

SOUTHWEST TRIBAL FISHERIES COMMISSION

# SWTFC News

## FALL 2018/WINTER 2019

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*Making a Difference*



## From The Chair



**Jacob, holding a healthy roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*), on the banks of the Navajo River.**

Normally I start my Letter from the Chair writing duties with fresh thoughts of recent meetings or monitoring efforts. New Year's always brings reflection and the possibility of new beginnings, but with the current state of the snow pack and Washington D.C. political uncertainty, it has taken slightly more effort to muster positive thoughts. This New Year I have decided to focus on the future, of not only the fisheries resources I manage but more importantly to the readers of this newsletter and the Commission as a whole. This effort of reflection is mostly (if not entirely) filled with positivity. I can see new opportunities to accelerate the wave of progress the Commission has ridden over the previous year. It is through the immeasurable potential this group has as a whole that I know 2019 will bring the Commission good tidings.

In November, Mr. Adam Ringia resigned his position with The Pueblo of Laguna after nine years of service and recused himself from his position with the Commission as he moves forward with his career. In addition, Dr. Stuart Leon resigned his position as Executive Director (see story inside). Adam started his tenure with the SWTFC as Vice-Chair in 2011 and served in this role until his recusal. Stuart has served the Commission since 2013, and has overseen numerous positive advancements including training opportunities and native youth programs. The Commission temporarily (briefly) lost two actively engaged partners, informed perspectives and true advocates for Southwest natural resources. These two individuals added immeasurably to the overall knowledge of the group. I would like to wish Adam and Stuart the best of luck on the paths they ultimately choose to follow next.

Stuart will be missed, although we have high hopes that White Mountain Apache will join the commission and expect to have Stuart (or at least his representative) back soon. Adam has agreed to take over the administrative responsibilities of the Executive Director for the present, until he is officially sanctioned by the board, or an official search for a new Executive Director is completed. This shuffle still presents opportunities as the Vice-Chair position is vacant and need to be filled. The Vice-Chair position will be filled through our normal nomination and election process at the next meeting on April 18, 2019. The Commission will also begin the official search for a new Executive Director.

The Commission is made up of Tribes, Pueblos and Nations who all share a vision of healthy aquatic resources. Members choose to participate in this vision through fisheries management, research and conservation at home as well as being actively engaged with the Commission and Partners at meetings, trainings and conferences both regionally and nationally. To further this vision, while increasing self-determination of Tribal fisheries programs in the Southwest, please consider nominating someone (including yourself) to serve as Vice-Chair on the SWTFC Board of Directors for a two year term. Nominations can be made by contacting Steve Whiteman, Secretary-Treasurer, at [swhitma@southernutensn.gov](mailto:swhitma@southernutensn.gov). It is often through traveling occasionally difficult trails that great change and growth can occur.

*Jacob Mazzone*

Chairman Southwest Tribal Fisheries Commission

## **Executive Director Leon Accepts New Position**

In November, Dr. Stuart Leon, Executive Director of the SWTFC since 2013, accepted the position of Director of the White Mountain Apache Tribe's Game and Fish Department. In his five-year tenure with the SWTFC, Leon contributed to increases in SWTFC membership, attendance at meetings, and strengthened partnerships with numerous entities such as the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Trout Unlimited, B.A.S.S., and Bass Pro Shops. Through his efforts, he was able to mobilize these partnerships to produce two outstanding training opportunities for Southwestern tribes, including the 2017 Fish Health Workshop, hosted by the Mescalero Apache Tribe, and the 2018 Fisheries Techniques Workshop, hosted by the San Carlos Apache Tribe. In both workshops, instructors of national acclaim were able to provide in-depth continuing educational opportunities for tribal biologists, technicians, and decision makers. Through partnerships with the Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs, Leon was successful in promoting Native youth summer natural resource employment opportunities with the Hopi, Zuni, White Mountain Apache, Mescalero Apache, and Southern Ute tribes. He also oversaw the development of the new SWTFC strategic plan, successfully campaigned for a modest increase in the cost of rainbow trout produced by the MTFH, and promoted changes to how a quorum at SWTFC meetings is determined – making it easier for important decisions to be approved. Recognitions of the SWTFC during Leon's tenure included the 2017 Conservation Partner of the Year by the Arizona/New Mexico Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, the 2017 Apache Trout Award from the Arizona Game and Fish Department and Trout Unlimited, and the Bass Pro Shops 2017 Conservation Partner of the Year.

