

RECOVERY PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S UPDATE  
August 1999

Population Status: Little change in population status.

SPECIES	RIVER		
	MIDDLE GREEN <sup>1</sup>	LOWER GREEN <sup>2</sup>	COLORADO
Colorado pikeminnow	Stable/increasing	Stable	Stable/increasing
Humpback chub	<u>Yampa Canyon:</u> Stable/small	<u>Desolation/Grey Canyon:</u> Stable?/small	<u>Blackrocks Canyon:</u> Stable/doing well <u>Westwater Canyon:</u> Stable/doing well <u>Cataract Canyon:</u> Stable?/small
Razorback sucker (All populations are currently being augmented through stocking)	<500 adults, very limited recruitment	Few adults, very limited recruitment	Few adults, no recruitment
Bonytail	Populations are currently being re-introduced in Colorado and Lower Green rivers.		

<sup>1</sup> Middle Green River consists of the Yampa River to approximately 30 miles SSW of Ouray, Utah.

<sup>2</sup> Lower Green River is from the end of the Middle Green River section to the confluence of the Colorado River.

Recovery goals: The Program has approved interim management objectives (target numbers of each species for the various river reaches). With the help of a consultant, the Recovery Team is in the process of drafting specific recovery goals which are to be completed by April 30, 2000, and subsequently published in the Federal Register for public comment.

I. Instream Flow Identification and Protection

Goal: To protect sufficient instream flows to support self-sustaining populations of the fishes.

Status: • The Yampa River Low Flow Study final report was completed in April 1999. A draft of the Yampa River Basin synthesis report is out for review with comments due by August 31, 1999. Work on the Yampa River Management Plan continues, and a programmatic biological opinion (PBO) approach to the Yampa River is being developed. The Service is refining flow recommendations for the Yampa River based on a synthesis of previous flow recommendations and documented flow-habitat relationships.

- Work continues on the Colorado River Coordinated Facilities Study to look at water facilities in the basin and options for managing the facilities to provide additional water for endangered fish recovery. A draft report for Phase 1 is out for review. Initial public meetings have been scheduled.
- A final draft of the synthesis report to be used in preparing a new biological opinion on Flaming Gorge operations was submitted to the Biology Committee in May 1999 and was discussed at its July 15-16, 1999, meeting. The report was not approved at the meeting, and additional written comments from Biology Committee members and other interested parties were due by August 13, 1999. The Flaming Gorge Technical Integration Team will consider the comments received and report to the Biology Committee at its August 31 meeting as to when a revised draft will be ready for re-submission. At this time, without all comments in hand, the Flaming Gorge Technical Integration Team anticipates about a two-month turnaround.
- A working draft of the Aspinall synthesis report was completed in August 1999 and is being circulated for preliminary internal review. Comments are expected before the end of August.
- Biological data collected in 1998 under the study to assess and refine instream flow needs of fishes in the Duchesne River resulted in a better understanding of the distribution, relative abundance, and habitat use of native and nonnative fishes; work continues in 1999 and a final report is expected in 2001. Work continues on a model that will be used to identify possible coordinated operations of Duchesne River reservoirs to provide additional water for the endangered fishes.

### Section 7 Consultation

Goal: To allow water development to proceed in the Upper Colorado River Basin in compliance with the ESA.

- Status:
- A revised programmatic draft biological opinion for the 15-Mile Reach on historic and new depletions was released on June 29, 1999. Copies of the draft opinion were made available to the Management Committee. The next meeting of the 15-Mile Reach workgroup is August 31, 1999. The Service hopes to finalize the biological opinion by early fall.
  - The final biological opinion for the High Savery project on the Little Snake River in Wyoming was released July 14, 1999.
  - From 1988 through June 30, 1999, the Service consulted on 210 projects with a potential to deplete a total of 587,212 af of water in the Upper Colorado River Basin, of which 64 are historic projects depleting 463,552 af. Three of these "projects" are blanket consultations for depletions under 100 af, up to 6,000 af total. These consultations have covered 326 actual projects depleting a total of 4,928 af. (see Section 7 consultation list).
  - The CWCB, Bureau of Reclamation, and the Fish and Wildlife Service signed a contract for an additional 21,650 af of water from Ruedi Reservoir this year. The amendment to the biological opinion was issued on January 6, allowing additional Round II contracts to go forward. The CWCB, Reclamation, and the Service have initiated the process to negotiate a long-term contract for up to 21,650 af of water in Ruedi Reservoir.

