**

Present: Randy Carver, Montezuma Valley Irrigation Company; David Graf, Division of Wildlife; Vern Harrell, Bureau of Reclamation; Meghan Maloney, San Juan Citizens Alliance; Peter Mueller, The Nature Conservancy; and Don Schwindt, Dolores Water Conservancy District and Jim Fisher, alternate. DWCD. Also: Marsha Porter-Norton, facilitator; Ken Curtis, Hydrology Committee DWCD; Ann Oliver, DRD Science Committee ; and Gail Binkly, recorder.

Agenda: The agenda was approved with no changes.

Native-fish grant: David asked about the \$50,000 native-fish grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board that was mentioned in the February minutes. Marsha said Mike Preston, DWCD manager, had suggested the purpose of that grant be defined after “A Way Forward” is further down the road. Don said the redefinition should be a stand-alone agenda topic. Marsha said there was no new information about the grant since the February meeting. She said the native-fish grant is an intersection of the DRD-SC and “A Way Forward”. The DWCD was the applicant for the DRD, and also serves as the fiscal agent, while the San Juan Citizens Alliance is the fiscal agent for “A Way Forward”. Marsha said the grant may have to be revised slightly and possibly resubmitted. The big question is how the \$50,000 will be used to benefit native fish on the Lower Dolores. The money must be spent between 7/1/11 and 6/30/12 and the project will begin once a purchase order is received from the CWCB. Marsha suggested the DRD-SC wait to discuss the grant until the direction of “A Way Forward” is clearer so the two efforts will dovetail. It will need to be discussed in May or June and there will need to be a work plan.

DRD goals: Marsha presented for discussion a revised draft of the DRD goals document. She reiterated that this document is being prepared in response to the expressed desire of the full DRD at its fall meeting that the functions and goals of the DRD be spelled out.

Some changes agreed on related to different sections were:

Functions of the DRD

- Don said the term “key hydrological information” in one item needs a fuller definition.
- It was agreed to add to the functions of the DRD that it reviews proposals.

Projects/Activities

- In No. 2, change “...alternates which are first vetted by the DRD Steering Committee, and the Hydrology and Science Committees...” to “with input from the Hydrology and Science Committees...”
- Under the set of principles, more fully explain the “known hydrological sideboards, Colorado water law, and Project contracts”.
- Delete “which is expected” after, “Therefore, the proposal may have a multi-year implementation component”.
- Under No. 4, “Host full DRD meetings biannually or more if necessary,” spell out when it is necessary. Meghan said it had been agreed that additional DRD meetings would be held when there were proposals to be discussed.

Ways Success Will Be Measured

- In the second bullet under Do-able Alternatives, add “per year” after “at least two proposals”.
- Under “The Concept of an Adaptive Management Model”, add a second bullet to the effect that small steps in adaptive management may be of value in building broader adaptive management.
- Provide a definition of adaptive management. Ann will e-mail one to Marsha.

Committee Activities

- Replace “the Big Gyp report” with its new name, “the Opportunities Report”.
- Make the bullet about the DRD Science Committee working under a \$50,000 grant related to native fish a stand-alone item instead of listing it under the Science Committee column.
- More fully explain the parameters of the hydrology.

Performance Standards

There was considerable discussion of the chart under this heading. Marsha said this title may need to be changed. She said the chart could be a set of goals or a set of performance standards. Ann said these are really goals, so the middle column of potential tools, which is the controversial portion, could possibly be dropped.

Randy said he thought the chart was generally good but he wouldn’t call these goals. He suggested labeling the left-hand column “desired outcomes if the hydrology is there”. He said he didn’t want to see the potential tools dropped because there is value in specifying what exactly is needed to achieve the goal or desired outcome.

David agreed he wouldn’t want to see the potential tools dropped. He said it is important to have targets. He said the problem is the river system is iterative. Flow targets aren’t the silver bullet; it wouldn’t be desirable to hit these targets every year.

