

LOWER DOLORES WORKING GROUP
Meeting 7 Summary
Aug. 17, 2009

Note: Presentations, documents, meeting summaries, agendas and other information related to the Lower Dolores Working Group process are posted at <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drd/>. There is a button on the left on the home page for the Lower Dolores Working Group.

Facilitator: Ann Oliver replaced Marsha Porter-Norton as facilitator for this meeting because Marsha was ill. Ann explained that her role with the Working Group is completely separate from her role with The Nature Conservancy.

Review of process: The review was deferred until the next meeting, when Marsha is back.

Meeting summary: Review of the April and May meeting summaries was deferred until the next meeting.

Public comment: None

General discussion: Rowdy Suckla, rancher, asked why no one from the Dolores Public Lands Office (“DPLO”) was present. Ann said that DPLO Manager Steve Beverln has said his most urgent priority at present is for his interdisciplinary team to finish its grazing-allotment analysis.

Jim Siscoe, director of the Montezuma Valley Irrigation Company (“MVIC”) and co-coordinator of the Dolores River Dialogue (“DRD”) Science Committee, said he has been one of the biggest critics of the interdisciplinary (“ID”) team’s absence from the Working Group meetings. He said everyone who comes to the meetings is busy as well. He asked how the ID team can write the river management plan if the members haven’t heard the Working Group’s comments all along. He said the federal agencies should have at least one or two representatives at the meetings. He said he does respect Steve’s time and priorities and does believe he’s trying to get the grazing analysis completed.

Several other group members agreed. They said it is not sufficient for the ID team to simply read written summaries of the group’s comments, because those have to be condensed. It was stated that it may be most important to have DPLO staff present after the Working Group’s reach-by-reach small-group discussions.

Ann said this is a legitimate concern that she will convey to Steve and the ID team. She said that Shauna Jensen of the DPLO is on medical leave and Steve is severely short-staffed.

Reaches 1 and 2 An in-depth look

Ann showed a PowerPoint presentation about Reaches 1 and 2, beginning with their Outstandingly Remarkable Values (“ORVs”) and top management topics. (The complete PowerPoint is available on the web site.) Reach 1 is defined as the stretch of the river from McPhee Dam to Bradfield Bridge; Reach 2 is from Bradfield Bridge to the Dove Creek pumps.

The ORVs in those reaches are:

- rafting,
- archaeology,
- scenery (groves, cliffs and linear canyons),
- geology (linear canyons), and
- the roundtail chub.

The top management topic is the coldwater fishery.

Ann said Reach 1 is largely surrounded by Forest Service land. At the Bradfield Bridge, the land becomes Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) property. Some land is managed by the Colorado Division of Wildlife (“DOW”). There are also two private parcels along Reach 1, but no private land along Reach 2.

Ann said the *1990 Dolores River Corridor Management Plan* found Reach 1 to be eligible for Wild and Scenic River (“WSR”) status as a “recreational” WSR, and Reach 2 to be eligible as a “scenic” WSR. She reviewed the characteristics of the wild, scenic and recreational categories.

WSR eligibility for the Lower Dolores starts 1 mile downstream of McPhee Dam. From that point the public-lands agencies have to manage the river so as to maintain its ORVs.

The PowerPoint listed the overall goals and objectives of the *1990 Dolores River Corridor Management Plan*, the first of which is, “Protect and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the Corridor while allowing compatible uses.”

The PowerPoint also listed questions for the group’s consideration regarding Reaches 1 and 2. The final question was, “Overall, what management/protection tools should be recommended in these reaches? (especially ‘so as not to diminish’ the ORVs).”

The presentation also listed current management objectives for each of the two reaches.

ORVs for Reaches 1 and 2

Ann then discussed each of the individual ORVs present in Reaches 1 and 2 in terms of their significance, goals/objectives, current management, status/trends, and problems/concerns.

Rafting: Rafting is very important, especially in Reach 2, which is one of the most popular rafting sites in Southwest Colorado. There is one commercial outfitter permitted to float and fish in Reach 1. In Reach 2, commercial rafting outfitters must have permits; private boaters are not required to obtain permits.

Status and trends for rafting include a changing definition of what constitutes a rafting day. It has been defined as a flow of 800 or more cubic feet per second ("cfs"), but that definition is changing to 1,000 cfs with two weeks' notice. Carolyn Dunmire, recreational rafter, said boaters are currently being compacted into Reach 2, and most are taking only day trips, because there is very little notice of when adequate flows will occur. When the 1990 plan was written, most boaters were taking multi-day trips and floating on to other reaches.

