

Blue Ribbon Fisheries Advisory Council

January 18, 2024

Meeting Notes

In Attendance: Trina Hedrick, TJ Tsakalos, Darby Doyle, Rebecca Granillo, Mickey Anderson, Dave Behunin, Russ Lawrence, Rich Lobrovich, Larry Finch, Tyler Robinson, Natalie Boren, Nic Braithwaite, Terry Hill, Calvin Black, Clint Brunson, Jon Hudson, Mike Hadley, Makayla Roundy, Neil Banner, Ryan Newman.

Approve June 2023 Minutes

Neil Banner has officially been approved by the Governor's Office to join the Council, and was welcomed into the group. His expertise will be very helpful to the Council.

There were some updates on the notes from the June 2023 meeting.

- At the last meeting, the Council noticed that there was a question on a water that Clint was discussing. It was determined that it was Lost Creek.
- There was also a request to include the meeting dates on the notes being approved, not just on the heading. These are the June 2023 meeting minutes.
- Trina also made a couple of changes. Including a date change, as well as including a welcome to Ryan as part of the Council.

The Council moved to accept the (June 2023) notes with the changes discussed, all agreed.

Trina will make those changes and they will be available on the Council's Google Site. She sent out the November meeting minutes yesterday, but the Council didn't get a chance to review them, so those will be discussed at the March meeting.

The March meeting will be held on March 21 at 9:00 a.m. here in the Salt Lake DNR building. This meeting will be the annual project proposal meeting, and will be in the auditorium for the joint morning session with the Habitat Council and the afternoon will be BRF projects only in another location.

2023 Outreach Priorities

There are several possible BRF outreach opportunities. Trina has them listed in order of responses and votes on the google drive. DWR's outreach section can use several outlets to bring these items into the public eye; including social media, podcasts and press releases.

- Flaming Gorge issues and study results
 - There is an upcoming meeting on February 1 in the region to discuss Flaming Gorge with the public. Ryan will be giving a detailed presentation. February or March would be the best time to highlight Flaming Gorge after those discussions.
- Creel survey results for Flaming Gorge Reservoir, the Provo River, Jordanelle Reservoir, and Pelican Lake

- Some of these creels are ongoing until summer and final data analysis won't be complete until after the regions review results in the winter. Updates and reports can be made on these creels after the reviews are completed; however, final data won't be available until early next year.
- Fish habitat structures – what are they? (Informing Boaters)
 - Spring would be the best to talk about this subject (after the Pineview install project has been completed), as most folks will probably be ready to launch their boats by then.
- How funding is allocated and used
 - This could be fit in whenever there is an opening.
- Promotion of populations where we need harvest
 - This would depend on the region and the water. Trina suggested July – September. Clint said summer would work best for his region. Spring works best for other regions. Outreach could run two stories if we wanted.
- Walleye, other “different” species fishing
 - Several non-traditional species can be highlighted. Trina suggested summertime for this topic.
- High elevation fishing opportunities like tiger trout, tiger muskie, goldens, and cutthroat trout and brook trout.
 - Summer would be best for this topic as high elevation accessibility is limited mainly to summer.
- Starvation screens
 - This project is one that the Council helped fund. Currently, work is still ongoing through the summer, so fall would be a good time for this one.
- Duchesne River bank stabilization (or statewide habitat post)
 - This project was also BRFAC funded, and should be completed in the spring.
- Pineview habitat install
 - All the equipment for this project has been ordered and the work should be ready to start in May.
- BR waterbody selection/review process
 - This topic could be fit in whenever there's time.
- Ice fishing at BR waters
 - This topic has already been addressed this year, but it could be made into an annual tradition.
- Catch & release best management practices
 - This would be to remind anglers of the impacts that they can have on fish. It can happen in summer as well.

The following are other topics should time allow.