Ann said it might be good to think about the goals that have to be met on the hydrology side alongside these desired ecological outcomes, without thinking about the constraints.

Don said there needs to be a better definition of the hydrology. He said it has three parts:

1. Mother Nature – the physical reality. This is the most important component. The goals in the second column can be goals only in the framework of what Mother Nature provides.
2. Colorado water law and legal rights within the context of Mother Nature.
3. Contractual obligations resulting from the Dolores Project.

Don said this also relates to other sections of the goals document.

As an example, Don said that under “Riparian Ecology”, there is a stated outcome of 2,000 cfs for 10+ days for floodplain scour. Don said there might be that much water available 3 out of 10 years. The question to consider is: What is the best way to potentially utilize that water? Don

said that's the context in which these goals need to be examined and discussed. Goals are good but Mother Nature has to provide the water.

Vern said the listed outcomes/goals have changed somewhat from the operating criteria the BOR has been using; for instance, the goal used to be 7 days for floodplain scour. He said these desired outcomes seem to conflict with the needs of rafters. Many people wouldn't want a flow of 3,000 cfs for one week because that is too high for rafting.

Marsha said this is where an adaptive-management model could be utilized if a multi-year approach were considered.

Peter said the critical piece missing is the cyclical time element. In most cases these goals are not something that is to be met every year.

Ann said she strongly feels that the first step is for the DRD-SC to agree on what amounts to a vision of improving the environment downstream while staying within hydrologic sideboards. She suggested looking at the left-hand column alone and asking, "Is this what we would like to see happen on the river?" without worrying about how to get there. Her recommendation would be to remove the middle column (tools) from this document and put them elsewhere.

Don said he wouldn't want the tools to disappear but is concerned about the hydrologic realities. He said the tools would need to be fleshed out to be discussed, then evaluated in terms of the stated goals in the context of the scientific realities.

Vern said these could become proposals to be considered by the DRD-SC. Ann and Meghan agreed.

Meghan said there is value in maintaining this information because the DRD sometimes has need for more specificity. She liked the idea of including the recurrence interval. A disclaimer could say these aren't agreed-upon tools but ideas for ways each goal could be handled, and for any to be implemented they would have to go through the Framework Process.

David said he would look for "A Way Forward" to provide flow recommendations that are similar to these. He does not want to park these as future proposals and forget them.

Vern said the goals document is an overview, except for this section, which is very detailed. He said it doesn't seem to fit and perhaps should be somewhere else. He can see 10 proposals that could be done fairly quickly if someone would propose them and take the initiative. Marsha said either this becomes one giant adaptive-management proposal or people take these up individually.

Peter liked Don's suggestion of having the hydrologic constraints in this framework and in context because that is an educational tool and that's part of the intent of the goals sheet. He said the boaters should be included in this chart.

Ann suggested these be called "flow hypotheses" instead of tools. She would like the opportunity to flesh these out based on the Opportunities Report in order to make sure there is consistency between the documents.

Don said he liked Ann's suggestion to call these "flow hypotheses". He would like to keep two columns on the right: Mother Nature in one, and water laws and contracts in the other. Another column could be labeled "Adaptive Management/Potential Proposals" and left blank, then filled out as proposals come in. He said he wants the Hydrology Committee to flesh out the laws/contracts.

Meghan said flow hypotheses for rafting exist, but she doesn't know if they are finalized and ready to put into a public document. She will check with the rafters. Marsha said if necessary she can look to the contracts for flow hypotheses and change the information later if necessary.

Marsha said if this is done well it will be a framework for adaptive management.

David said this is like a goals document but also a performance review. Marsha said maybe once it is developed it will become part of the Framework Proposal documentation.

Meghan said the SC was charged with creating a stand-alone goals document.

Don said the chart is a matrix of do-able alternatives, not performance standards. He said to call the left column "Ecological Goals" and that rafting should be part of the "contracts" column.

