



Dolores River Dialogue 10/28 Meeting Summary

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"Dolores River Dialogue"

Tuesday, October 28, 2008

DOLORES WATER CONSERVANCY DISTRICT

AGENDA

- ◇ Introductions and Review of Agenda
- ◇ Lower Dolores River Management Plan Update
- ◇ 319 Water Shed Study
- ◇ 2008 Water Year/Spill Review and Rafting Year
- ◇ DRD Science: Current Efforts; 2008 Findings and Conclusions; Priority Questions; & CDOW Fish Sampling Report

Lower Dolores River Management Plan Update

Background / Issues: At the February 2008 DRD meeting, a project to update the current 1990 Management Plan and to develop alternatives to the Wild and Scenic River designation for the Lower Dolores River area was started. This agenda item informed DRD members of the planning process; gave detailed information about the new Working Group which will start in December; and provided information about the proposed planning outcomes.

First, an overview was given of past DRD actions and decisions which led to the DRD being well-positioned for involvement in this planning effort. The DRD commented on the San Juan National Forest Draft Land Management Plan specifically around Wild and Scenic River issues. Additionally, the DRD formed in 2004 and since that time, has brought together water managers, commercial boaters, recreationalists, conservation groups and governmental entities to discuss ecological issues, land use planning, water flows and management. Finally, the DRD's science efforts and findings make the DRD a logical choice to help the Dolores Public Lands Office with this Management Plan Update.

Starting in December of 2008, a diverse Working Group will be launched. The group will meet until September 2009. Through field trips, discussions and learning, this Working Group will be asked to devise recommendations for protecting important values in the Lower Dolores River Valley area and develop recommendations with proposed actions. The outcome will be a report from the Working Group which will be forwarded to the Dolores Public Lands Office (USFS/BLM) to use in initiating a formal Environmental Assessment process, which will start in the Fall of 2009.

The Working Group process will be open and transparent. The past work of the DRD and science findings will be fully integrated into the process. The public will be informed and engaged during each step, and time will be made available on the agenda for public comment.

The DRD-Technical Committee will do detailed planning for meetings. A grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board for \$99,980 was received to cover costs for the planning process. This fund is for communities to find alternatives to the Wild and Scenic River designation.

DRD Input: After learning about the Working Group in detail, the full DRD gave suggestions for additional stakeholders/groups who they believed should be involved (see list on the next page).

Action: There was acceptance of the Working Group process as outlined and developed by the DRD-Technical Committee (DRD-TC). Anyone interested in being on the Working Group was asked to contact Marsha Porter-Norton, DRD facilitator. For a copy of the current *1990 Dolores River Coordinator Management Plan*, contact the Dolores Public Lands Office: 882-6834.

The current list of Working Group invitees is as follows:

Bureau of Reclamation
City of Cortez
Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB)
Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW)
Congressional Staff (Sens. Salazar & Udall, Rep. Salazar)
Counties (Dolores, Montezuma and San Miguel)
Dolores Public Lands Office
Dolores River Coalition
Dolores Water Conservancy District (DWCD)
Land owners
Livestock producers
Mining/Gas and Mineral Stakeholders
Montezuma Valley Irrigation Company (MVIC)
Natural History/Science & Archeology
Non Water recreationalists
Rafting — commercial and recreational
Recreational fishing
San Juan Citizens' Alliance
Southwest Water Conservation District
The Nature Conservancy
Towns of Dolores and Dove Creek
Trout Unlimited
Upstream and Trans-Basin Water Users
Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe
Water rights holders

Photo: Courtesy of Chester Anderson



For more information on this agenda item, please contact the DRD facilitator Marsha Porter-Norton - 247-8306 or email: porternorton@animas.net

Rafting Year — 2008, Rick Ryan, BLM (Dolores Public Lands Office)