Mike Preston, general manager of the Dolores Water Conservancy District ("DWCD"), said that his staff reads Sno-Tel reports and receives forecasts in early January but it isn't until May 1 that they get a solid feel for the extent of the snowpack. 2008 was a good year for predictability. However, 2009 was less predictable. The forecast was for a relatively dry year at first; then the snowpack deepened. But the combination of no new snow and considerable dust and wind in spring meant that the snowpack melted rapidly. In 2008, the inflows to the reservoir were 375,000 acre-feet or so, and the DWCD was still releasing water in March and through April. In 2009 not only was there a lot less snowpack but it came off two or three weeks early, and predictability was lost. Instead of spilling for a long time, which would have helped rafters, the DWCD had to fill the reservoir first. Mike said it would help to have more snow-monitoring stations, but they are costly.

Ann's presentation also listed problems and concerns in regards to rafting, the broadest of which was the issue of carrying capacity.

Archaeological resources: Current management includes a stipulation of no surface occupancy for mineral-leasing, and limits on types and places of vehicle use. Only 3.6% or less of the 91 miles of the Lower Dolores has been systematically surveyed for archaeological sites. There are 85 recorded sites within the one-half-mile-wide river corridor at Reaches 1 and 2, and an estimated total of 1,500 sites along the river down to Bed Rock. Problems and concerns include impacts from recreational users and cattle, the disappearance of artifacts,

and limited funding for surveys. Rowdy said that, for the record, none of his cows have stolen any artifacts.

Roundtail chub: Ann discussed the roundtail chub, a warmwater native fish species declining in much of its range. It is listed as a U.S. Forest Service sensitive species and a species of special concern by the DOW. The 1990 plan called for establishing at least two permanent aquatic-habitat monitoring sites in the warmwater sections of the Lower Dolores and monitoring them at least every five years. Jim Siscoe asked what monitoring the federal agencies are doing now. David Graf, water resource specialist with the DOW, said he is not aware of any, which means the agencies did not meet their goal as stated in the 1990 plan.

Regarding the status of the roundtail chub, David said the warmwater species are not found in Reach 2 any more. They have been mostly extirpated from these top two reaches. When the 1990 plan was written it was valid to call this a warmwater reach because there were fish almost to the dam. Now there are almost no warmwater fish above the pump station. The chub is rare in Reach 1 and has not been captured since the 1990s but it is still present in two tributaries, Beaver and Plateau creeks. In Reach 2 it is assumed to be common but not abundant, but that is based on very scanty data.

Problems with maintaining the roundtail are: It is difficult to survey and monitor; it is killed by non-native fish (especially smallmouth bass); the dam has created colder water temperatures because of releases from the bottom of the reservoir; the dam has created shortened spills and reduced spills/flows. Water is key to suitable habitat for the roundtail, which likes deep pools.

Jim Siscoe said the DRD and DOW are trying to obtain more data about the fish. There is not much data now and funds for surveying are limited. He said he believes the DRD reaches define the river better than the 1990 plan did. He said the question is whether Reach 2 is really a warmwater fishery any longer. If not, the roundtail chub should be taken out of the picture for WSR consideration.

David said the better the coldwater trout fishery is in Reaches 1 and 2, the poorer the warmwater fishing is going to be. It's a trade-off. The roundtail chub is doing the best of the three warmwater species historically present in the river.

Scenery: Ann discussed the significance of scenery, which is closely tied to recreation. The corridor is classified as a Class II Visual Resource Management Area and is managed according to those guidelines. Goals include retaining the existing character of the landscape, with a low level of change.

The recent Narraguinnep and Bradfield wildfires were discussed in terms of their impacts to the scenery and other ORVs. Carolyn Dunmire said the flames burned through the area around Reaches 1 and 2, dropping into the river corridor only at

the Ferris Campground. The Narraguinnep Research Natural Area reportedly was burned entirely.

Geology: The geology of the reaches includes dramatic Cretaceous cliffs. The northerly flow of the river is rare in the region and the speed of the tectonic process and downcutting by the river are also unusual. Because of the slowness of change regarding geology, there are no problems or trends, although it was noted that bullet holes are damaging the desert varnish in places.

Reach 1 Coldwater Fishery

Ann discussed the goals, management, status and problems for the coldwater fishery, which consists of brown, rainbow and cutthroat trout. Browns are self-sustaining; rainbows and cutthroats are stocked.