Randy said his focus is beyond the spill. He said everyone needs to look for flexibility within the entire basin for the benefit of the whole community. Concentrating only on the physical and hydrologic constraints can mean overlooking opportunities regarding efficiency. It's important to recognize the hydrology, but that doesn't mean you can't do something. You just have to overcome the constraints.

David said it helps to define existing hydrology. He said to avoid the word "constraints". Vern suggested "realities" instead.

Randy said MVIC is going to put forth a proposal to lease water to the CWCB and put that water downstream this year. He hopes to have the proposal in place by the next DRD-SC meeting. The basic concept is to set up a trust as the fiscal agent for funding for the water. The trust would govern how those flows would happen to help meet the minimum instream flow of 78 cfs. Marsha said this will be discussed again at the April 5 DRD-SC meeting.

Marsha will do a redraft of the goals document before the next meeting and may try to get it out for comments before then.

Steering Committee composition: Vern asked whether there should be a boater on the SC. Meghan said she represents the Dolores River Coalition, which includes a commercial-rafting component, and she tries to communicate with Nathan Fey of American Whitewater about what happens in the meetings. She said most boaters have day jobs and have a hard time making the meetings. Marsha said boaters could be asked to come to certain meetings when there is an agenda topic of interest to them. They can also be involved in the Science or Hydrology committees because those committees' membership is open to anyone.

Peter said the DRD-SC had said it wanted to revisit the composition of the group after a year, and suggested it be an agenda item. Marsha said she can put this on the agenda.

Funding for the new SnoTel site: Ken said the DRD-SC can spend either a total of \$25,000 or \$27,000, depending on whether the soil-moisture probes are included. It was agreed they are needed and to seek the larger amount.

Ken said the funding sources are as follows:

- CWCB has committed to \$15,000.
- There is \$2,000 left from the Sharkstooth installation.
- Trout Unlimited has committed \$500.
- He has a request in to the Ute Farm.

Don said the DWCD would likely provide funding but would want to be an equal partner with MVIC and the SJCA for whatever amount remains to be provided.

Randy agreed MVIC would likely be willing to share the costs and told Ken to invoice the company for whatever amount is decided. He told SJCA to invoice the company for its share of "A Way Forward".

It was agreed to ask the Southwestern Water Conservation District for \$1,500. David said the DOW might be able to contribute \$500. Don said if the Utes give \$500, then that would leave about \$2,000 apiece for DWCD, MVIC and SJCA. Meghan said SJCA would probably be amenable.

Committee evaluation: Marsha said there is not an abundance of people participating in the Science Committee. One idea is to combine it and the Hydrology Committee into a Technical Committee.

Ken said the Hydrology Committee has been examining documents related to the Dolores Project and has had good discussions. The idea was to educate themselves before real questions came to them. He said he would like some guidance from the DRD-SC as to the further role of the Hydrology Committee.

Ann agreed that better coordination is needed. The Science Committee would be happy if the DRD-SC has tasks it would like it to work on. She said it has been encouraging recently to see the range of people that have been attending the Science Committee meetings. Ann said the meetings sometimes feel a bit redundant because some people from the DRD-SC stay for the later Science and Hydrology committee meetings, but although there is redundancy in the people involved, there is not necessarily redundancy in the focus.

Meghan said eliminating any redundancy would be good because it is a long day of meetings. She said the Hydrology Committee has been providing the educational component in a very detailed way and she is glad for that.

David agreed that the Hydrology Committee's education has been valuable. He is trying to get Jim White of the DOW to come to the Science Committee meetings. He said both committees are valuable as individual entities.

Marsha said she took responsibility for some of the confusion because there hasn't been good communication between the three committees. She said it doesn't sound like there is support to combine Science and Hydrology. Marsha suggested she and Ken and Ann need to have a phone call after these meetings.

