

RECOVERY PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S UPDATE  
March 1998

A. Population Status: Little change in population status.

SPECIES	RIVER		
	GREEN	YAMPA	COLORADO
Colorado squawfish	Stable/increasing	Stable	Stable/small
Humpback chub	Stable?/small	Stable?/small	Stable
Razorback sucker	500± adults, limited recruitment	Few adults, limited recruitment	Few adults, no recruitment
Bonytail	Rare ---- all rivers		

B. Habitat Management (Instream Flows)

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

- Status:
- o The Service during January of 1998 signed a MOU with the Colorado River Water Conservation District to make up to 6,000 acre feet of water available from Wolford Mountain Reservoir. The water will be managed as if the Service has an account in Wolford Mountain reservoir and will be subject to the hydrology of Muddy Creek, similar to other accounts in the reservoir.
  - o The CWCB has written a draft water right decree for the Instream flow filings for the baseflow flow water rights on the Colorado and Yampa Rivers. The purpose of the draft decree is to narrow down the issues and to begin working with objectors. Further progress on this issue is linked to progress in the development of the programmatic biological Opinion for the 15-Mile Reach.
  - o The water users and CWCB have been meeting and developing a proposal for resolution of the Ruedi reservoir issue with regards to providing water for the endangered fish.
  - o Work to synthesize technical information related to Flaming Gorge and the Aspinall Units is progressing, but has been delayed because the supporting technical reports have been late. Synthesize reports are due May 1998 for Flaming Gorge and October 1998 for Aspinall.
  - o The water demand study, as part of development of the Yampa Water Management Plan, has been completed and should be available in March 1998.

- o The Bureau of Reclamation released the draft Environmental Assessment for the Grand Valley Water Management Project, December 1997. Reclamation also began public negotiation meetings on a contract with Public Service Company of Colorado for delivery of a portion of the surplus Green Mountain Reservoir water; it appears that a contract can be worked out by this summer. Completion of the programmatic biological opinion for the 15-mile reach remains an obstacle for beginning construction of the project.
- o The process to begin coordinated reservoir operations in the Duchesne River basin has been initiated, thanks to the CUWCD and Bureau of Reclamation.

### C. Habitat Development and Maintenance

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

- o fish passageways
- o restoration of flooded bottomland habitats.

- Status:
- o Operation of the Redlands Diversion Dam on the Gunnison River continued in 1997. The ladder was used by 20,603 fishes, 94% of which were native fishes, including 19 Colorado squawfish. 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.
  - o A fish passage structure was constructed at the Grand Valley Irrigation Company Diversion Dam on the Colorado River in January 1998; evaluation is scheduled to begin in March 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.
  - o Design options are currently being developed for restoring fish passage at the Price-Stubb Diversion Dam. Construction is tentatively scheduled to begin in the fall of 1998, and could be completed as early as April 1999.
  - o Pre-construction activities are being initiated in FY 98 to restore fish passage at the Grand Valley Project Diversion Dam. The current plan is to complete pre-construction activities in FY 99.
  - o Studies are underway to determine if the Tusher Wash Diversion Dam on the Green River just upstream from the town of Green River, Utah, is a barrier to upstream movement of endangered fishes; and to determine if the Tusher diversion canal siphons endangered fish larvae through the power plant or into irrigation ditches. The results of this study will be used to determine the need for screening at diversion structures.
  - o During March 1997, levees were breached at 3 sites along the Green River, resulting in 201 floodable acres. During October 1997, levees were breached at 3 more sites resulting in an additional 153 floodable acres. Levees are currently (February/March 1998) being breached at 2 more sites for an additional 862 to 1380 acres (depending on flows). Total habitat made available for endangered fishes is 1,216 to 1,734 acres. This fills out the 8-site block design recommended by the Levee Removal Evaluation Group and subsequently approved by the Biology and Management committees. Evaluation studies will be conducted through October. A report based on preliminary results of data collected from 1996 through 1998 will be

developed by December 1998 for review and evaluation by the Recovery Program.