The trend from 1992 to the present has been generally downward, but 2008 showed an increase in the biomass of trout from 9 to 29 pounds per acre. The DOW's goal is 32 pounds per acre, but some Working Group members said this may be optimistic.

Problems are:

- Drought years are hard on trout.
- Water quantity is not sufficient or consistent enough to provide habitat for adult trout. Years with flows of 78 cfs produced biomass generally over 32 pounds per acre.
- Temperatures are too high in summer, and dissolved oxygen is too low because of algae.

Small Group Discussion

At this point the Working Group broke into small groups for discussion (see below for the rough notes). Where there is a "?", it will be clarified with the person who took the notes.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be Monday, Sept. 21, at 6:30 p.m., with dinner at 6, at the Lewis-Arriola Community Center.

Lower Dolores Plan Working Group Small Groups Exercise (draft)

Attendees:

Andy Logan, Oil & Gas – County Planning
Mike Preston, DWCD
David Graf, CDOW
Bruce Smart, DWCD
David Vackar, TU
Dale Smith, fisherman
Amber Kelley, Dolores River Coalition
Dave Schneck, San Miguel County
Carolyn Dunmire, DRAG
Kara Miller, private property
Julie Kibel, Dolores County
Doug Stowe, Dolores County
Cole Crocker-Bedford, Slick Rock
Randy Carver, MVIC
Lynn Garner, MVIC
Rick Gersch, Dove Creek
Clint Cressler, OHV
Leslie Sesler, Science/Archeology
Meghan Maloney, SJ Citizen's Alliance
Ann Oliver, The Nature Conservancy

Group #1 - Leslie Sesler & Meghan Maloney

Management Goals & Objectives

- Upgrade on-the-ground conditions for management
- Roundtail Chub is a prime example of conditions that may have changed
- Does timing of fish surveys affect results?
- Having a way of assessing how management goals are being implemented – are they successful?
- Use other resources like non-profits, etc. to help fund management – find other partnership
- Use outside resources to fund research

1. What should be the role of wildland fire within the river corridor?

- Thorny issue – need more data
- What is current management for ORV?

2. How should the ponderosa pine be managed within the river corridor?

- If ponderosa's burn, is it still scenic?
- If they do prescribed burn, is it still wild?

3. Should there be any additional recreation opportunities in any of the existing sites?

- Longer season for Ferris & Cabin recreation sites (after Labor Day through the end of hunting season)

4. Should the Bradfield launch site be permitted?

- Very difficult to permit due to uncertainties associated with flows

5. Do we have the appropriate mix of outfitter and guides to meet public needs?

- Yes – consensus

6. Should there be reserved campsites on the river during rafting season?

- Have a few campsites for commercial use that are or can be reserved – or maybe are designated for commercial use

7. Is there a threshold for use that, if we approach or exceed, we would need to implement further restrictions for use? What threshold and restrictions?

- Degradation of the natural environment is threshold
- Trashy camps
- Saturation per BLM management guides for assessing campsites
- If campsites exceed a certain level of saturation, then a permitting system might be needed

8. Are there management activities we need to implement to support a cold water fishery in these two reaches?

- Get the water – through basins – augment minimum in-stream flow
- Nutrient problems – study to determine cause and solutions
- Support Dolores River Dialogue and incorporate these findings into ID team

9. How do we cooperatively fund invasive species inventory and treatment?

- Use other groups
- Use outside means
- Be more flexible in management
- Be more flexible in budgeting
- Incorporate other people’s work: graduate students; Tamarisk Coalition; Walton Family Foundation; unlikely partnerships

Overall, what protection tools might be recommended in these reaches?

- Leasing water for cold water fishery
- Support augmenting the minimum in-stream flow
- Budget money for monitoring
- Legislate conservation area that would preclude Wild & Scenic and Federal Reserve water right
- Opinions that the above would never fly in Montezuma & Dolores counties

Group #2 – Amber Kelley

Management Goals & Objectives

- We think many are ok, but perhaps need more specific action steps – don’t need to start over for plan
- But, we felt that we need to get this stuff in advance so we can think about it and have it in front of us – can we revisit in a future meeting?