- Triploid grass carp as a management tool
- Anger survey results
- Spring bass fishing
- Fall fishing
- Other individual BR water highlights.
- Fishing sampling results

- Kokanee closure reminders

Trina mentioned that there are some categories that need to happen, regardless of any other releases. They include:

- BRF economic survey results brochure (after July 1)
 - The report will be available at the end of June, so fall would be a good time for this. That would give the SL staff time to summarize the main points.
- Small boat, float tube, kayak, etc. cleaning and decontamination (rules in general – include a video)
 - This is such a confusing topic for some, and it should be widely released so everyone knows what the protocol is. Many people don't even realize that they need to purchase an annual sticker for their boats. Partial funding from the sticker program goes toward the AIS technicians that operate the dip tank stations. Full funding disclosures are on the stdofthesea.utah.gov website. Darby said that they are working on updating the information that is currently on the website. She said that each motorized vessel needs an AIS sticker, which is \$20 for residents of the state and \$25 for non-resident boats. Non-motorized vehicle owners need to be educated and receive a certificate. They will need to carry that documentation with them when they are on their craft. She said that they will work with law enforcement to strengthen the language and include it on the FAQ on the Division's website. Calvin said that their law enforcement section has been actively spreading the word on these AIS rules. Trina said that she will research these rules more, and will report back at the March meeting with any updates.
- DWR regulations post public survey
- WIA programs (access number, and why it's needed, etc.)

The following are seminars and public appearances that the Council can attend and host. The Division will help find a venue, and the Outreach committee will find presenters.

- Kokanee Seminar
- Catfishing Seminar
- Blue Ribbon @ Fly Fishing Expo (with Trout Unlimited Partnership)
 - This is scheduled for March 15-16.
- Ice Fishing Seminar
 - This could happen in either December or January. The Council would like this to be an annual event.
- Outdoor Rec Day on "the Hill"
 - It was mentioned that this would be a fun way to highlight BRF. Breakfast is provided, and BRFAC could piggyback with the Department's booth. Darby said that she would work with Faith to see if they could do this event.
- Blades and BBQ
- Boat Show at Sandy Expo Center
- Bass Seminar

Faith handles the Division's news releases. They plan to do the following releases –

- New BRF water bodies and projects

- Ice-fishing in January
- Spring fishing in May
- Fall fishing in August or September
- Ice-fishing tournaments in December

Trina is working with Jessica to iron out the Council's social media posts. Outreach plans to have at least one BRF post per month. Darby is also planning to feature BRF on the Division's blog. They plan to include BRF in their marketing campaign's phase 2, where they will specifically spotlight women and underserved communities in fishing. They are also looking to DWR biologists to write blog posts. They hope to do some listicles, which will highlight the best fishing locations. There are two podcasts planned, including a Flaming Gorge episode (update: recorded last week of April) as well as a Utah Lake fisheries management episode. There are seven events scheduled to be held at BRF.

Trina will post the outreach schedule to the Blue Ribbon Google Site (done).

Regional Updates

Central Region – Tyler Robinson

- At Strawberry, the fish have been doing really well, and the fishery is showing good result numbers, and catch rates are great. Kokanee numbers are still low, but it should be better next year. Chub populations are low and remain stable, the cutthroat are keeping their numbers in check, and are doing well. A walleye was caught in December, and they will be looking to see if there are more in the fishery. The water is currently iced from 4-10 inches, but there is some open water. An intensive gillnetting effort is scheduled for the spring (update: currently happening now), if there is anyone that is interested in helping, please let the region know.
- They are still waiting on the data from the creel at Jordanelle. It is close to being finished, and Tyler will share those findings at a future meeting.
- The Lower Provo creel ends in two weeks. They have been contacting 5-15 people a day, even in the snow.

Northern Region – Clint Brunson

- At Bear Lake, Monster Fest and the Cisco Disco will be held at the end of January. They will be working on some studies with the data that they collect from this event.
- At Willard, they are currently working on reporting. Taylor has been working on walleye and catfish spine research. They hope that the walleye population will be healthy this year, and will keep the shad numbers down.
- At Pineview, they will have some project proposals that they will talk about later on in the meeting. There is ice here, but it does have some open water.
- The Weber River has finally frozen over, especially in the higher elevations. Fishing may be tough though.
- Echo Reservoir has been 92% full, up until about a month ago. Anglers are unhappy due to too much water; however, it's good to have water.
- Clint answered a question regarding kokanee at Smith and Morehouse. He said that they did find red kokanee in the reservoir under the ice.