## II. Habitat Restoration

Goal: To provide or enhance habitat for the rare fishes through habitat development or management measures such as:

- fish passageways
- screens to prevent fish entrainment into diversion canals
- restoration of flooded bottomland habitats.

- Status:
- The fish ladder at Redlands Diversion Dam on the Gunnison River has been operational since June 1996. The ladder has been used primarily by native fishes, including 44 Colorado pikeminnow. Two of the pikeminnow have used the ladder twice. Native fishes that were marked and released above the dam dispersed upstream, some as far as 57 river miles to the base of the Hartland Diversion Dam.
  - A fish passage structure was constructed at the Grand Valley Irrigation Company Diversion Dam on the Colorado River in January 1998. Ten adult Colorado pikeminnow were captured above the GVIC dam between August 19 and September 24, 1998. It is unknown whether these fish used the fish passage structure or swam over the dam during high spring flows. Providing fish passage at this structure, Price-Stubb, and the Grand Valley Project Diversion Dam will restore 55 miles of historically-occupied habitat for endangered fishes.
  - Design options are being developed to restore fish passage at the Price-Stubb Diversion Dam. Construction was tentatively scheduled to begin in the fall of 1998. However, complex issues (e.g., potential effects of passage restoration on railroad, highway, Reclamation's siphon, and Ute pumping; ownership of property and FERC license) have caused delays. The schedule for construction is pending a decision by FERC on the amendment to the hydropower license.
  - Pre-construction activities are ongoing through FY 99 to restore fish passage at the Grand Valley Project Diversion Dam. Construction is scheduled to begin during FY 2000, after the 15-Mile Reach programmatic biological opinion is finalized.
  - Design options are being developed for a fish screen at the Tusher Wash Diversion canal on the Green River in Utah. Design/engineering is expected to continue through FY 2000.
  - Design options for a fish screen at the Grand Valley Irrigation Company diversion canal on the Colorado River will be developed during FY 2000. A construction contract award is expected in the fall of 2000.
  - Restoration of passage at Hartland Diversion Dam on the Gunnison River has been delayed because of other priorities. However, Reclamation is awaiting a feasibility report from FLO Engineering on options for fish passage at Hartland, and may consider contracting design and construction in FY 2000 if sufficient funds are available.
  - Between March 1997 and March 1998, levees were breached at 8 sites along the Green River, resulting in 1216 to 1734 floodable acres (depending on flows), and filling out the eight-site block design recommended by the Levee Removal Evaluation Group and subsequently approved by the Biology and

Management committees. A report based on preliminary results of data collected from 1996 through 1998 was submitted to the Recovery Program in December 1998. A final report is due in July 2000.

- Both public and private lands continue to be screened for contaminants and relative floodability (pre-acquisition; pre- and post-restoration). Land acquisition activities have resulted in acquisition of eight properties (580 acres) along the Green and Colorado rivers thus far. Currently 30 additional properties (1,600 acres) are in the land acquisition process.

### III. Nonnative Fishes and Sportfishing

Goal: Minimize the impacts of nonnative fishes and incidental take associated with sport fishing on the endangered fishes.

