

RECOVERY PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S UPDATE
March 2001

Population Status: Little change in population status. Numbers reflect the best available point estimates of the mean number of adults.

SPECIES	RIVER		
	MIDDLE GREEN ¹	LOWER GREEN ²	COLORADO
Colorado pikeminnow	Stable/increasing. ≈3,500	Stable	Stable. ≈600
Humpback chub	<u>Yampa Canyon:</u> Stable/small. ≈600	<u>Desolation/Gray Canyon:</u> Stable?/small. ≈1,500	<u>Black Rocks Canyon:</u> Stable/doing well. ≈1,500 <u>Westwater Canyon:</u> Stable/doing well. ≈4,500 <u>Cataract Canyon:</u> Stable?/small. ≈500
Razorback sucker (All populations are currently being augmented through stocking)	<500 adults, very limited recruitment; stocked fish returning to spawning bar	Few adults, very limited recruitment	Few adults, no recruitment
Bonytail	Populations are currently being re-introduced in Colorado, lower Green, middle Green and Yampa rivers.		

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² Middle Green River consists of the Yampa River to approximately 30 miles SSW of Ouray, Utah.

Lower Green River is from the end of the Middle Green River section to the confluence of the Colorado River.

Draft recovery goals will be available for public comment in Spring 2001. The recovery goals supplement and amend existing recovery plans. The goals contain measurable, objective criteria that, when met, would result in proposals to remove the fish from the Federal list of threatened or endangered species. The criteria specify standards for self-sustaining, viable populations and management actions needed to minimize or remove threats. An estimated time required to achieve recovery is provided.

I. Instream Flow Identification and Protection

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

- Status:
- The Service is preparing a new biological opinion on operation of Flaming Gorge Dam which should be completed by fall 2002. The Bureau of Reclamation anticipates completing the NEPA process by spring of 2002.
 - The draft final report on flow recommendations to benefit endangered fishes in the Colorado and Gunnison rivers was reviewed by the Biology Committee, which approved it by majority vote. Three minority opinions were provided to the Management Committee. A workgroup will meet in April to discuss the technical aspects of FWS flow recommendations for the Gunnison and

Colorado rivers. After the FWS finalizes its flow recommendations, and the USBR completes a water demand analysis for the Gunnison River (due by the end of May), the Yampa PBO workgroup will begin work on a management plan for the Gunnison River. A review draft is expected by the end of November 2001, with a final PBO by the end of June 2002.

- A draft of the White River flow recommendations report has been completed and is out for internal review. It is anticipated that the report will be submitted for peer review by July 2001.
- Reclamation continues to work on a Green Mountain Municipal Recreation contract to allow Green Mountain HUP surplus water to be released and protected under Colorado Water Law. The cities of Grand Junction, Palisade, and Fruita want to be party to the contract and Reclamation will discuss issues with them in mid-March. The goal is to get a 5-year renewable contract signed this year, but if not, another one-year contract will be made.
- Colorado and Reclamation continue working toward an agreement to construct a pumping plant at Highline Lake as part of the Grand Valley Water Management Project.
- The Coordinated Facilities Project was initiated in 1999 to investigate alternatives for supplying up to an additional 20,000 acre-feet (average annual) of water to the 15-Mile Reach of the Colorado River. The additional water will be supplied to supplement spring peak flows by about 1,000 cfs over a 10-day period. A secondary purpose is to augment flows during the late summer and fall period. Phase I of this project examined a wide range of possible alternatives that were subjected to a preliminary screening process in order to arrive at a short-list of alternatives that would be intensively studied in Phase II. The final report on Phase I was completed in September 2000. Phase II modeling is underway and Phase II is expected to be completed by September 30, 2001. Modeling of alternatives related to CBT is being postponed pending responses from Reclamation and Colorado to the Colorado River Water Conservation District regarding CBT operations.
- A review draft of the Yampa River Management Plan will be completed later this month. Public meetings will be scheduled in April to present the plan and solicit scoping input for an EA. A final plan and draft EA are expected by the end of June, with a final PBO by the end of September. Parties agreed that an increment of 30 KAF of future depletions in Colorado would be considered in the PBO, with a caveat that up to 20 KAF of additional depletions could be considered in the future. ESA consultation would be reinitiated if and when we approach the first 30 KAF increment. The Yampa River Management Plan and PBO also will cover an estimated 23 KAF increment of future depletions from the Little Snake River in Wyoming.
- From 1988 through December 31, 2000, the Service consulted on 138 projects with a potential to deplete a total of 1,664,972 af of water in the Upper Colorado River Basin, of which 1,442,415 are historic depletions. Three of these "projects" are blanket consultations for depletions under 100 af, up to 6,000 af total. These consultations have covered 375 actual projects depleting a total of 5,428 af (4,008 af in Colorado, 841 af in Utah, and 578 af in Wyoming). Another of these 138 "projects" is the 15-Mile Reach programmatic biological opinion which covers an average depletion of 1 million acre-feet per year of existing depletions (through September 30,