Southeastern Region – Calvin Black

- The region is finally seeing winter, and both Scofield and Huntington have ice.
- Calvin provided a report on a couple of projects in the region.
 - The first is the Recapture Reservoir angler access improvement project. They have a draft design for a parking lot and boat ramp. They needed to hire an archeologist to map the entire site. This project is about a year out, but they are proceeding with it. They are just being very mindful to not affect any cultural sites that are right by the reservoir.
 - The Huntington Creek limiting factor analysis is the second project. They have met with the consultant, and hope to have a final report by the end of the month. They have been able to get some really good information from this, and how restoration efforts will impact the fishery. It is looking really good, the fish here are larger than prior to the fire, however, not as many fish. They hope that this will be back to BRF status soon.

Northeastern Region – Natalie Boren

- There have been several changes in the NER office. The new BRF representative for the region is Josue Hernandez. He was previously with the native fish crew, and he will be attending the next meeting.
- The ice-fishing season has been strange. There are places where there is ice, and places where there is no ice. There have been tournaments that have had to be canceled or postponed. Ice Addiction is still planned for this Saturday.
- The Flaming Gorge open house will be on February 1 at the regional office. The Wyoming presentation is available online. There are several tournaments upcoming, including the Burbot Bash. The Mac Attack tournament was able to happen last weekend. Conditions are not favorable, and the wind has been really bad.
- The creel is ongoing at Pelican. Anglers have been successful with most species.
- Natalie cautioned that the ice is dodgy in most locations, so please be careful and talk to Parks or herself before going out on the ice.
- Natalie got some oxygen information on the Diamond Mountain Lakes. There is plenty of oxygen where the Solar Bee is installed.
- Fishing reports are abundant, so if there is interest in any specific water, please give her a call.
- Natalie said that she's had good luck at Steinaker. She has caught several nice fish, including some bluegill.

Southern Region – Nic Braithwaite

- Ice and snowpack conditions haven't been great in the SRO this year.
- The Fish Lake creel has started and will go through the majority of the year. Some infrastructure work is ongoing. Currently, they are fixing the sidewalk in the middle of the marina, and buying some courtesy boat docks as well as a fish cleaning station.
- They are working on a new management plan for Piute Reservoir.
- Kokanee have been caught at Blind Lake.

SRO Waterbody Scoring (Washington County Waters)

Jon Hudson from the Southern Region went through the three Washington County waters that the Council will be reviewing. He said that he did a lot of sampling, and the data was collected from 2019 - 2023. The following information was gathered from that sampling.

Sampling

- Conducted in the fall (Sep-Oct) 2019 – 2022, 2023 via night time electrofishing
- 2019-2021 only bass were sampled
 - Narrow scope
 - Larger sample size of bass
- 2023 all species were sampled
 - Fyke netting was added
 - High water and lower numbers

Sand Hollow

- Background
 - Built in 2002
 - 1300 acres
 - 3060' elevation
 - Max depth at full pool:
 - 95'
- Species
 - Largemouth Bass
 - Black Crappie
 - Bluegill
 - Green Sunfish
 - Black Bullhead Catfish

Gunlock

- Background
 - Built in 1970
 - 266 acres
 - 3584' elevation
 - Average and max depth at full pool
 - 77'
 - 115'
- Species
 - Largemouth Bass

- Black Crappie
- Bluegill
- Green Sunfish
- Black Bullhead Catfish
- Treated in 2015

Quail Creek

- Background
 - Built in 1985
 - 590 acres
 - 2985' elevation
 - Average and max depth at full pool
 - 68'
 - 190'
 - Species
 - Largemouth Bass
 - Smallmouth Bass *
 - Black Crappie
 - Bluegill
 - Green Sunfish
 - Black Bullhead
 - Rainbow Trout

Numbers from the age and growth sampling, 2019-2021.

