



United States Department of the Interior

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CO/KS/NE/UT-CR/FY 2000 --
End. Species Act--Section 7
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APR 10 2000

Memorandum

To: Implementation/Management Committee, Consultants, and Interested Parties

From: Regional Director, Region 6

Subject: Sufficient Progress/Section 7 Consultations--Upper Colorado River Recovery Program

In accordance with the Section 7, Sufficient Progress, and Historic Projects Agreement, the Fish and Wildlife Service recently reviewed the Colorado River Recovery Implementation Program's 1999 and cumulative accomplishments. Per that Agreement, the Service used the following criteria to evaluate whether the Recovery Program is making "sufficient progress:"

- a. Actions which result in a measurable population response, a measurable improvement in habitat for the fishes, legal protection of flows needed for recovery, or a reduction in the threat of immediate extinction
- b. Status of the fish population
- c. Adequacy of flows
- d. Magnitude of the impact of projects

A complete assessment of recent accomplishments under the Recovery Implementation Program Recovery Action Plan (RIPRAP) is contained in Attachment 1. Previous years' accomplishments are outlined in the RIPRAP itself.

Status of the Species

Significant changes in the status of the four species generally are not detected on a year-to-year basis. The table on the following page summarizes current status of the populations.

SPECIES	RIVER		
	MIDDLE GREEN ¹	LOWER GREEN ²	COLORADO
Colorado pikeminnow	Stable/increasing	Stable	Stable/increasing
Humpback chub	<u>Yampa Canyon:</u> Stable/small	<u>Desolation/Gray Canyon:</u> Stable?/small	<u>Black Rocks 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.		

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

² Lower Green River is from the end of the Middle Green River section to the confluence of the Colorado River.

Accomplishments:

Program participants accomplished several important objectives over the last year.

- The Flaming Gorge Dam bypass tubes and spillway were to used release 10,500 cfs (first high release since 1983), and physical and biological data were collected during the release.
- Flows in the 15-Mile Reach were maintained at >1,630 cfs through most of the late summer and fall to meet the wet year flow recommendations. Colorado River Coordinated Reservoir Operations have enhanced peak flows during 1997–1999. The 15-Mile Reach Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO) was completed in December. Several water users have now signed recovery agreements as outlined in the PBO. Denver Water signed a 10-year agreement to provide 5,412.5 af of water per year to the 15-Mile Reach, and completion of a similar agreement with the River District is pending.
- Floodplain easements were acquired on 401 acres (6 properties) along the Green River, and 25 acres (1 property) along the Colorado River.
- Fifteen ponds in the Grand Valley area were chemically reclaimed to reduce escapement of nonnative fishes. Experimental removal of nonnative fishes was conducted in the Colorado, Green, and Yampa rivers.
- A barrier net to prevent nonnative fish escapement was installed at Highline Reservoir.

- Previously stocked razorback sucker were found on the Green River spawning bar.
- In April 1999, 3-5" razorback suckers were stocked in three floodplain wetlands along the Green River. Of the nearly 6,000 razorbacks stocked, 1,100 were recaptured which grew to an average length of 14 inches in the presence of large numbers of nonnative fishes.
- The Grand Valley hatchery facility was expanded in time to produce Colorado pikeminnow. Hatchery pond construction was completed at Wahweap, Utah.

Concerns

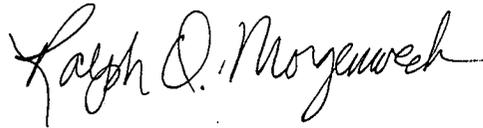
The Service's memorandum in 1999 assessing sufficient progress expressed concern regarding progress of: 1) fish passage construction; 2) construction of outlet structures at Leota and Johnson Bottom; 3) Ouray hatchery construction; 4) instream flow protection that addresses State, Service, and the water user concerns; and 5) completion of the Flaming Gorge and 15-Mile Reach opinions. The Service is pleased with the progress the Recovery Program has made in several of these areas. Areas of remaining concern are:

