

Biologists honored for contributions to recovery

The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program recognized biologists Bruce Haines and Tom Nesler last January with special awards for their significant contributions and dedication toward recovery of the endangered fish. Both men expressed surprise and honor for this recognition from their scientific peers.

Since retiring in 2001 after a 31-year career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Bruce continues to volunteer 15 to 20 hours per week with the Colorado River Fisheries Project in Vernal, Utah. While he still likes to collect samples of razorback sucker larvae in the Green River and its tributaries for studies, he said he leaves most of the field work to the younger staff.

"I spend a good part of my time mentoring the new biologists and helping them with data analysis," he said. "When you've been a fisheries biologist for 35 years, it becomes part of your identity. I'm glad to have the opportunity to share what I've learned with the new staff. They seem so appreciative and keep me involved. They make me feel like I'm contributing."

The younger biologists are fortunate to learn from Bruce whose Service career began in 1970 before the razorback sucker and bonytail were listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

"Along with researcher Ed Wick and I, Bruce is one of the original 'nighthawks,' a group of biologists that started light trapping razorback sucker larvae in the Green River system in 1992," said Recovery Program Director Bob Muth who presented the awards. "Bruce has worked with this river system so long, he has knowledge that cannot



BRUCE HAINES



RECOVERY PROGRAM DIRECTOR BOB MUTH (LEFT) CONGRATULATES TOM NESLER.

be learned in books. We appreciate his willingness to share his sage wisdom with our staff."

While Bruce was working in the Green River system, Tom Nesler was floating the waters of the Colorado and Yampa rivers in western Colorado. He, too, has extensive knowledge of these rivers gained during his 33-year career. Tom is currently the statewide manager for wildlife conservation for the Colorado Division of Wildlife, where he has held a variety of research and management positions since 1976.

Tom said he's always been attracted to "big rivers" and endangered fishes. "As a young student in fishery biology, I was fascinated by the unique nature of these fish — the living dinosaurs of the river," he said. His career has held his interest through more than three decades.

"Working with endangered species is like a treasure hunt. We're always finding new information and understandings about the fish and their habitat," he said.

As a leading researcher and active participant with Recovery Program projects and committees, Tom plays an important role in helping to make decisions about the

management actions needed to recover the fish.

"Tom has been involved with all aspects of the Recovery Program," Bob said. "He's a researcher, a manager and a representative of the state of Colorado on our committees. Tom has supported the program through good times and bad and has helped solve many difficult issues that have enabled us to keep moving forward toward recovery of the fishes."

Tom said the Recovery Program has helped sensitize people to wildlife management issues that are broader than just hunting and fishing.

"Some of the things about the system that attract fishermen include the natural wildlife community that is out there," he said. "Colorado pikeminnow, roundtail chub and bluehead sucker are all part of that too."

"I feel fortunate to be involved with the Recovery Program for so long and I am optimistic that at some point we will meet the goals for downlisting and delisting the fish. As we learn more about them, we've come to realize that they are more resilient than we ever thought." ◀