Background / Issues: Rick Ryan with the BLM gave a Power Point that gave the DRD members a detailed look back at the 2008 rafting season, which was very good this year. Rick told the DRD that many more commercial and recreational rafters enjoyed the Lower Dolores River compared to previous years. Rick gave a presentation that showed the number of launches by month from four sites; flow releases; trip lengths; group size; and origin of rafters by state. Key points:

- * rafters were mostly from Colorado;
- * the most reported length of trip in # of days was three (3);
- * May had the most launches at 451 compared to other months;
- * the most-used type of boats were rafts and dories;
- * most rafters started at Bradfield Bridge;
- * the first day of rafting water release was March 26th at 200 cfs and the last day was June 24th; and
- * the highest CFS release was in mid-May at 2,000.
(source: sign-in box at the launch sites)

DRD Input: There was broad agreement that the spill year worked much better this year. There was strong coordination between rafters and water managers in terms of timing of releases, communication and planning. The question was asked if more management of the area should occur (designated camp sites). Rick said this is something that could be raised in the Management Plan Update planning process.

Action: There was no action related to this DRD presentation.

For more information on this agenda item, contact Rick Ryan at the Dolores Public Lands Office—882-6834 or email: richard_ryan@blm.gov

319 Watershed Study, Chester Anderson

Background / Issues: Through a grant from the Federal Clean Water Act, there is a water quality study being done on the Lower Dolores River called the *319 Water Shed Plan*. Chester is leading this effort and gave DRD members an update. The goal is to: *Protect or improve water quality on the Dolores River from McPhee Dam downstream to the Utah State Line.*

Through working with affected people and organizations, this study will identify any sources of non-point pollution and make management recommendations based on best practices. Chester emphasized this is a non-regulatory program. A definition of non-point source pollution was provided: *Non-point source (NPS) pollution, unlike pollution from industrial and sewage treatment plants, comes from many diffuse sources. NPS pollution is caused by rainfall or snowmelt moving over and through the ground. As the runoff moves, it picks up and carries away natural and human-made pollutants, finally depositing them into lakes, rivers, wetlands, coastal waters, and even underground sources of drinking water.*

The procedures used to complete this study include:

- * Research and compile existing information on current land use practices
- * Identify potential sources of non-point pollution
- * Review and compile literature and stakeholder information in regards to current water quality issues
- * Participate in on-going DRD process
- * Participate in Lower Dolores River Management Plan Update Working Group process
- * Contact individuals and organizations that may have a stake in the outcome of the watershed plan and invite them to the table
- * Focus on downstream areas not covered in the Lower Dolores River Management Plan Update Process

DRD Input: There was not a lot of input on this agenda item. Some DRD members did discuss that some pollution is from naturally occurring sources (e.g. sediment loads and salinity in some areas). Chester said that natural polluting sources can be mitigated as well.

Action: Chester is going to be on the Management Plan Update Working Group and will utilize that process for information and input. He regularly reports to the DRD-Technical Committee.

For more information on this agenda item, contact Chester Anderson with B.U.G.S. Consulting—970-764-7581 or email: chester.bugsconsult@hughs.net



Photo: Courtesy of Chester Anderson



Photo: Courtesy of Rick Ryan

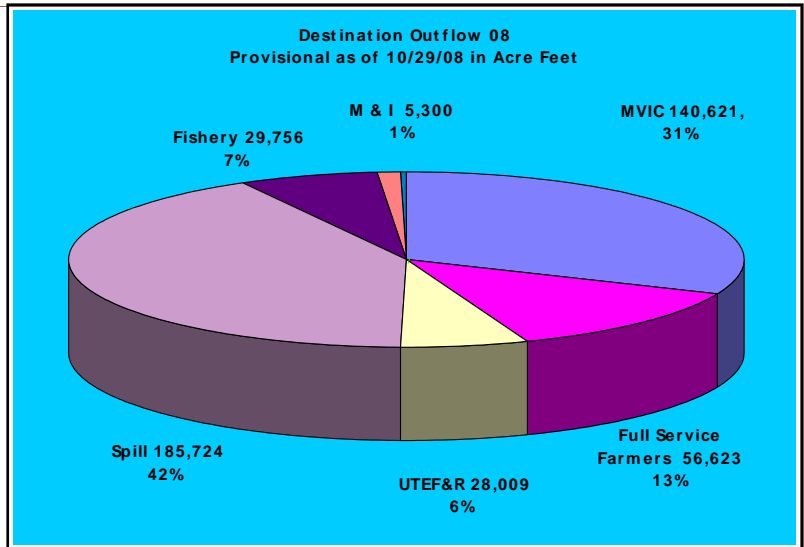
2008 Water Year Review, Mike Preston, DWCD