"I appreciated the opportunity to have served the member tribes of the SWTFC over the last five years, but am extremely excited to embrace the opportunities and challenges that await me with the White Mountain Apache Tribe. I wish the SWTFC all the best in the future," stated Leon.

## **Vice Chairman Ringia Recuses Himself**

### **Due to his Resignation from the Pueblo of Laguna**

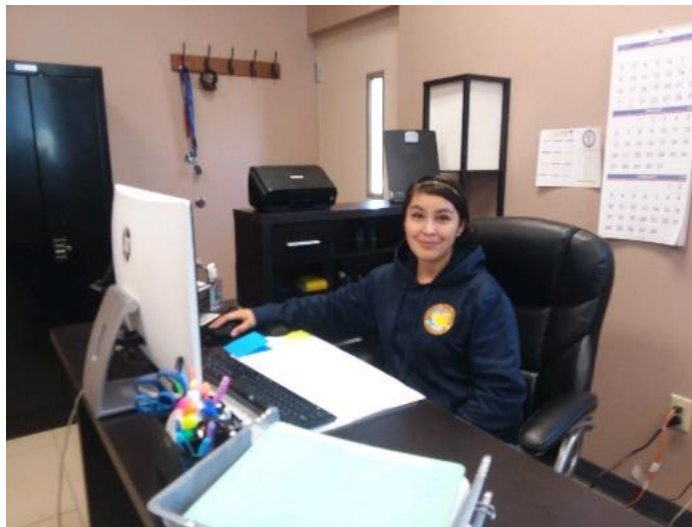
Also in November, long serving Vice Chairman Adam Ringia, who had been the Vice Chair since 2011, and the Pueblo of Laguna Representative since 2009, resigned his position as the Environmental and Natural Resources Director for the Pueblo of Laguna, and as he was no longer a tribal representative, felt it inappropriate to remain as the Vice Chairman. Upon learning that the Mr. Leon was also leaving the commission, Mr. Ringia expressed a willingness to contract with the Commission for those Administrative functions that Mr. Leon was carrying as Executive Director, at least until the full Board could consider the issue, and make an official Executive Director hiring decision.

## **Acting Executive Director Ringia Shares His Vision for the Future of the Commission**

As a former Board member and Vice Chairman for the last several years, I have a good understanding of the basic goals and objectives of the Commission and many of its activities and accomplishments. Over the next months I intend to review the financial history of the Commission, its by-laws and agreements, and other formation documents and to maintain those that are working, and recommend any changes that seem appropriate to the Board. I plan to update and improve the website, to make it useful, not only to our members, but also to the outside world. I would also like to develop policies and procedures for hiring, financial decisions, and other internal Commission processes. As the Board has never officially identified the powers of the officers or the Executive Director, almost all current decisions require an official vote from our board members, even though the Board only meets quarterly, but once those initial steps are taken, I believe that the organization will function much more smoothly and transparently.

The Commission has been very successful in gathering Youth funding to assist Tribes in the development of the next generation of Biologists, and I fully intend to continue those relationships. In addition, I plan to continue building the involvement of the Commission in regional fisheries and watershed discussions, and to continue to bring in new members with new ideas. Until the full Board meets in April to discuss the official hiring process, I will do my best to start filling in the gaps that will ensure a more efficient, useful, and transparent organization to its Board Members and member Tribes.

## **New Administrative Assistant at the MTFH**



On November 13, 2018, the Mescalero Tribal Fish Hatchery welcomed a new hatchery Administrative Assistant, Ms. Sharlayne Melendrez. Sharlayne brings six years of office experience with her to this job.

“We are really excited to have her join the hatchery crew. In the short time she has been here, she has exemplified office professionalism in her communications with vendors and other tribal departments and agencies,” stated Hatchery Manager Shelley Battiest.

