LOWER DOLORES WORKING GROUP FACT SHEET
Meeting #2
January 19, 2009

Science, recreation and spill management

Science efforts of the Dolores River Dialogue

Presenter: **Jim Siscoe**
Co-coordinator of the Dolores River Dialogue (DRD) Science Committee

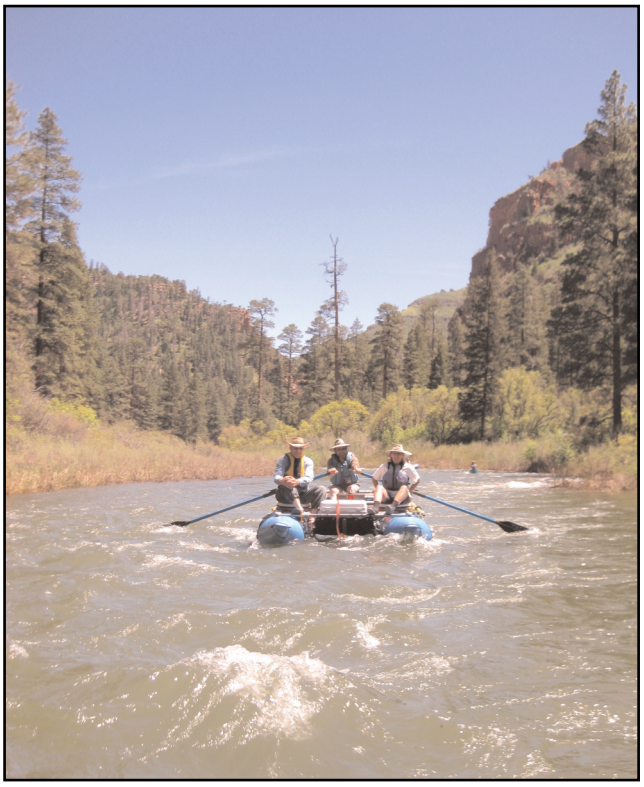
The philosophy of the DRD science team is to ensure that the science efforts they conduct are completely transparent, free of hidden agendas, and as devoid of politics as possible.

Major topics of discussion for the DRD science team have been:

- Geomorphology (primarily sediment transport)
- Coldwater fisheries (in particular, how to manage for a recreational fishery from McPhee Dam to Bradfield Bridge while also supporting native fish)
- Riparian ecology
- Special species of concern (native fish)

Fact

Scientists have divided the Dolores River from McPhee to the confluence with the Colorado into eight reaches, all with unique characteristics in regard to gradient, riparian ecology, geology and more.



Marsha Porter-Norton

Rafting on the Lower Dolores

Challenge: In the past, the Dolores River saw greater fluctuations than it does now. During the 120 years prior to construction of McPhee Dam, the river periodically experienced big flushing flows. Then it would go dry, or nearly dry, from mid-June through July from the area where the dam is now, down to the pump station. There was no trout fishery, but there were deep pools of water filled with native fish. The river bottom was churned up, making it ideal for fish to lay eggs. It was a healthier environment. Today, the maximum amount of spill that is released from the dam is 5,000 cubic feet per second. The energy from the big flushing flows has been lost. And where the Dolores was once sometimes dry, it is now a perennial river. The DRD science team is seeking ways to create healthier conditions. However, the team recognizes there are limitations to what can be done because of the many needs of downstream users.

The Lower Dolores Management Plan Working Group is working to provide recommendations for updating the Dolores Public Lands Office (Forest Service/BLM) 1990 Dolores River Corridor Management Plan. The Working Group includes diverse stakeholders with many perspectives and interests in the Lower Dolores River Valley. Its goals are to gather information, identify values worthy of protection in the planning area, formulate ideas for protection of the values, and make recommendations to the Dolores Public Lands Office. The Working Group will meet until Fall 2009.

Lower Dolores Working Group Members & Alternates

Chester Anderson
Linda Bassi
Steve Beverlin
Ann Brown
Chris Burkett
Jon Callender
Randy Carver
Steve Chappell
Amber Clark
Scott Clow
Clint Cressler
Cole Crocker-Bedford
James Dietrich
Carolyn Dunmire
Nathan Fey
Jim Fisher
Lynn Gardner
Rick Gersch
Art Goodtimes
David Graf
Dave Harper
Vern Harrell
Al Heaton
Shauna Jensen
Rick Keck
Julie Kibel
Gerald Koppenhafer
Ted Kowalski
Tony & Peggy Littlejohn
Andy Logan
Joe Mahaffey
Meghan Maloney
Karel Miller
Ann Oliver
John Porter
Mike Preston
Larrie Rule
Rick Ryan
David Schneck
Lisa Schwantes
Don Schwindt
Leslie Sesler
Jim Siscoe
Bruce Smart
Dale Smith
Doug Stowe
Rowdy Suckla
Steve Trudeau
David Vackar
Chuck Wanner
Mely Whiting
John Whitney
Ernie Williams

Staff
Marsha Porter-Norton
Kathy Sherer
Gail Binkly
Gina Espeland

Recreation

Presenter: **Rick Ryan**
River manager, San Juan Public Lands Center

Recreational uses in the 97-mile corridor from Bradfield Bridge to Bedrock (the portion managed by the center) include motorized travel along the Snaggletooth trail from the Dove Creek pump station to Slick Rock; horseback riding; camping; hiking; fishing; hunting; biking and more. Although rafting is just one activity, it is a major factor in deciding flows. Launch-site information from 2008 shows that Bradfield Bridge is the most popular boat launch site; May is the busiest rafting month; and the vast majority of boaters on the Dolores are from Colorado.

Fact
The Dolores is not a "permitted" river. Private boaters do not now need permits to float it.

Managing spills

Presenter: **Mike Preston**
Manager, Dolores Water Conservancy District

Mike discussed the logistics of managing spills from McPhee. The 2008 early winter spill forecast turned out to be too optimistic, but there was still enough water for 85 days of rafting spills. Last year the reservoir stayed full until the end of June. However, projections surrounding climate change indicate more rain but less snowfall and earlier snowmelt in the Southwest, which could mean a 30 percent reduction in reservoir water in the next 100 years. Water managers will keep a close eye on when the snowpack is melting and will plan different management if necessary. So far, the time of peak snowmelt seems steady, around the third week in May.

Working Group discussions and thoughts

• The Working Group largely expressed **support for continuation of recreation and expansion of recreational opportunities**. Suggestions included keeping open the road that runs along the river corridor across public lands in Dolores County and into San Miguel County; revitalizing the coldwater fishery below the dam to Bradfield; and providing better flow management to create steady flows so boaters can take several raft trips in a single season if spills are good. Under the existing contract, the Dolores Water Conservancy District and Bureau of Reclamation must manage the dam for irrigation and to "maximize rafting days"; however, this is not defined. Flows of 1,000 to 1,200 cubic feet per second are ideal for rafters, but smaller craft are able to raft the river at lower cfs, so there may be opportunities to increase boating of this type.

• On the other hand, some **concern was expressed about the carrying capacity of the river and river corridor**. Rick Ryan said that one day at Coyote Wash there were seven groups camping, all in sight and sound of one another. There have been complaints about loud parties and drinking, fireworks, and dogs running loose. Careless OHV use is destroying pools and vegetation in the Coyote Wash area as well. One group member asked whether we really want to promote the area and attract more users when this could prove detrimental to the resource.

NO decisions or recommendations were made at this meeting.

Presentations, documents, meeting summaries, agendas and other information related to the Lower Dolores Working Group process are posted at http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drd/.