- o Thirty-two sites have been screened for contaminants (including pre-acquisition surveys on 14 private properties; pre-restoration surveys on 18 public properties; two candidate growout ponds; and two post-restoration surveys). Floodability assessments have been conducted on 28 sites.
- o Land acquisition activities have resulted in 14 private landowners that have shown interest in selling easements or titles on approximately 500 acres of floodplain properties along the Green, Colorado, and Gunnison rivers.

#### D. Stocking Native Fishes

- Goal:
- A. Produce a sufficient supply of hatchery reared fish to support research and recovery activities.
  - B. Conserve the genetic diversity present in the wild.

- Status:
- o During Fall 1997, 3,732 razorback suckers ranging in size from 4-15 inches were stocked in the Gunnison River. These fish were raised in Clymers Pond, Grand Junction. Up to 1,000 razorback suckers may be stocked in the Green River in late Spring 1998.
  - o In October 1997, 2,164 age-0 and ten age-1 bonytails with radio transmitters were stocked in Professor Valley near Moab, Utah. Another 3,000 will be stocked in the Spring of 1998.
  - o Construction of 10 new 1/2 acre ponds at the Ouray National Fish Hatchery was completed on December 31, 1997. There are now 36 line ponds on line at this facility. Twenty-three of the ponds currently hold fish. The water treatment system is basically complete, except for testing. The remainder of the facility should be complete by early Summer 1998.

#### E. Nonnative Fishes and Sportfishing

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

- Status:
- o Removal of nonnative catfish, carp, and centrarchids is proceeding on the Green River. This past season removal included: 16,611 catfish; 1,332 carp; 1,051 centrarchids; and 6,683 other nonnative fish.
  - o Removal efforts this spring and summer will include Yampa Canyon in Dinosaur National Monument and nursery habitats along the Green and Colorado rivers.
  - o Nonnative fish control efforts recommended in the FY 99 Program Guidance include: expanding nonnative fish removal on the Colorado River to include the 15 & 18-mile reaches and nonnative fish removal on the Yampa River.

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

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

- Status: o The Interagency Standardized Monitoring Program (ISMP) is being expanded to incorporate population estimates of humpback chub, Colorado squawfish, and razorback suckers in various reaches of the Yampa, Green, and Colorado rivers.
- o Management Objectives (MO's) have been approved by the Biology Committee. The current estimate of effective population sizes for each stock are: Colorado squawfish - 5,477; razorback sucker - 5316; humpback chub - 4,796; and bonytail - 4,118. These are adaptive objectives and can be modified as new information becomes available. Note: The Westwater/Black Rocks humpback chub population has been estimated at 7,000.

#### G. Information and Education

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

- Status: o The text portion of the Recovery Program Web site is now on-line (Web address: <http://www.r6.fws.gov/coloradoriver>). Additional photos and graphics are being added this month.
- o In conjunction with the three open houses we are holding next week on the environmental assessment on land acquisition, we also are setting up meetings with local reporters and editorial boards to discuss the program and the value of floodplain habitat to endangered fish, other wildlife, vegetation and the river ecosystem.
- o We have been working with producers of several public television and cable programs on stories on the Colorado River and endangered fish recovery. One of the programs aired February 20 and 27 in Denver on KRMA and Grand Junction on KRMJ.

#### H. Section 7 Consultation

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

- Status: o The draft biological opinion for the 15-Mile Reach on historic and new depletions has been delayed. Discussions between the various water user groups have been very beneficial. Discussions continue between the water users, environmental representatives, Bureau of Reclamation, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- o An official draft of the Duchesne River biological opinion, addressing both historic and new depletions is undergoing final regional review.
- o The updated biological opinion for Wolford Mountain Reservoir has been finalized.
- o The biological opinion for the Ute Water District pipeline expansion has been finalized.

## I. Program Management

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

- Status:
- o The FY 99 Program Guidance and RIPRAP revisions have been drafted for Implementation Committee approval.
  - o Most of the participating water users have sent a letter to Senator Allard (Colorado) asking him to support the long-term funding legislation for the Upper Basin and San Juan recovery programs. Program participants briefed their Washington, D.C. delegations on the long-term funding legislation and FY 99 appropriations.
  - o Program Director's office is developing a tracking systems for program activities including research, Recovery Action Plan items, final reports, etc.