**And ... Additional News from the MTFH:**

Another exciting event which occurred for the hatchery in November was the purchase of a 2018 Ford F-150 4WD. This is the first time since the opening of MTFH, that staff have been able to acquire a new hatchery vehicle. This vehicle will be used for delivering fish to off road water bodies that normally require 4WD. Having a reliable vehicle to travel in, when going long distances, is very important.

In December, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was able to submit Right-Of-Way documentation for the application package to retrieve new electrical service from the county electric company. This was the final step needed in order for the MTFH to get placed on the electric service schedule. We expect new service to the Recirculating Tank House (RTH) to be set up in January 2019. The MTFH's Fisheries Technicians worked on installing power supplies for the flow meters in the RTH, and also built brackets for the 5500 digital read-out system.

Hatchery Staff successfully delivered fish to San Carlos Apache (our longest haul at the moment!) in Late January, and Sandia Pueblo in Early February cleaned out the MTFH supply of big trout. Almost 4,000 pounds of fish!! Everyone else will be getting smaller fish until they grow!

On February 13<sup>th</sup>, the Hatchery staff assisted with the annual Fish Disease Testing process. Deliveries are on hold until the results of the testing are received in approximately a month. We are all hoping for good news!!

Mora NFH will be at the Hatchery on March 6 and 7. One biologist and one electrician will help us install a Dissolved Oxygen monitoring system in the Recirculation Tank House (RTH). They will be working with our four Fish Techs. The Mora workers will be staying in the MTFH living quarters that we have prepared for visitors/volunteers to stay in. Jimmy has taken the lead in working to get the RTH up and running. Thanks for all of your work!

## **Bring back the Natives project at the Bylas Springs**

**Blanche Hooke**

**Biologist, San Carlos Recreation & Wildlife Department**

### **Brief History**

The Bylas Springs Complex is a series of springs on the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation, running parallel to one another, with each documented as S1, S2 and S3, respectively, from west to east. S1 and S3 were once tributaries to the Gila River. S2 has long been a small, isolated spring. Gila Topminnow (*Poeciliopsis o. occidentalis*), historically populated all three springs. Throughout its range, the species' habitat is restricted to small streams, springs or cienegas below 4,500 feet in elevation in Arizona and New Mexico. Gila topminnow is very resilient, tolerating high water temperatures and low dissolved oxygen. Declining populations of the species is due to nonnative, predatory fish as well as habitat modifications or degradation. Projects at these springs originated in the early 80s to mid-90s. San Carlos Apache project goals at Bylas springs are aligned with those in the recovery plan for the Gila topminnow, which was listed Endangered wherever found in 1967 (US Fish & Wildlife Service, 2008).

The topminnow at the Bylas springs were once at risk of extinction due to depredation by mosquito fish (*Gambusia affinis*) entering from the Gila River. Studies and spring renovations conducted to preserve these populations began in 1984. More than 150 Gila topminnow, as well as native invertebrates, were collected and restocked after streams were chemically treated to remove the invasive mosquito fish. Barriers with v-notch weirs were also constructed to prevent upstream movement of mosquito fish (Marsh and Minckley, 1990). These efforts were initially found unsuccessful in springs S1 and S3, due to continuous upstream movement and depredation of mosquito fish. Despite these efforts, populations continued to decline. S2 experienced overgrowth of vegetation after fencing from cattle at the time, and no topminnows were found. Studies were conducted in 1993 by Dr. Stuart Leon and Stuart Jacks from (at the time) the USFWS's Arizona Fishery Resources office. Documentation shows that small populations of topminnow were present at S1 and S3. However, researchers focused primarily on water discharge, temperature in relation to climate change, and species resiliency. They found that spring temperatures and discharge varied dependent upon ambient temperature and rainfall (Leon and Jacks, 1993). This study documented a wide range of characteristics between these springs as far as the variance of discharge and temperature. Commonalities demonstrated the topminnow preferences of shallow pool habitats that showed resiliency and a narrow range of water temperatures. Since these early studies, as well as additional spring rehabilitation done in the late 90's, documentation and continued work at the springs has been minimal. Over the years, S1 and S3 have been overgrown with Salt Cedar (*Tamarix spp.*) and Cattail (*Typha latifolia*), causing a decrease in stream flow. Nevertheless, populations of Gila Topminnow did repopulate over the years and continue to thrive in both springs. S2 was overgrown with cattail and no fish were found.