Background / Issues: Mike gave a detailed presentation about the water year and the spill. Through presenting information that he emphasized was provisional data, he went through the projections; in-flows and releases since 1986; ending reservoir levels; and the reservoir hydrograph (see below). This year's abundant early moisture gave the Spill Committee more water to work with than in recent years.

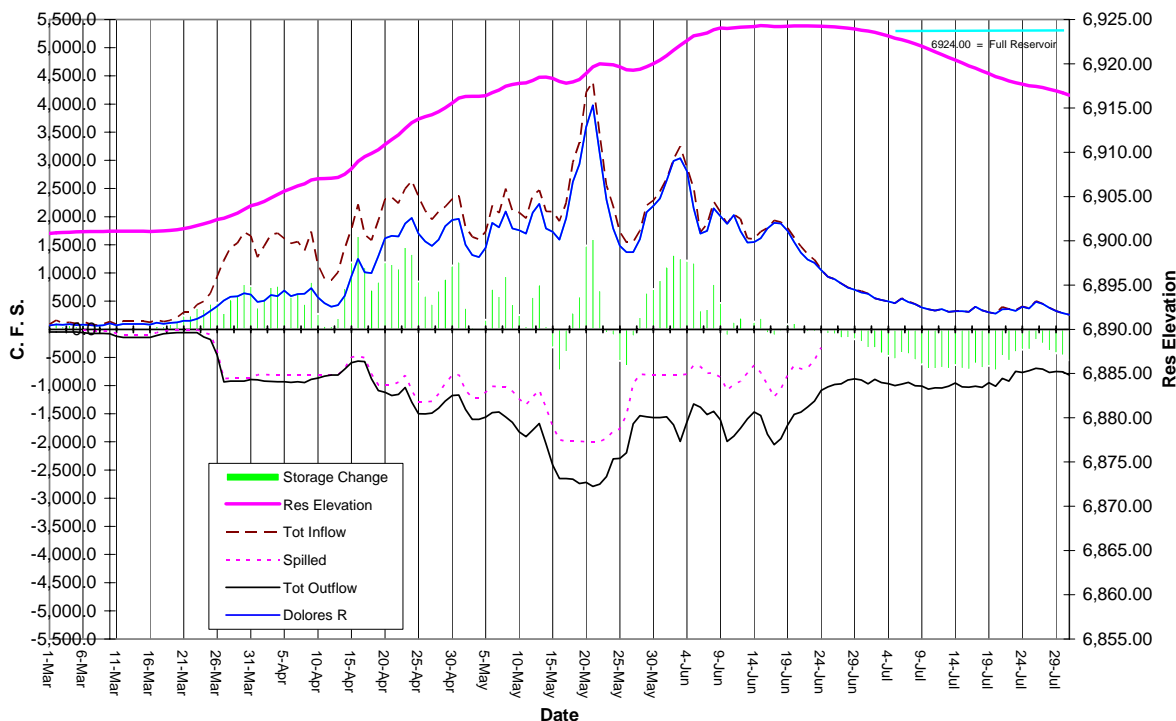
The highest in-flow was in May at 145,455 AF. The managed spill was 185,724 AF from March 6th to June 24th, higher than for 2005. The water allocated to the fish (aka "Fish Clock") was turned off for 85 days from April 1st to June 24th which saved at least 50 AF/day. This resulted in higher flows later in the summer because CDOW water could be released later. This action helps with cooling of the river in summer. Flows were also coordinated with fish sampling done by the CDOW.