- Sand Hollow
 - Numerous bass in the 12-16 inch range
- Gunlock
 - Good size and age distribution
- Quail Creek
 - Numerous young of year bass and a few over 20 inches

Sand Hollow 2023

- Relative weight for all fish is below 90%
 - Average WR should be higher
 - The average bass is around 15 inches and weighs 1-1.5 lbs

- Most bass are 14-16 inches
- Very few smaller bass
 - Almost no young of year
 - Few fish less than 10 inches
 - No largemouth bass
- Prey/predator ratio is low ... ideally want more prey than currently exists

Gunlock 2023

- Wr looks good
 - Bluegill has some outliers due to wind affecting catch rates. However, we did have a few exceptional fish.
 - Bass looked healthy.
 - Crappie are numerous and easily caught.
- Better size range of bass
 - Young of year, and larger bass present.
- Prey/predator ration(p:P) is optimal
- Hopefully we will see bass move into the 18" + length in the next year or two.

Quail Creek 2023

- Relative weights look ok for crappie, bluegill and green sunfish
 - Good size and numbers of bluegill
- Largemouth bass look good.
- Lots of small young of year and 1+ bass.
- No fish over 12 inches this year.
- Prey/predator ratio (p:p) is less than ideal.

The following are the waterbody scores that the region has scored.

Quail Creek Reservoir

- 3: Trophy Fish, Naturally reproducing, Diverse species assemblage; 4 points
- 6: Management plan necessary and pending; 2 points
- 7: 51%-80% of shoreline is reasonably accessible to the public; 3 points
- 11: Water quantity is a not concern, but there is no formal protection in place; 8 points
- 12: Not impaired, water quality improvement not needed for the fishery; 10 points

Sand Hollow Reservoir

- 3: Trophy fish, Naturally reproducing, Diverse species assemblage; 4 points
- 6: Management plan necessary and pending; 2 points
- 7: 81%-100% of shoreline is reasonably accessible to the public; 4 points
- 11: Water quantity is not a concern and there is a conservation pool in place; 10 points

12: Not impaired, water quality improvement not needed for the fishery; 10 points

Gunlock Reservoir

3: Trophy fish, Naturally reproducing, Diverse species assemblage; 4 points

6: Management plan necessary and pending; 2 points

7: 51%-80% of shoreline is reasonably accessible to the public; 3 points

11: Water quantity is not a concern and there is a conservation pool in place; 10 points

12: Impaired, but does not negatively impact the fishery; 8 points

All three are unique fisheries.

Sand Hollow

- High bass catch rates, access, and diversity.

Gunlock

- Scenic, trophy fish, diversity, high crappie catch rates.

Quail Creek

- Chance to catch a larger fish, diversity, bluegill fishery.

Future

- Management Plan
 - BR involvement
- Fine tune monitoring to capture the whole picture

Trina explained the scoring processes, and went through the scores from the Council members who had scored them. The BRF scoring system was developed several years ago by Craig Walker and Richard Hepworth. They took the list of Blue Ribbon waters at that time, characterized and scored them and then ground truthed the scoring to ensure that the reasons those waters were Blue Ribbon were captured in the scoring criteria. If there is anyone who wants a more in depth explanation, Craig could come in and give more information.

The region is planning to readdress the management plan at these waters. They are using the public to help come up with a development of the plan. Nic said that it would be nice to have a BRFAC member sit on that committee. Jon said that they want a well-represented committee, so that all voices are heard.

All waters have met the minimum criteria for being a BRF.

Sand Hollow, Quail Creek and Gunlock Reservoir met with a unanimous “thumbs up” approval for them to remain BRF.

Overview of Potential FY25 Blue Ribbon Projects with Feedback

Trina will forward the website for the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative where these projects can be viewed online. You can search by project or by BRF specific projects. There are maps, and plenty of

information included on the website. There is an option to make comments, if you set up an account with WRI. Clint said that he appreciates comments or insight into the project, or location, so please do so. Trina has been working on the scoring processes, and as soon as all the projects have been submitted, she will send those out to the Council (post to the Google Site). When you are ready to rate the projects, they will have several questions that you can answer with a rating of 1-10.