**Current Work**

In July of 2017, Zachary Jackson, USFWS Project Coordinator/Supervisory Fish Biologist, Jennifer Johnson, USFWS Fish Biologist, and Blanche Hooke, Biologist with San Carlos Recreation and Wildlife department, visited the springs for topminnow collection. Fifty-five Gila topminnow were collected and classified in various pools along S3. During this visit, conversations arose to renovate the springs for invasive plant removal of salt cedar and cattail, and replanting of native willows: black willow (*Salix nigra*), red willow (*Salix laevigata*), as well as yerba mansa (*Anemopsis californica*), a culturally important, medicinal plant that naturally grows upstream. We found that where Yerba Mansa is multiplied there is little to no cattail. Later in the year work continued with the USFWS Fishery Biologists to complete the application for the “Bring Back The Natives Grant” funded by the *National Fish and Wildlife Foundation*.

Upon receiving the grant, we proceeded with the Tribal NEPA, Section 7 consultations and permits to begin the project. After a few delays in permitting and hiring, we were able to start the project in October of 2018. The timing was perfect in that it was sensitive to the possible nesting season for the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) from May to August. A crew of five tribal members began salt cedar removal at S3, using the stump cut method. Timing was limited due to defoliation of the Salt Cedar and chemical treatment. Once complete, technicians moved on to cattail removal at S2. Students from the San Carlos High School AVID, college advancement program, assisted with removing tree slash and debris. This was an educational opportunity for the students to gain interest in the field; they were excited to learn more about the endangered topminnow and spring work. Later, our Department harvested local black and red willow for replanting. Future plans include continuation of seasonal invasive plant removal and replanting of native plants, monitoring water quality, and also establishing a program with the San Carlos High School to continue student engagement.

**Sources**

- Leon, Stuart C. and Jacks, Stewart L. “*Bylas Springs and The Endangered Sonoran Topminnow: Long-term Relationship to Changes in Climate*” Annual Report. 1993
- Marsh, Paul C. and W.L. Minckley (1990) “*Management of Endangered Sonoran Topminnow at Bylas Springs, Arizona: description, critique and recommendations*” Great Basin Naturalist: Vol. 50: No. 3, Article 8
- US Fish & Wildlife Service. “*Gila Topminnow*” May 2018.  
[www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Gila\\_Top.htm](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Gila_Top.htm)

## **SWTFC Officers**

Chairman: Jacob A. Mazzone, Fisheries Biologist, Department of Game and Fish, Jicarilla Apache Nation; email [Jacob.a.mazzone@gmail.com](mailto:Jacob.a.mazzone@gmail.com), phone 575-759-3255

Vice-Chairman: Vacant

Secretary-Treasurer: Steve Whiteman, Division Head, Wildlife Resource Management, Southern Ute Indian Tribe; email [swhitema@southernute-nsn.gov](mailto:swhitema@southernute-nsn.gov), phone 970-563-0130 ext. 2413

## **SWTFC Staff**

Executive Director: Vacant

MTFH Manager: Shelley Battiest; email [apacheplume1@yahoo.com](mailto:apacheplume1@yahoo.com), phone 575-464-8768

## **MEMBER TRIBES**

Jicarilla Apache  
Mescalero Apache  
Navajo Nation  
Northern Ute Tribe  
Oh-Kay Owingeh  
Pueblo of Cochiti  
Pueblo of Isleta  
Pueblo of Laguna  
Pueblo of Nambe  
Pueblo of Picuris  
Pueblo of Sandia  
Pueblo of Taos  
Pueblo of Zuni  
Pyramid Lake Paiute  
San Carlos Apache  
Santa Clara Pueblo  
San Ildefonso Pueblo  
Southern Ute Tribe

## **Upcoming Events and Opportunities**

SWTFC Annual Meeting, April 18, 2019, BIA Training Building, Room #284, 1011 Indian School Road NW, Albuquerque, NM (not the normal building).

NAFWS National Meeting, May 20-23, 2019, Wild Horse Pass Casino and Resort, Phoenix, AZ