Approximately 212,000 AF of irrigation water went through McPhee Reservoir and out to irrigation users this season. And, approximately 5,000 AF went to municipal and industrial users including Cortez, Towaoc, Dove Creek and full service users. As of October 20th, the reservoir was at 6900.48' with an active capacity of 133,357 AF requiring 95,803 AF to fill up.

Action: Mike ended by saying that managing the spill is a balancing act between the water users, ecological needs, flood control and rafting interests while meeting current water agreements. It was emphasized that given this complexity, the Spill Committee's input is very important and helpful. Mike stated that this was a year of learning for the DWCD. Lessons can be applied in the future.



McPhee Reservoir 2008 Hydrograph (Mar-Jul)



For more information on this agenda item, contact Mike Preston, DWCD - 565-7562 or email: mpreston@frontier.net

DRD Science Update: Ann Oliver,
Co-Coordinator DRD Science Committee

For more information on this agenda item,
contact Ann Oliver 375-0800 or email: aoliver@tnc.org
or Jim Siscoe at 739-4541 or email:
jsiscoe@questoffice.net

Background / Issues: Ann Oliver gave the DRD a presentation on current Science Committee findings, efforts and questions. First, she defined “DRD Science” as: *a gathering of pertinent research or monitoring efforts; current efforts by members of DRD or others; and DRD efforts to identify additional needs.* The DRD Science Committee held an extensive meeting on October 8th. They began to identify goals and needs, and ask “the big picture” questions plus share information and coordinate. This work builds upon the Core Science Report and all other DRD science done in the past. A total of 8 people and 11 organizations are conducting science on the Lower Dolores River. The Science Committee produced a list of list questions (below) that are guiding current research and monitoring efforts of the DRD and partners in these areas: River Mechanics (Geomorphology); Riparian Ecology; Cold Water Fish; Warm Water Fish; and “Other.” These questions and the current efforts framework were presented to the DRD. For each topic, the current efforts framework showed the lead person/entity; needs; study sites including DRD reaches; and the research questions in play. Many of the research questions relate to the flows necessary for certain conditions. The current efforts framework allows everyone involved to develop a common understanding of what is happening and why, around science initiatives. The framework presented is on the Web site.

Action: The DRD Science Committee is funded by the MVIC, Colorado Water Conservation Board and Northern Arizona University. The co-coordinators continue to pursue funding opportunities.

Geomorphology

- How do flows affect geomorphic processes in Reach 1? Has the habitat improvement work at Lone Dome improved riffle/pool habitat for Trout? Define best restoration strategies for Reach 1.
- How do flows affect geomorphic processes at the Dove Creek Pump sampling site? How does this reach compare w/ Lone Dome site? Particle size analyses.
- How do flows affect geomorphic processes in Reach 5? How could you optimize flow regime for scouring fine sediment through Big Gyp Valley?
- How is BLM land management affecting geomorphology?

Riparian Ecology

- Has regeneration occurred for major native tree species on lower Dolores and what flow events are associated with that regeneration? How does the regeneration and growth of *Populus angustifolia* compare below and above McPhee dam? How does the regeneration and growth of *Populus deltoides* subsp. *wislizenii* differ between the Dolores River and the San Miguel River?
- Is there a link between riparian habitat and aquatic habitat, fish populations and/or water quality?
- What is the status/rate of vegetation encroachment onto floodplain?
- How has Dolores River riparian area/channel changed over time since dam construction?
- Is BLM meeting Rangeland Health Standards under current management?