Don said he wouldn't discard the idea yet. He said the Hydrology Committee has a more active role to play than it has played yet. We need to think how to best focus and utilize people's time.

David said combining the committees or just having regular joint meetings should be considered. He said the concept was to not have a Hydrology Committee meeting if there is no topic. Meghan said having joint meetings might be good for a specific item that requires people from both committees, but she has concerns about combining them because the old Technical Committee's agendas were always packed. David suggested the hydrologic elements of the "performance standards" table be considered in a combined meeting after the April meeting.

Marsha said the committee discussion is evolving and continuing. The idea of combining the Science and Hydrology committees can remain a possibility.

Don said he has always couched some of the discussion in terms of staffing and it has been valuable to have Ann and Ken at the DRD-SC meetings. He said there may be a way to structure the meetings so no one's time is wasted. Perhaps the coordinators should continue to attend the DRD-SC meetings and then have the other meetings be very agenda-driven and not necessarily take place every month.

Agenda for April 28 DRD meeting: Marsha said the preliminary agenda includes a goals discussion, an update on "A Way Forward", and a rafting-flow panel, which was suggested by David. Meghan suggested asking American Whitewater if they have something to present. Marsha said to call it just a rafting panel. Meghan said it will be important to do outreach ahead of time to make sure rafting representatives are present.

Marsha said it is important to hear from everyone, not just rafters, regarding the goals. She suggested breaking into small groups for feedback about the entire goals document.

Don said the Spill Committee may be the place to have some discussion about how to make native fish a priority of the project instead of having the spill be solely for the rafters. There is room in the interpretation of the Dolores Project documents for native fish to have some priority. He said it may be very do-able to manage for native fish and rafters both.

Vern said rafters are integral to river management and their buy-in and attendance are needed. Meghan said the rafters need to internally coordinate and there is a process under way to try to get that to happen. However, she said they may not be ready to present a coordinated response at the April 28 DRD meeting.

Marsha said she thinks DRD meetings are for:

- The DRD to review the DRD-SC's recommendations about proposals.
- The dissemination of information about reports, new science, etc.
- Networking.

Marsha said she thinks they need to be careful about introducing ideas at the DRD level. Rafters and proposals need to come to the DRD-SC first and maybe the Spill Committee. David then withdrew his recommendation for a rafting panel.

Marsha said that left two DRD agenda items: goals and “A Way Forward”. She said to keep thinking about other agenda items but to keep in mind that goals could be a three-hour discussion.

Science Committee: The discussion was tabled because of time.

Representation at seminar: Marsha said the Southwestern Water Conservation District’s annual seminar will be April 1. She asked if anyone could speak about the DRD because she and Meghan have schedule conflicts. She suggested maybe Mike Preston could talk. Randy Carver said he will consider talking and Marsha said she will think about changing her schedule.

Meeting summary: The Feb. 1 minutes were approved with no changes.

Contractor for proposals: Vern said he thinks there needs to be a contractor to draft people’s concepts into proposals or the DRD-SC will not meet its goal of seeing two proposals a year through the process.

Marsha said the message needs to be disseminated that people can come to the DRD-SC before they fill out a formal proposal. Also, there is \$7,500 in the budget set aside for “shepherding” proposals. She suggested putting ideas on the agenda, and if a special consultant is needed for a proposal, money could be made available.

Don said he prefers having staff such as Ann and Ken do the shepherding rather than hiring another contractor. Randy said he also opposes paying a contractor to write a proposal. He said there are people with groups such as TNC and SJCA that can draft proposals.

Peter said he and TNC want to work with Don on the proposal to make native fish a priority for the spills. Don said he is willing to work with Peter on this. Ann said she is willing to work on the proposal and willing to talk with Vern about making permanent the categorical exclusion for early flows to benefit native fish. Don said the early fish flows could dovetail with native-fish prioritization.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be April 5 at 9 a.m.