- Status:
- Mechanical removal of channel catfish from the Ouray and Gray Canyon reaches of the Green River, Utah, which started in 1998 continues in 1999. Data from 1998 are still being analyzed, and preliminary results from 1999 are pending.
  - Mechanical removal of nonnative cyprinids from backwater nursery areas used by native fishes in reaches of the Green and lower Colorado (Utah) rivers was started in 1998 and is scheduled to continue through 2001. In 1998, a total of 36,080 nonnative cyprinids (1,139 other nonnatives) was removed from backwaters of the Green River, and a total of 16,498 nonnative cyprinids (763 other nonnatives) was removed from backwaters of the lower Colorado River. Preliminary results from 1999 are pending.
  - A project to mechanically remove small nonnative cyprinids and centrarchids from backwaters on the Colorado and Gunnison rivers, Colorado, was initiated in 1999.
  - Mechanical removal of channel catfish from reaches in Yampa Canyon on the Yampa River was initiated in 1998 and will continue in 1999. In 1998, a total of 1,346 channel catfish was collected. A similar number has been collected to date in 1999 with preliminary results suggesting a depletion effect.
  - The study to evaluate the precision and accuracy of ISMP backwater sampling on the Colorado River (Grand Valley) in terms of its ability to collect and assess the relative abundance of nonnative fishes continues in 1999. Results of the study will be used to guide decisions regarding sport fish management and control of nonnative fishes in the Colorado River and its floodplain in the Grand Valley.
  - The project to translocate adult northern pike removed from the Yampa River to ponds in the Yampa Valley was initiated in 1998 and continues in 1999. After a late start in 1999 due to delays in identifying appropriate receiving waters (i.e., those in compliance with the 1996 Procedures for Stocking Nonnative Fish Species in the Upper Colorado River Basin) and in obtaining collecting permits, a total of about 70 northern pike was removed from critical habitat reaches and placed in ponds at the Yampa State Wildlife Area. Response of local anglers fishing the ponds was very positive. With an expected earlier start in year 2000, it is anticipated that substantially more northern pike will be collected and translocated.

- The project on removal and control of nonnative fishes in Colorado and Gunnison River floodplain source ponds started in 1998 and continues in 1999. As of March 24, 1999, 86 ponds along the Colorado River and 20 along the Gunnison River had been identified as potentially requiring reclamation. Of the Colorado River ponds, 49 had been sampled and 14 had been reclaimed. Of the Gunnison River ponds, 15 had been sampled and 3 had been reclaimed. An objective of the project is to reclaim/control water levels/reshape/isolate 150 floodplain ponds of the Colorado and Gunnison rivers through 2003.
- The net to screen the outflow of Highline Reservoir in order to reduce or eliminate escapement of nonnative fishes into the Colorado River was installed on August 18, 1999. Pre- and post-screening evaluation is being conducted by CDOW. This will allow for active management of Highline Reservoir to provide warmwater fishing opportunities.

#### IV. Stocking Native Fishes

- Goal:
- Produce a sufficient supply of hatchery reared fish to support research and recovery activities.
  - Conserve the genetic diversity present in the wild.
- Status:
- The Program approved the multi-year stocking plan for razorback sucker and bonytail in the Green and Colorado rivers developed by Utah Department of Wildlife Resources.
  - The Program approved a revised Genetic Management Plan (June 21, 1999) for the populations of the four endangered fish of the Upper Colorado River Basin developed by Utah Department of Wildlife Resources.
  - The table below identifies the species stocked from September 1998 through August 1999.

Species	Date	River Section	Number	Approximate Size (inches)
Bonytail	10/98	Colorado	3,280	5
	10/98	Lower Green	3,000	5
	3/99	Colorado	15 (with radio tags)	10
	4/99	Colorado	10,000	4
	4/99	Lower Green	10,000	4
Razorback sucker	10/98	Middle Green <sup>1</sup>	125	6-8
	4/99 - 8/99	Middle Green <sup>1</sup>	6659	4-8
	5/99	Middle Green <sup>1</sup>	≈57,900	<1
	5/99	Middle Green	35 (with radio tags)	>10
	6/99	Middle Green	738	10-16
	9/98	Gunnison	249	9
	10/98	Gunnison	126	16
	8/99	Gunnison	≈1,500	8
Colorado pikeminnow	4/99	Middle Green	36	16

<sup>1</sup> These smaller fish were stocked in depression wetlands where early life stages can take advantage of resources for growth and protection.