The Council went through the projects that have been submitted by the regions. They will be voted on during the March meeting. The total of all projects that will be reviewed is \$583,040, and the allotted amount per year is \$450,000. Trina stated that the Division is over a million dollars short in federal and \$250,000 in restricted money. Those funds pay for employees, tech time and equipment. So, we are asking for funds for things we wouldn't normally in a more normal funding year.

SL/Statewide Projects

Blue Ribbon Fisheries Monitoring

- This project is a portion of creel surveys for the regions. This year we also need to add technician time. The work will be specific to Blue Ribbon waters.

Blue Ribbon Fisheries Administration

- This is an annual cost, and includes lunches and travel reimbursements for Council members, among other administrative things.

FY25 Stream Restoration Training

- This is the yearly Rosgen stream restoration training for biologists to attend as per Don Wiley's recommendation.

Central Region

Aquatic's Monitoring Equipment

- Tyler said that they usually don't ask for funds for equipment, but there are some major needs in the region that this could help provide for. Included is a backpack shocker for electrofishing projects that is much needed.

Strawberry Reservoir Coop Snowplow FY 2025

- This repetitive project has been funded for years. This year the Forest Service is supplying some funds, so the region is requesting less from BRF.

Lower Provo River Angler Access Improvements

- Given access issues, there are some improvements that the region would like to make to improve it. State Parks will be improving launch sites and Mike has plans to improve some additional access points to make it easier for anglers to get in and out. Tyler said that BRF could be included in any signage, and kiosks throughout the area highlighting their support.

Strawberry Reservoir eDNA testing for walleye presence

- This is supporting the Strawberry crew with their eDNA water testing and sampling for a walleye presence. These samples will help improve our detectability of any additional walleye illegally introduced with minimal effort. Strawberry is probably the most used BRF in the state, and this would only help to make sure that it continues to be a great fishery into the future. Each sample is \$85, and this would save the Division weeks of physical sampling. Walleye would be in direct competition with the other species in the system, and they need to protect the cutthroat trout population. Clint said that they have been using eDNA for native species and was able to find a population of least chub that hasn't been documented in 25 years. He said that his region has used this to do some cool work, and have been able to detect amazing things with this. They have also been using eDNA to search for AIS and mollusks.

Northeastern Region

Cedar Springs, Flaming Gorge Reservoir fishing pier.

- This will be jointly funded by several groups, and is a multi-faceted project. There's not a lot of angler access in this area. This project would be done in two tiers, the walkway and the pier. Ryan has been working for a while to get this set up. This would add angler access to an area that would be great for Flaming Gorge shore anglers.

Lake Fork Drainage rotenone treatment horse outfitter

- This is the third year for the Oweep project. There is limited accessibility in the area given its location in the high Uintas, plus the outfitters manage horses, transportation, and cooking for volunteers. This area is at 10,000 feet elevation, and these outfitters make the project a lot more feasible. They are working towards making this the final treatment, as they plan to start stocking cutthroat in September 2024.

Starvation spillway screen installation

- The screen design is complete. They want to hire a qualified contractor to install the screen. This project is also jointly funded. They are very hopeful that they can get this completed by the end of the calendar year.

Helicopter support for the high Uintas

- This is a technical and complex project. The only way to get a boat up to this elevation is via helicopter. Thirty-five people are required to be there for the main treatment day. Half of the crew will be flown in, and the other half will hike. This is year two for this treatment. This will also fund the helicopter restocking effort in Oweep.

It was asked about funding for the interns in the region. The Division is changing how the internship program is run, and last year the Director's Office came through with funding for this.

Northern Region

Post-stocking survival and spatial ecology of tiger muskie

- This project will be for Pineview, and will include tags on the tiger muskie that they stock. It will also include receivers that will be installed in specific areas. This will provide data on fish

movement, survival and overall how well they do after they are stocked. This is a jointly funded project. Clint said that other states have done this with good results.

Clint said that they might have another project; they are still working out the details.

