

Meeting Minutes: June 19th, 2008

Gunnison Basin / Grand Valley Selenium Task Force

I. Updates:

A. Regulatory Updates

1. Lower Co WQCC Rulemaking Hearing – The WQCC did not extend temporary modifications for Colorado River tributaries segment 13b
2. Lower Gunnison draft TMDL status – The draft TMDL should be available for public comment in August. The WQCD will try to have a draft to the STF a couple of weeks before releasing to the public. TMDL is based primarily on USGS report. Public comment period is generally 30 days. Requests to extend public comment period are accepted. Once a TMDL is completed the stream segment comes off the 303(d) list. The 305(b) list would then address streams with non attaining TMDLs.
3. ESA Trigger – The “trigger” for ESA Section 7 consultation with the FWS is the approval of the final TMDL for selenium in a listed segment in critical habitat.
4. EPA Fish Tissue Standard – Latest target date for a proposed standard is Nov 2008 or beginning of 09.
5. TMDL Regulatory Authority – Co has the authority to implement TMDLs through the NPDES or CDPS. Co has no regulatory authority to implement non-point source pollutants in TMDLs.
6. Se Task Force TMDL Subgroup – A recommendation was made to establish a TMDL subgroup in order to put together several methods of meeting State selenium standards. This will be done through the draft TMDL public comment period for the lower Gunnison River. A meeting date of early morning July 24th at the FWS offices in Grand Junction was proposed (provided that the draft TMDL is released to our group by this date). Group coordination will be done via email. It was also proposed that a tour of the pilot bioreactor site be coordinated for those interested. The Coordinator will work with United, Mesa State College, and Golder to set this up.

B. Status of the Selenium Long-term Monitoring Sites

The Coordinator spoke to Dan Beley (WQCD Monitoring Unit Supervisor) who indicated that the Division continues to perform water quality monitoring on the STF list of priority sites.

C. Water Resources Development Act (WRDA)

The selenium funds authorized by WRDA 07 are in this year's appropriations bills. Allard put \$10 million in Senate version, John Salazar asked for \$5 million in the House version. It's unlikely there's any chance of passage of these appropriations bills before 2009.

D. Conservation Innovation Grant Status-

The CRWCD is currently seeking a “no cost performance period extension.” They are trying to fill the GIS technician position that was vacated so that they can wrap up the project.

E. Programmatic Biological Opinion for the Aspinall Unit

A Programmatic Biological Opinion has been initiated on the Aspinall Unit for determining the effects of operations and management for all users. The USFWS is the lead. An Opinion is supposed to be issued by December.

F. Coordinator Funding

1. NIWQP Funding – The Coordinator was recently contacted by Mike Baker of the BOR. The BOR is working on providing funding for the Coordinator position by utilizing a small amount of leftover NIWQP funding.
2. CRWCD Funding – The CRWCD continues to fund the Coordinator position. The Coordinator has drafted a letter of appreciation to the River District Board and will submit it ASAP.

II. Gunnison Basin/ Grand Valley Watershed Plan

A performance period extension and increased funding request was approved by the NPS program. The new performance period ends March of 2011 and the new funding amount is \$32K.

Jeff Crane (CWA Director) has received a 319 grant for developing a comprehensive Uncompahgre Watershed Plan. This group will be working on creating several forums (agriculture, mining, recreation, urban growth and development, etc.) for obtaining information necessary to the development of the plan. They will also be establishing a volunteer monitoring group and experts to analyze data. The Task Force will be collaborating with the Uncompahgre Work Group to minimize duplication of efforts and to maximize potential opportunities in the watershed plan development process. Anyone wanting more information about the Uncompahgre Watershed Plan should contact Jeff Crane at: jeffcrane@coloradowater.org.

III. Loutzenhizer 319 NPS Piping Project

Comments have been received from WQCD staff on the draft PIP submitted to the Se Task Force. The Coordinator will make the necessary changes and resubmit. If a final draft is approved by mid-July it is possible that funding could be in place by September.

The original draft PIP suggested that a monitoring plan was not necessary given the data and model we have from the Montrose Arroyo demo project. Nevertheless, the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association (UVWUA) set-aside \$85K for possibly carrying out a watershed plan. Estimates from USGS for a monitoring plan/study were approximately twice the set-aside. The State 319 Coordinator suggested that we allow the State to conduct the monitoring at the 319 Program's expense through a contract they have with the Co Watershed Network for monitoring 319 projects. The UVWUA agreed. The PIP will be revised to reflect the change. It was decided that the remaining \$85K should be used for project inflation given the effects of current gas prices on project costs. Should there be funding left-over, it may be able to be used on another lateral if completed within the project performance period.

The State 319 NPS Coordinator (Lucia Machado) has been discussing the issue of monitoring and the collection of flow data with the State Monitoring Unit. The Monitoring Unit has agreed to collect water chemistry and flow data 4 times/year on

the Loutzenhizer project. USGS representatives at the meeting were concerned that the frequency of monitoring would not be sufficient to determine selenium reduction. In addition, the lack of corresponding flow data is of great concern.

