

LOWER DOLORES WORKING GROUP FACT SHEET

Meeting #3

Feb. 17, 2009

Fish, ecology and wildlife in the river corridor

Wildlife

Presenter: Dave Harper
Colorado Division of Wildlife

Species of note:

- **Desert bighorn sheep (reintroduced)**
- **River otters (reintroduced)**
- **Townsend's big-eared and other bats**



Division of Wildlife
Bighorn sheep

Other wildlife:

Deer, elk, black bears, ring-tailed cats, mountain lions, bobcats, wild turkeys, peregrine falcons, prairie falcons, bald eagles and golden eagles, unique reptile species and amphibians.

Fact
Over 90 percent of wildlife species in Colorado depend to some extent on riparian habitat.

Vegetation and riparian ecology

Presenter: Ann Oliver
Dolores River Dialogue Science Committee and The Nature Conservancy

Rare plants:

- **Eastwood monkeyflower**

Found only in the Four Corners region, in the Gunnison, Dolores and San Juan river corridors. There are 24 known sites in Colorado, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico.

- **Kachina daisy**

First identified near Kachina Natural Bridge, Utah. Very rare; there are only about 7500 individual plants in the world, all in 15 sites in Utah and Colorado — including the Dolores River corridor.



B. Jennings ©1999

Eastwood monkeyflower

Unusual plant communities:

- **Strapleaf willow and coyote willow found together**
- **Narrowleaf cottonwood-boxelder/red-osier dogwood.**

This is a multi-level plant community.

- **Large stands of skunkbrush and of New Mexico wild privet**

The New Mexico privet communities occur only in Utah and Colorado, and in Colorado they are found only in the Dolores River basin.

Exotic invader of concern:

Tamarisk

Loves lower elevations, perennial water and salt; thus, the Lower Dolores is “heaven” for this species.

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

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Art Goodtimes
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Dave Harper
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Shauna Jensen
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Ted Kowalski
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Steve Trudeau
David Vackar
Chuck Wanner
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John Whitney
Ernie Williams

Staff

Marsha Porter-Norton
Kathy Sherer
Gail Binkly
Gina Espeland

Fisheries

Presenter: Jim White
Colorado Division of Wildlife



Colorado Division of Wildlife
Brown trout

Trout species present in the cold-water reach (McPhee Dam to Bradfield Bridge):

- Browns (hardy, self-sustaining)
- Rainbows (stocked)
- Cutthroats (stocked)
- Also present: Paiute sculpin (Dolores River native species; abundant)

Status of trout species: General trend is downward for numbers in the Dolores. Management goal is 32 pounds per surface acre of trout.

Native warmwater species present in the Lower Dolores:

- Roundtail chub
- Bluehead sucker
- Flannelmouth sucker

Status: Roundtail chub populations are relatively stable; bluehead and flannelmouth populations are declining. A rangewide conservation plan involving six states and multiple agencies is in place to keep these three species off the federal endangered and threatened list. Primary threats range-wide are habitat loss, non-native fish interaction and hybridization with other fish.



Colorado Division of Wildlife
Roundtail chub

Native warmwater species no longer present in the Lower Dolores:

- Pikeminnow
- Razorback sucker

Status: These species were historically present in the Dolores River and are now thought to be extirpated. Both species are federally listed as endangered.

Non-native fish species found downstream:

Smallmouth bass, green sunfish, channel catfish, black bullheads, fathead minnows, carp, brown trout and rainbow trout.

Management objectives for the Dolores River fisheries:

- Ensure adequate base flows, which are critical to bluehead suckers and flannelmouth suckers and also beneficial to trout.
- Stock whirling-disease-resistant rainbows to increase biomass.
- Remove non-native fish that threaten natives.
- Release flows from the bottom outlet of the dam to prevent white suckers from making it into the river.
- Mimic natural spring hydrograph when reservoir conditions allow and ensure adequate base flows.

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Working Group discussions and thoughts relating to fish, ecology and wildlife

- Working Group members were in general agreement that **recreation** (rafting, camping, hiking, four-wheeling, and so on) **has a definite impact on wildlife**. All users have an impact, and more recreational use causes more disturbance.
- It was asked whether it is possible to accomplish the **many conflicting goals** involved in management of the Dolores River (restoring native fish, improving the sport fishery, restoring cottonwoods, providing irrigation water, etc.). Which goal has priority? What does the public want?
- A common theme was the need to **continue to allow historic uses while providing protection** for the resources.
- Some members expressed the sentiment that there is **not a need for major changes** in management, such as listing the Dolores River as a Wild and Scenic River. They believe management so far has been fairly successful; wildlife and fish are still present and many activities are enjoyed throughout the corridor. Conditions change even without humans being involved.
- Others said the pressures of increasing human population in the West and increasing numbers of recreational users mean that the **resources in the Lower Dolores River Valley need protection** now if they are to retain their special values.
- It was noted that **a foundation of the Dolores River Dialogue** has been to work with available flows/spills. There is some debate about what those constraints are and whether they could be changed.
- The Working Group would like **more information** on a number of topics, including historic river hydrology and details about wildlife species and their range and habitat, including along tributaries and into uplands.

“**T**his river has been diverted for a hundred years. We changed the native species a long time ago. How do we know what's native and what's not?
Group member

Management Questions

Shauna Jensen, hydrologist with the SJPLC, presented management questions to discuss at future meetings as follows:

Ecology

- How do we protect and enhance the ecology (specifically, aquatic and riparian) of the Dolores River while allowing for compatible uses?
- What are possible management objectives for old-growth ponderosa pine? (There is significant ponderosa pine in the corridor.)
- What management opportunities and strategies exist to maintain or improve the existing quality of the riparian and wildlife habitat?

Wildlife

- How do we ensure the continued existence of federally listed, state-listed, and BLM and Forest Service sensitive species?
- How do we minimize potential conflicts with recreational use of public lands and the preservation of federally, state-listed and BLM and Forest Service sensitive species and their habitat?

Recreation

- Should the Dolores River be on a permit system for rafting use?
- Should campsites be on a reserved or first-come, first-served basis?



Wendy Mimiaga

NO decisions or recommendations were made at this meeting.