1995) and up to 120,000 acre-feet of new depletions (since September 30, 1995) in the Colorado River above the confluence with the Gunnison River. Thus far, the 15-Mile Reach PBO has covered 106 actual projects. In total, since January 1988, the Service has consulted on 619 actual projects depleting water from the Upper Colorado River Basin.

- The Service continues to waive charges for water projects that deplete fewer than 100 acre-feet of water per year. This arrangement has simplified the section 7 consultation process for many water projects in the upper basin.

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 the Redlands Diversion Dam on the Gunnison River has been operational since June 1996. The ladder has been used primarily by native fishes (more than 40,000), including 51 Colorado pikeminnow. Six of the pikeminnow have used the ladder twice; one has used it three times. 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 screen will be installed at Redlands by April 2005, if deemed necessary, to prevent entrainment of endangered fishes into the diversion canal.

- 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. 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 for a canal fish screen are being developed; construction is scheduled for completion by March 2002.
- 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. Construction is tentatively scheduled for completion by April 2003. A fish screen will not be necessary because water has not been diverted at this site since 1919.
- Pre-construction activities are ongoing through FY 2002 to restore fish passage at the Grand Valley Project Diversion Dam. Construction is scheduled for completion in April 2003. Installation of a fish screen is scheduled for completion by February 2004.
- Design options have been developed for a fish screen at the Tusher Wash Diversion canal on the Green River in Utah. Construction is tentatively scheduled for completion by September 2003. Reclamation is negotiating with the Green River Canal Company and Thayne Hydropower.

- Restoration of passage and installation of a fish screen at the Hartland Diversion Dam on the Gunnison River is on hold pending reassessment of the need for passage this far up the Gunnison River and assessment of the feasibility of warming releases from the Aspinall Unit (being conducted in 2001)..
- Floodplain habitat has been restored at five Bureau of Land Management sites on the Green River, three sites at Ouray National Wildlife Refuge, and two sites on the Colorado River near Grand Junction. The Program has acquired 1,200 acres of floodplain/wetland habitat along the Green, Colorado, and Gunnison rivers. A quarterly update on land acquisition is expected by the end of March 2001.
- A draft final report which evaluates the success of levee-removal efforts is expected to go to the Biology Committee by September 2001.

III. Nonnative Fishes and Sportfishing

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

- Status:
- To date, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and the Service have removed more than 20,500 nonnative channel catfish, 21,700 nonnative sunfish and bass, and 319,500 nonnative minnows from rivers in the upper Colorado River basin.
 - The project to remove adult northern pike from the Yampa River and translocate these fish to off-channel sites in compliance with the 1996 Nonnative Fish Stocking Procedures (NNFSP) was initiated in 1999. After a late start due to delays in identifying appropriate receiving waters and in obtaining collecting permits, 164 northern pike were collected. Of those, 80 were translocated to ponds at the Yampa State Wildlife Area, and 72 were returned alive to the Yampa River (returned alive because at time of capture no appropriate receiving waters had been identified). Response of local anglers fishing the translocation ponds was positive. In 2000, about 350 northern pike were translocated to Rio Blanco Lake (in-basin sites that meet the criteria of the NNFSP agreement were unavailable). A meeting has been scheduled for March 27, 2001, to discuss the future of northern pike control in the Yampa River.
 - Removal and control of nonnative fishes in Colorado and Gunnison River floodplain source ponds began in 1998 and continued in 1999. To date, 118 ponds have been surveyed. Of those, 24 have been chemically reclaimed, 1 reduced in depth to allow for winterkill, and 5 are managed annually through filling and drying. An objective of the project is to reclaim/control water levels/reshape/isolate 150 floodplain ponds of the Colorado and Gunnison rivers through 2003.
 - A fish barrier net was installed on August 18, 1999, in Highline Lake Reservoir to reduce or eliminate escapement of nonnative sportfishes from the reservoir and into reaches of critical habitat in the Colorado River. Evaluation of the operation, maintenance, and effectiveness of this fish barrier net suggests that it has significantly reduced escapement of nonnative fishes from the reservoir. While largemouth bass in the lake doubled from 1999 to 2000, the number of bass captured below the lake fell by almost 50 percent. This effort

has allowed active management of Highline Reservoir to provide warmwater fishing opportunities. Similar devices to control escapement of nonnative fishes from reservoirs are being considered for Elkhead Reservoir, Bottle Hollow Reservoir, and possibly other reservoirs.