Southeastern Region

Recapture Reservoir Fish Habitat Enhancement

- This is a continuation of previous projects. They are looking to do fish habitat enhancement structures. This will help the black crappie, black bass and green sunfish populations. If this works out, they will expand on this project throughout the lake. BLM is the dam owner.

Southern Region

Blue Ribbon Fisheries Biologist

Trina added that she has been working on a new Blue Ribbon Fisheries Advisory Council Google Site. She went through the documents currently on that Site, including waterbody scoring, volunteer opportunities, volunteer time tracking and project and budget updates. She is also including meeting dates, and contacts. It was suggested that the meeting minutes be included on that site as well. She said that if there's anything additional that you would like added, to please let her know. When a new document goes live, she will send out an email.

Blue Ribbon Waters for Re-Evaluation in 2024

Scofield Reservoir is now ready for another look from the Council, so it is being added to the waters for evaluation in 2024. Since it is located nearby to some BRF waters in the NER, we'll include some of those as well this year.

Scofield Reservoir has completed all five years of its management plan, and Calvin feels that it's ready to be readdressed. The chub numbers have significantly decreased, and stocked fish are looking good. Calvin said to contact him to get specifics on when to go depending on what you are fishing for. There has been more pressure at the fishery lately, but Calvin doesn't feel that additional pressure would affect the fish populations.

Natalie said that she would prepare a document with updates on their proposed waters to be reevaluated and email them to the Council. The following NER waters are on the reevaluation list: Duchesne River Hanna, West Fork Duchesne, Strawberry River below Starvation, Currant Creek, Currant Creek Reservoir, Starvation Reservoir, and Scofield Reservoir. She said that these waters have good and unique fishing opportunities. Natalie said that they are willing to organize a fishing trip for Starvation. The Council agrees that this would be a great idea.

Blue Ribbon Budget Update

Trina has been updating and tracking the current year budget. She will monitor the incoming expenditures and update the budget as new figures come in. There may be a small amount leftover that will be held by the Division to help cover Federal Aid shortfalls.

It was moved and seconded to use the internship funds to begin the eDNA program at Strawberry. The Council agreed and the movement passed. (Update: the NER ended up needing those funds for

internship costs that were unaccounted for in January. They did, however, have eDNA money that they were not going to use. That money was then moved into the Strawberry Reservoir budget).

Upcoming Blue Ribbon Volunteer Opportunities

Trina presented volunteer opportunities for the Council members. This list is available on the Google Site, and will be updated as more projects become available.

Debrief/Discussion on new BR format

Trina said that she will be assessing the suggestions and comments through her first year as the Division representation of the Council. She said that in November we can look at how the schedule is working for everyone.

It was suggested that the Council would like to solidify a date(s) for field trips, so they can start planning. This will be added to the March meeting agenda. The options to go to the NER waters are May or June. (Update: Calvin has invited the Council to his Scofield netting on May 9th, the NER has invited the Council to the Currant Creek Reservoir netting on September 23-24 and they will schedule a Starvation trip for sometime this summer).

New Business

- Volunteer hours will now need to be recorded online, each member must go on to the new system, and sign up for the BRFAC program. Trina said that she can input hours, as long as you sign up, plus provide her with your hours. Dave suggested including any work that members do on management committees, or other non-council work.

Trina said that Jordan Nielsen's replacement was unable to complete his term. Jordan originally thought that he would be unable to spend the time on the Council due to a new job, but he is willing to come back and fulfill his second term.

It was moved and seconded to approve Jordan Nielsen to a second term on the Council. The Council unanimously agreed.

There is an interested person for the CR opening, Trina will talk with him and get back to the Council in March.

The Council is in need of a vice chair and Russ Lawrence was nominated and seconded. The Council unanimously approved Russ to the vice chair position.

TJ would like to discuss the penalties for illegally transplanting fish, and would like to see an increase to the highest amount of fines. He feels that if that happens on a BRF, it's within the parameters of the Council's mission statement to request this of the Legislature. He wants the Council to think of this and they can bring something to the Legislature next year.

It was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting, all agreed.

Next Meeting: March 21 – Project Proposals (DNR auditorium. Trina will send links to each BR project and scoring sheet at the end of February.)