Cold Water Fish

- Why is there so much algae below the dam? What is the impact on the trout fishery? What sort of bottleneck is created for trout by warm temperatures and decaying algae at low flows?
- How does temperature vary hourly at the dam outlet and at Bradfield Bridge?
- How can we mitigate non-point source pollution on the Dolores?
- What is the species composition and biomass/acre of trout and sculpin?
- What is the species composition and biomass/acre by species?

Warm Water Fish

- What is the status of 3 species of concern (flannelmouth, bluehead sucker, roundtail chub)?
- What is the water quality and what is the status of the habitat? What tributaries [perennial] are the most likely to be impacting the water quality on the Dolores?

Other Questions Related to the Dolores River

- How far is the current rangeland condition departed from the ecosite? How are uplands affecting the river?
- Which sub-watersheds of Disappointment Creek are contributing the most salinity?

CDOW Fish Sampling/Results, Jim White, Colorado Division of Wildlife

Background / Issues: Jim White with the Colorado Division of Wildlife gave a presentation about his agency's fish sampling work on the river. The CDOW has been doing regular inventoring at sites for 19 years at the same water level (40 cfs) and the same time of the year when possible. Some of the results presented were from sampling done in 2007 and some results were from this past season. The highlights of the CDOW's findings, by testing area, include:

From McPhee Dam to Bradfield Bridge:

- Biomass of trout up from 9 to 29 lbs (management goal is 32 lbs/ac)
- Percentage of rainbow trout is up (20%-23%)
- Whirling Disease (WD) resistant rainbows stocked and found at all sites
- No native suckers captured
- Trout biomass appears to correlate with downstream water deliveries

Native Fisheries Sampling (Pyramid Mountain to James Ranch)

- A total of only 9 fish were collected in this 14 mile reach
- 3 brown trout, 1 rainbow, 2 smallmouth bass, 1 speckled dace and 2 roundtail chubs (67% non-native)
- No flannelmouth or bluehead suckers captured

Dove Creek Pump Station

- RTC abundance was up from last year (29 to 40 fish captured > 80 mm TL)
- No native suckers captured
- 1 YOY smallmouth bass captured; 1st recorded at this site
- Note – no FMS or BHS were captured in this two pass mark and recapture 20 mile reach of stream

Pyramid to Slickrock

- Majority of fish captured were smallmouth bass and trout and few native suckers were captured
- Most of the bass were in a short section of the canyon called the narrows
- Higher baseflows may "squeeze" the reproductive and habitat preferences of these fish

Big Gypsum Valley

- Showed a decline in the abundance of native fish but the assemblage is doing better here than above Disappointment Creek

Slick Rock Canyon

- Abundance of natives low but species composition was mostly native fish

Gateway

- 7 mile reach of stream from Gateway to the Stateline
- Only site where bluehead sucker was relatively abundant
- This site is below the San Miguel confluence which enhances baseflows

CDOW Management Recommendations

Jim gave these recommendations for future water management: 1) Adequate base flows are critical to native suckers whose primary habitat consists of deep riffles and runs. 2) Better base flows benefit trout as well as the native fish. 3) Work with DRD and Dolores Biology Team to identify willing water leasers during dry years per House Bill 1280. 4) Thermal criteria could be used to evaluate effectiveness of any additional water leased during critical time periods. 5) Continue releasing flows through the bottom outlet work. 6) Continue fish monitoring in historic sites as well as native longitudinal surveys (if water available) in May at 400 cfs. 7) Continue removing SMB. 8) Continue stocking Whirling Disease resistant rainbow trout.

DRD Input: There were questions on the data and Jim answered them. The DWCD and CDOW agreed to continue discussions about where the water is released from (higher is warmer water and lower is colder).

Action: The CDOW will continue to do fish sampling and report to the DRD.



Photo: Courtesy of Jim White, CDOW

For more information on this agenda item, contact Jim White, CDOW—375-6712 or email: j.white@state.co.us