- In addition to stocking events, seven new lots were added to the brood stock development of razorback sucker for the middle Green River and over 8,000 are at the hatchery for stocking next year.
- The Program approved the development of Leota 10 (150 acres) at the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge for second year grow out of razorback suckers and subsequent stocking into the Green River basin.
- Construction of 12, 0.4 acre ponds at the Wahweap State Fish Hatchery is scheduled for completion by the end of August. These ponds will be used for

the grow out of more than 100,000 bonytail already on station for stocking in the year 2000.

- Expansion of the 24 Road Hatchery Building in Grand Junction, CO, was completed this summer by the Bureau of Reclamation. Reclamation did an excellent job on the new building. Two lots of Colorado pikeminnow were produced for future stocking on the Colorado River; approximately 20,000 Colorado pikeminnow are being raised this year at the new facility.
- Grow out ponds are being developed throughout the Grand Valley area. This past year, the Program cost-shared acquisition of 15 acres of land to develop ponds for grow out and leased additional pond space with the City of Grand Junction. The Colorado Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation donated approximately 25 acres of pond space.

#### V. Research, Monitoring, and Data Management

Goal: To support recovery activity, monitor endangered fish status and trends, and maintain Recovery Program data archives.

- Status:
- The Biology Committee is in the process of revising the Interagency Standardized Monitoring Program to develop better estimates of endangered fish populations throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin.
  - The Program is currently developing population estimates for Colorado pikeminnow in the Colorado River; and humpback chub in Yampa, Blackrocks and Westwater canyons.

#### VI. Public Involvement, Information, and Education

Goal: To promote public understanding, appreciation, and support for efforts to recover the endangered fish.

- Status:
- Debbie Felker assumed the role of Information and Education Coordinator on July 12, 1999.
  - The Information and Education Committee met July 21, 1999, to review the "Call to Action" white paper identifying: 1) issues and concerns related to the Program's public involvement efforts; 2) recommendations for discussion and consideration by the Management Committee; and 3) an action plan for activities the Committee will implement as a result of its assessment and planning process. Key recommendations to the Management Committee include: 1) I&E Coordinator participation in all Management Committee meetings to serve as advisor for projects that may have significant public involvement issues; 2) Modification of the approach to developing public involvement plans to make them subsets of the Coordinator's umbrella scope of work for information, education and public involvement. (One of the goals of this approach is to facilitate more coordinated communication to target audiences); 3) Assuming a more strategic approach to public involvement planning and ensuring active I&E Committee participation.
  - The program brochure is being updated this fall and will include an insert, or complementary fact sheet, for specific projects.
  - Work has begun to produce a winter issue of the Program's newsletter.

- July and August news coverage included transfer of razorbacks from grow-out ponds near Grand Junction to the Gunnison River, placement of a barrier net at Highline Lake State Park, and Yampa Basin water management.
- Bids are being secured to edit and finalize the Grand Valley video. This video was shot by Tom Pitts and Frank Pfeifer to illustrate recovery activities in the Grand Valley area.

## VII. Program Management

Goal: To ensure effective implementation and coordination of the Recovery Program

- Status:
- The funding authorization legislation for Colorado River and San Juan Recovery Programs has been introduced in the House (H.B. 2348) and Senate (S.B. 1544). Hearings are expected soon after Congress reconvenes in September.
  - Extending the Recovery Program beyond 2003 - Recognizing the need to make the Program's Cooperative Agreement (which currently goes through 2003) conform with the dates in the long term funding legislation, Program participants have been discussing over the past year how to go about amending the Cooperative Agreement.
  - The Program participants' web site has been up and running since December. This password-protected site has much more detailed information than the general Program web site. Contents include: upcoming meeting dates and times; meeting agendas and summaries; a bibliography of the Program library; the RIPRAP; and numerous other Program documents. This site is a key part of the Program's electronic communications and is continuously being updated and expanded.