1. What should be the role of wildland fire within the river corridor?

- Reach 1: range land fire is a good tool for regeneration – use where it makes sense as a management tool
- Reach 2: controlled burns or other mitigation to benefit the ponderosa, which needs fire to reproduce

2. How should the ponderosa pine be managed within the river corridor?

- Managed to maintain this feature
- Make sure target shooting is not happening down there
- Use fire in some way to help them regenerate without burning them down

3. Should there be any additional recreation opportunities in any of the existing sites?

- None needed

4. Should the Bradfield launch site be permitted?

- Permitting could help pay for rescue
- In general, no good reason
- Hard to do – timing is an issue
- Over saturation is a reason to do – many people monitor it themselves
- Probably doesn't make sense, but education is important – encouraging people to sign in and note where they plan to camp

5. Do we have the appropriate mix of outfitter and guides to meet public needs?

- Yes – no need for more, no need to promote more commercial to come in

6. Should there be reserved campsites on the river during rafting season?

- How to do this without permits - first come, first serve
- Encourage small groups not to take large sites
- Education is important – have a place to sign in and write what camp site they will try for
- Include a map that shows sites and size

7. Is there a threshold for use that, if we approach or exceed, we would need to implement further restrictions for use? What threshold and restrictions?

- Use is short in a year and not always every year, so hard to figure out a way to change management
- Threshold has no predictability – hard to pin down
- Archeology and litter should be considered when thinking about thresholds

8. Are there management activities we need to implement to support a cold water fishery in these two reaches?

- Think about temperatures from releases at different levels of the dam, but don't let invasions out of the reservoir
- Put more emphasis on Reach 1 as cold water fishing
- Consider more fish habitat improvements

9. How do we cooperatively fund invasive species inventory and treatment?

- Coordinated effort already underway, but emphasis on land agencies working with DOW and others
- BLM needs to try to acquire more funding

Overall, what protection tools might be recommended in these reaches?

- 1990 plan is doing a decent job
- Concern that designation is not a protection tool
- Concern that without designation it will not be well protected
- Need for special management designation to get long term protection
- Don't want to see people lose the rights to be on public lands
- Tools should be put in place now before population increase puts too much pressure
- Balance – protect what's there without losing it
- Reach 1: DOW management for wildlife is a good protective tool – continue to manage for recreation
- Reach 2: some thought Wild & Scenic appropriate here, but others thought that it self protects due to topography

Group #3 – David Graf

1. What should be the role of wildland fire within the river corridor?

- Reach 1: protect structures, otherwise let it burn
- Reach 2: prescribe fire, avoid catastrophic burn

2. How should the ponderosa pine be managed within the river corridor?

- Ensure periodic burn; weed management

3. Should there be any additional recreation opportunities in any of the existing sites?

- Bradfield: maintain presence during boating & hunting seasons; education over enforcement; public play area at bridge (CDOW site); put-in at Metaskas site to accommodate day trippers
- Reach 2: appears adequate; designate campsites/capacities; some active management (poison ivy control)
- Reach 2: designated sites; voluntary sign-ups; specific reaches (Coyote Wash, Slick Rock WSA)

4. Should the Bradfield launch site be permitted?

- No – concentration DS or Coyote Wash

5. Do we have the appropriate mix of outfitter and guides to meet public needs?

- Yes – concentration DS or Coyote Wash

6. Should there be reserved campsites on the river during rafting season?

- Reach 1: No
- Reach 2: Yes (see #4 comment) applies to Coyote Wash & Slick Rock WSA

7. Is there a threshold for use that, if we approach or exceed, we would need to implement further restrictions for use? What threshold and restrictions?

- 10 groups per day plus use days
- 20% of use season or number of launches per day
- If exceeded: potentially restrict permit, designate camps; voluntary sign-ups; no small groups at large sites
- Monitor and evaluate – baby steps

8. Are there management activities we need to implement to support a cold water fishery in these two reaches?

- Cooperative management – re-visit objectives
- Add big pile of H2O
- Temp/Nutr/D.O. work
- Habitat (sediment)

9. How do we cooperatively fund invasive species inventory and treatment?

- Tamarisk Coalition, DOL Tamarisk Action Group, other volunteers (Fort Lewis): inventory, abatement, leverage other efforts

Group #4 – David Vackar & Ann Oliver

Management Goals & Objectives

- Underutilized by ? users
- Perception ? bad fishery
- Could buy more water
- Wild ? fire
- Acquisition of private lands - Wallace & Saller?
- ? of elk ? range for wildlife
- manage fields for wildlife feed
- water ? manage for wildlife
- ? for elk to ? these
- ? coalition with farmers

Please email the facilitator for a final copy of the small group's write up: porternorton@animas.net This version is a draft and we are still filling in some blanks. 9/22/09.