IV. Propagation Activities

- 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 table on the following page identifies the species stocked from September 1998 through November 2000.
 - In 2000, 19 adult razorback suckers were collected from the spawning bar in the middle Green River. Of these, 8 were wild fish (2 females and 6 males) and 11 were hatchery fish (2 females and 9 males; one of these fish had been stocked into a restored Green River floodplain site).
 - Twenty-two of the planned 25 lots of razorback paired matings have been produced. The remaining three lots will be produced from “nearest neighbors” – razorbacks from the Grand Valley in 2001.
 - Over the last weekend in February 2001, failure of three mechanical systems at the hatchery facility near Grand Junction resulted in the loss of 30,000 1-year-old razorback suckers. A pump ceased to circulate water in the tanks, a pressure-sensing device failed to activate the emergency backup oxygen system, and the alarm which should have alerted hatchery staff to the problem also failed. The Service immediately repaired the pump, replaced the pressure-sensing device, and reprogrammed the alarm. More than 51,000 razorbacks at the facility were unaffected. Development of the specific recovery goals is expected to lead to modified stocking plans and reduced target stocking numbers, thus, the 51,000 remaining fish may be enough to meet these new targets for 2001. A report assessing the causes of this failure, what can be done to prevent future failures, and the impact of the losses to meeting stocking goals is in preparation.
 - This was the first year of stocking bonytail in the State of Colorado. A total of 10,000 bonytail were stocked at Dinosaur National Monument, in Yampa and Lodore canyons. This fall, more than 21,000 bonytail were stocked in the Colorado River and more than 48,000 were stocked in the Green River.
 - The Program continues to obtain growout ponds both in the Grand Valley, CO and Vernal, UT areas. Through November, the Program had secured approximately 36 acres of ponds in the Grand Valley area through leases and agreements and approximately 477.5 acres in the Vernal, UT vicinity (which includes large ponds on the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge).
 - The Program has received approval from the Colorado Department of Transportation for access to a pond located near the upper end of DeBeque Canyon for use as a growout site for young razorback sucker beginning spring 2001.

Species	Date	River Section	Number	Approximate Size (inches)
Bonytail	Oct 1998	Colorado	3,280	5
	Oct 1998	Lower Green	3,000	5
	Mar 1999	Colorado	15 (with radio tags)	10
	Apr 1999	Colorado	10,000	4
	Apr 1999	Lower Green	10,000	4
	Mar 2000	Lower Green	13	
	Apr 2000	Lower Green	19,987	4-7
	Apr 2000	Colorado	15,037	3
	Jul 2000	Yampa	5,000	4
	Jul 2000	Middle Green¹	5,000	4
	Oct/Nov 2000	Colorado	21,237	4-7
	Oct/Nov 2000	Green	48,205	3-4
Razorback sucker	Oct 1998	Middle Green ²	125	6-8
	Apr & Aug 1999	Middle Green ²	6659	4-8
	May 1999	Middle Green ²	57,900	<1
	May 1999	Middle Green	35 (with radio tags)	>10
	Jun 1999	Middle Green	738	10-16
	Jun 2000	Old Charlie	9599	<1
	Jun 2000	Middle Green	79	17
	Jun 2000	Stewart Lake	145	12
	Jun 2000	Old Charlie	2,106	>6
	Sept 1998	Gunnison	249	9
	Oct 1998	Gunnison	126	16
	May & Nov 1999	Gunnison	2,772	8
	Sept-Oct 1999	Colorado ³	3,498	8
	Apr 2000	Colorado³	7,147	4-6
	Aug 2000	Colorado³	3,875	4-13
	Aug 2000	Gunnison	1,640	3-13
Colorado pikeminnow	Apr 1999	Middle Green	36	16
	Jun 2000	Colorado	60⁴	17-22

¹ This reach of the middle Green River was in the Lodore Canyon.
² These smaller fish were stocked in depression wetlands where early life stages can take advantage of resources for growth and protection.
³ Colorado River at Parachute, CO.
⁴ These fish are 1991 year class from Horsethief ponds and are part of the translocation study

