

Yuba Habitat Committee Meeting

Thursday, April 17, 2003, 10 a.m., Room 2000, Salt Lake DWR Office.

(Next meeting: Thursday, May 8, Room 2000, Salt Lake DWR Office)

In attendance:

Will Jefferies, Rocky Mountain Anglers; Wes Schneider, Rocky Mountain Anglers; Charlie Thompson; DWR Retired; Mike Slater, DWR Central Region; Don Wiley, DWR Central Region; Tom Pettengill, DWR Salt Lake; John Tomich B.A.S.S.; Ray Schelble, Rocky Mountain Anglers; Terry Opheikens, Rocky Mountain Anglers; George Sommer, B.A.S.S.; Clyde Bunker, Sevier Bridge Reservoir; Richard Hepworth, DWR Central Region; Dean Anderson, Sevier Bridge Reservoir; Ty Hunter, Yuba State Park; Jeff Rassmussen, Yuba State Park; Chris Evans, Yuba State Park; Richard Hepworth, DWR Central Region; Jay Christianson, Utah State Parks; Craig Bagley, Bowen, Collins and Associates.

Don: Welcomed everyone. Gave Powerpoint presentation with Yuba fishery's historical orientation. Adult walleye population decreased from 13,000 walleyes in 2001 to about 5,000 walleyes in 2002.

Mike: Powerpoint presentation on project background: Aquamats in IPP for spawning; Aquacribs; Christmas tree reefs; rope structures. Yuba water is too murky for observing most activity on structures except for perch eggs. Greatest habitat benefit comes from vegetation that grows along the shoreline during low water. Bigger brush could last for three to five years after the water comes back up and should speed reservoir's recovery.

Don: Structures were monitored about every other week to find fish and to detect any movement. Stressed that efforts have been made to include all stakeholders in the information and if any are missed he wants to be informed of them. Explained that the goal of the project is to flatten the peaks and valleys in the fish populations.

Discussion about the reservoir being drained this summer for state-mandated dam repairs.

Clyde: Decision to drain was made a couple of weeks ago and was dependent on funding.

Craig: Dam improvements for this year that are required by state:

1. New outlet structure with guard gate
2. Seismic stabilization berm
3. Riprap on upstream face

In 1951 Yuba was drained empty and refilled in 1952. Also emptied in 1960 and 1961. Has not been drained since.

Discussion: Will be drained for 6 to 8 weeks this year, which will have great impacts on public recreation. Would like to close the dam to public access. As the plan stands now, the fishery will be lost.

Discussion on constructing a secondary cofferdam to hold back some water. Would be difficult. Only about 8 feet of drop from the dam back about 13,000 feet. Building a dam expensive and difficult. About 10 feet of lake bottom sediment that will have to be dug through. River will still maintain 200 to 500 cfs flow through reservoir during construction.

Discussion: Too early in irrigation season to tell but would like to have it drained by mid-August. Goal is to use water in reservoir for summer as much as possible. End of May/first of June should be peak water level for year.

Clyde: October 1 should be date to begin storing water again.

Craig: Bottom sediment will erode and flow downstream.

Clyde: Will try to predict use to coordinate draining of reservoir.

Craig: Draining will be slow to minimize silting.

Don: Asked about dredging in front of dam to decrease sediment. Asked about cofferdam in another location

Clyde: Building a cofferdam was looked at to save some water, both near the present dam and uplake from the narrows. Would require 20-foot dam, which would be cost prohibitive.

Discussion on how cofferdam may not be of great benefit to water users but could benefit fishery tremendously.

Discussion on where a cofferdam could be built to best serve the needs of the fishery. Near the dam would present problems with muck.

Clyde: State is forcing the issue to fix the dam but water users do not have a problem with anything that can be done to save water in the reservoir

Charlie: Since mid-1990s fish didn't survive well going through the outlet. Discussion on possible changes over the years in structure or water release. Nothing apparent to explain these changes in fish survival.

Jay: Water recreation will be affected by lowering water. Economic impact on surrounding communities needs to be considered with loss of fishery.

Dean: Economics are tight. Double shifts discussed to speed work on the dam. Not enough money allocated to fund.

Discussion: Nobody had any objections to building habitat on the lake bottom during the time it is drained.

Discussion: Only concern with structures has been if they come loose and migrate to the outlet structure or cause problems with boaters. That has not happened to date. It has happened in other reservoirs but not in Yuba.

Discussion: A 10- to 20-foot deep pool would probably suffice to keep fish in.

Clyde: Expressed the water users' desire to have a cofferdam to conserve water. (But, no money available from state funding of dam renovation project.) Discussed possibility of building one across from the long point that comes out near the state park if funds were to be found.

Dean: Small cofferdam will be built to funnel water into a pipe to bypass the dam.

Charlie: River will carry sediment which will impact fish in the river. As river flows through the lake bottom it will cut a channel and carry the sediment out.

Discussion: Paiute Reservoir doesn't seem to carry much sediment down the river but it fluctuates more and more often than Yuba.

Charlie: If it costs \$100,000 to \$200,000 to build a cofferdam, it will probably cheaper to buy fish.

Dean: Probably best place to build cofferdam would be in front of cofferdam for dam repair.

Don: If a request for funding for cofferdam construction is presented to Habitat Council, partners would be necessary. Since water users favor a cofferdam (although they do not have the ability to help fund it), that is definitely an option, but cost benefits will have to be analyzed to check options.

If a cofferdam is not built, regulations will be lifted to best utilize fish before draining.

Discussion on artificial Christmas trees acquired from K-Mart last year: Agreement with BOR to put them in Deer Creek. Assembled trees to see how they will work out. The clearer water in Deer Creek will allow them to be monitored better than in Yuba. Six will be going in next week (Trees were installed Tuesday, April 29, in Deer Creek).

If regulations are liberalized it have to be done as soon as possible.

Discussion on possibility of cofferdam: Final documents need to be out by June 9 to put out for bids. DWR has own construction crew that may be able to do work. Sheet pile cofferdam might work but expensive.

All state money for dam repair is coming from dam safety funds. Irrigators have to come up with matching funds.

Don will go down there with a member of the DWR construction crew to give an estimate of how much it would cost to build a coffer dam.

Discussion: Regulations to liberalize fishing limits on the reservoir should start on May 19 to August 15. Double the limit on walleye, northern pike and catfish. Should go with standard statewide limit on perch.

State parks will follow up with BLM to ensure shorelines are protected from ATV use so shoreline habitat is protected.

Discussion on fishing from the dam: Have had problems in the past with litter and shooting at nearby houses. State parks will meet with water users to see about a provision to close the dam to fishing.