The Task Force proposed that there might be opportunities to supplement the State's efforts by purchasing and installing several low cost gages and placing them in key areas. The gages would collect continuous flow and conductivity measurements. Barb Horn (CDOW, River Watch) offered to help with volunteer training and water chemistry analysis through the River Watch program. In addition, it was noted that there might be opportunities for collaboration with the Uncompahgre Work Group on this effort. The Coordinator will work on developing some cost estimates for the gages and submit to the State 319 Coordinator.

Because of all the outstanding monitoring issues associated with the eventual TMDL development, the Aspinall Unit Operations, the watershed plan developments, the Loutzenhizer project, etc. it was proposed that a *Task Force Monitoring Subgroup* be established. The monitoring subgroup will set up a conference call to discuss both the Loutzenhizer piping monitoring and more importantly, long-term monitoring efforts in the Uncompahgre basin. At a minimum, the sub-group should include the CRWCD, WQCD 319 Staff & Monitoring Unit Staff, River Watch (CDOW), USGS, USBOR, and Jeff Crane (Uncompahgre Work Group).

IV. BLM Land Transfer Process & Selenium

As suggested at the February 08 meeting, the Coordinator spoke to Robin Lacey, BLM Reality Specialist, Grand Junction BLM Office. The Coordinator asked how the Task Force could become involved in the evaluation process for land exchanges in order to adequately address selenium issues. Ms. Lacey explained that the BLM has a 45 day public comment period on land exchanges and that we could register for the "notice of exchange proposal". The Coordinator indicated to Ms. Lacey that the Task Force would also like to be involved at a higher level such as in sharing new selenium soils data. The Coordinator pointed out that Selenium Task Force members (FWS) had commented about the potential selenium issue with Devil's Thumb Golf Course development and that those comments were ignored and development proceeded with negative consequences that were later addressed at significant expense. It was decided that the Coordinator should continue to work with the BLM and get a higher level representative to a Task Force meeting to discuss the issue as the BLM is getting ready to go through their Resource Management Plan Update. It was also suggested that a packet and "boiler plate" letter be drafted that could be sent to potential developers, County Commissioners, etc. with a copies of CIG soil maps, bmp brochures and guides, and contact information for up to date soils info.

V. Selenium Priority Areas in the EQIP Proposal Review Process

The Task Force asked Ed Neilson of NRCS to attend the meeting to discuss incorporating the CIG soils data and selenium priority areas map into the EQIP ranking process. Mr. Neilson indicated that the best way to do this was to address the issue at the watershed work group meetings held later this summer (July). The work groups prioritize where they want EQIP funding to be spent. He also said that there is a new farm bill that would likely make the ranking of projects a little different. There is also a move in NRCS toward "conservation based marketing" where a farmer gets a base cost share plus a bonus for salts (Basin States' \$). It's

possible that the Task Force could lobby to have a hypothetical bonus for selenium also. The Task Force asked if it might work to buy down the cost of implementing conservation measures (e.g. Putting in center pivot sprinklers or helping pay for power installation to run the sprinklers (this isn't covered under EQIP)). NRCS representatives indicated that one way the Task Force could help would be to pursue grant opportunities (e.g. the American Farm Land Trust website has a number of grants).

The Coordinator also asked NRCS staff how the Task Force might be able to assist the NRCS with education and outreach efforts. Staff said that it would be beneficial to have the following:

- Canned power point presentation on salinity and selenium that they could present to the public when they are asked to give presentations.
- Press releases – e.g. articles for quarterly newsletters and info for their local district website
- VISION home and community school program. Coordinator was told to speak to Elizabeth Kautsky (NRCS).
- Other: Speak to Denis Reich (CSU Cooperative Extension)

VI. Scope of Work (SOW) for Land Use Study

At the request of the Task Force, Paul von Guerard (USGS, retired Sub District Chief) prepared a draft SOW on additional studies needed to anticipate the effects of changing land use on selenium loads. His February 26th draft document was presented to the Task Force by Ken Leib (USGS Project Chief).

1) The *Urban Study* is complete and the final report is set to be released the first week of July. The major finding was that deep percolation decreases during a transition from irrigated agricultural land to residential homes.

2) The *Montrose Arroyo Phase II Project* (in progress) will look at the effects on selenium loading of multiple types of land use change including the conversion of previously irrigated and unirrigated lands to residential homes and golf courses.

3) The *Whitewater Phase II Project* would look at quantifying the effects of urbanization on previously unirrigated Mancos soils. If possible it would also be important to compare the effects of different sanitation disposal systems (i.e. sewer vs. septic).

3) Incorporate #2 and #3 above into the *Upper Co Detailed Salt and Selenium Model* and estimate the effects of urbanization of lands on selenium loading.

VII. Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, September 10th, 2008 (USDA Service Center, Delta)

Proposed Agenda Items:

- 1) draft TMDL & Subgroup Update
- 2) Programmatic Biological Opinion on the Aspinall
- 3) Monitoring Subgroup Update
- 4) Watershed Planning Efforts
- 5) Meet with BLM Staff re: Land Transfers and Selenium
- 6) Task Force "Canned" Public Outreach Presentation

Meeting Adjourned: 3:15pm