V. Research, Monitoring, and Data Management

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

- Status:
- In FY 2001, the Program is developing population estimates for Colorado pikeminnow in the Colorado River and the middle and lower Green River; and humpback chub in Yampa, Black Rocks and Desolation/Gray Canyon. Colorado pikeminnow in the Colorado River in Colorado may be nearing carrying capacity (emphasizing the importance of restoring fish access to the reach above Price-Stubb and the Grand Valley Project).
 - A population estimate for Colorado pikeminnow was initiated last spring for the middle Green River stock. Almost 1,200 Colorado pikeminnow were caught and tagged in the Green, Yampa and White rivers; a preliminary population estimate is >3,000 Colorado pikeminnow in these reaches.
 - A translocation study, moving Colorado pikeminnow into the Palisade-DeBeque reach of the Colorado River from the 18-mile reach, was started in FY 2000. Five wild fish were radio-tagged and translocated. In addition, 60 pikeminnow from Horsethief ponds were placed in the reach (5 of which were radio-tagged). Translocation will continue in FY 2001.

VI. Public Involvement, Information, and Education

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

Status: The Information and Education Committee met Nov. 10 in Denver and Jan. 19 in Grand Junction. Committee members remain active, helping the Program achieve its I&E goals. In the absence of a representative for environmental organizations, appropriate Management Committee members are informed of all I & E activities.

Key I & E efforts in the past six months include:

- News Media: The Recovery Program's visibility through the news media continues to increase. Key stories from September through March 9 focused primarily on raising and stocking fish in the Grand Valley, a public meeting in Rock Springs, Wyoming, passage of the long-term funding legislation, and the recent loss of fish at the 24 Road facility. The *Rocky Mountain News* wrote a special three-part, 24-page series on the Program that ran Dec. 3-5, 2000. The *News* also prepared a teacher's curriculum as part of its Newspapers In Education Program. News clips are faxed routinely to the I&E Committee, sent to Management Committee quarterly and are available to anyone else upon request.
- The Recovery Program newsletter was produced and mailed in October.
- At the request of Wyoming's Senator Craig Thomas, the Program held a public meeting in November in Rock Springs, Wyoming, to address community concerns related to operation of Flaming Gorge Dam.
- The Program exhibited at the Colorado River Water Users Association Annual Meeting in Las Vegas in December and the Researcher's Meeting in Grand

Junction in January. It plans to exhibit at the Gunnison Water Workshop (July 25-27).

- CDOW included Program materials at its display at the Denver Sportsmen's Show in January.
- An extensive outreach plan was developed and is being implemented in support of the draft recovery goals. The plan addresses seven states: Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and southern California. A total of 16 briefings will be completed by the end of March, including Indian tribes, State Fish & Game Directors and representatives of recovery and conservation programs. The Western Water Caucus scheduled two briefings for congressionals in Washington, D.C. on March 19.
- The Spring 2001 issue of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources magazine, *Wildlife Review*, will feature a story on students raising razorback suckers in golf course ponds in Page, Arizona,
- The D.C. Briefing Book was produced and distributed. To maximize its use throughout the year, 1,000 copies were printed and its name changed to "Program Highlights – 2000-2001."
- Interpretive Exhibits: Kathy Holley has assumed the lead for this project. She is working with many local groups in communities along the Colorado River to find partnership opportunities for interpretive signage/exhibits.

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 was signed into law (PL 106-392) on October 30, 2000.
 - Extending the Recovery Program - According to the funding legislation, by January 21, 2002, Program participants must extend the Program's Cooperative Agreement (which currently goes through 2003). Although final action on extension is conditioned upon Program concurrence with the recovery goals, Program participants are working out details to amend the Cooperative Agreement to extend the Program.
 - The Program's electronic listserver has more than 150 subscribers and is one of two key components of the Program's electronic communication (with about 13 messages posted per week). All Program participants are strongly urged to subscribe. The Program participants' web site (<http://www.r6.fws.gov/crrip/>) has detailed Program information such as upcoming meeting dates and times; meeting agendas and summaries; a bibliography of the Program library; the RIPRAP; a tracking list of Program assignments, and numerous other Program documents. The site is regularly updated and expanded.
 - Dr. Robert Muth, formerly the Program's coordinator for instream flow and nonnative fish activities, accepted the position of Program Director in January 2001.