- A schedule to meet deadlines in the Duchesne Coordinated Reservoir Operations project has been presented; however, Reclamation (Provo) has not kept team members adequately informed about this project, which was designed as a cooperative process.
- The Service raised concerns about delays in acquiring floodplain easements to Reclamation and the Management Committee. The Committee agreed that the Service's Realty division should begin work to acquire easements along the Colorado River between Rifle and Debeque. We appreciate the attention the Management Committee is giving this concern and encourage Reclamation to continue to accelerate land acquisition as much as possible.
- Modifications are needed at the Leota and Johnson Bottom floodplain sites to make them drainable as soon as possible.
- Other than the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado has not provided much support in the Recovery Program's effort to use highway ponds just east of Debeque Canyon for endangered fish growout. The State Department of Transportation apparently is opposed to their proposed use due to safety and access concerns.
- Water quality and treatment continue to be a major problem at the Ouray National Fish Hatchery. If the facility is still not operational by May 1, then the Service and Reclamation need to meet to consider all options and determine how to resolve the problem.

Conclusion

Based on careful evaluation of the status of the fish, adequacy of flows needed for recovery, magnitude of depletion impacts, and cumulative Recovery Program accomplishments and shortcomings, the Service concludes that progress in the Recovery Program continues to be sufficient for projects that have an annual depletion of up to 3,000 acre feet. Some Recovery Program participants have asked the Service to consider increasing this threshold based on cumulative Program accomplishments. However, we believe it is more appropriate to rely on programmatic biological opinions. The threshold no longer applies to the portion of the Colorado River addressed by the 15-Mile Reach opinion. When the Flaming Gorge, Gunnison, Yampa, and tributary opinions are completed, the threshold basically will become obsolete.

I am encouraged with the progress the Recovery Program made in 1999 and efforts accomplished so far this year. Recovery Program participants need to actively pursue resolution of the issues identified above, and I ask that a report of progress in these areas be provided to the Implementation Committee at their September meeting. I am confident that with continued cooperation by all Recovery Program participants, the Program will continue to make significant strides toward recovery of the four endangered fishes.



Attachment

March 28, 2000

FINAL
FY 2000 RIPRAP ASSESSMENT
Significant Accomplishments (✓) and Shortcomings (✗)

PAGE/ITEM # **STATUS ASSESSMENT**

>*27, IIA2d ✗ Land acquisition - We can't seem to acquire easements in a timely manner.
>*43, IIA5d
>*47, IIA3d

GENERAL RECOVERY ACTION PLAN

20, IIA ✓ Age-1 razorbacks stocked in depression wetlands, survived and grew in the presence of nonnative fishes.

21, IIIA ✗ Northern pike spawned in Old Charlie Wash on the Green River. (These fish will not be allowed to return to the river, however.)

 ✓ Nonnative fish control activities implemented: 15 ponds in the Grand Valley area were chemically reclaimed to reduce escapement of nonnative fishes; experimental removal of nonnative fishes was conducted in the Colorado and Green rivers (cyprinids from backwaters), Yampa Canyon (channel catfish), Colorado River from Palisade to Westwater (centrarchids and other nonnative fishes removed via electrofishing), and the Yampa River (northern pike removed and translocated to Yampa State Wildlife Area).

22, IVA2 ✓ Genetics Management Plan revised 6/99.

22, IVA3c ✓ Colorado pikeminnow genetics report completed and accepted by the Program subcommittees.

>22, IVA4a(1) ✓ Twenty of the planned twenty-five razorback suckers paired matings have been secured.

23, IVD ✗ Hatchery facility review not done because not all facilities are fully operational. In addition, they will need some time to work out any technical problems.

23, IVE2a ✗ Ouray National Fish Hatchery still not complete.

23, IVE2b ✓ Wahweap pond construction completed.

23, IVE2c ✓ Grand Valley hatchery facility expansion completed in time to produce Colorado pikeminnow.

- 23, IVE2d **X** Colorado (Department of Transportation) has thus far resisted Program interest in using of highway ponds just east of Debeque Canyon for endangered fish growout (citing safety and access concerns).
- 23, VA1a **X** Biology Committee and standardized monitoring program participants still need to determine future direction of ISMP.
- 25, VIIA4c **✓** Development of recovery goals begun for all four species.
- 27, VIIB **✓** Long-term funding legislation introduced in Congress.

GREEN RIVER ACTION PLAN

- 26, IA1
27, IB1 **✓X** Draft Final Flaming Gorge synthesis report was completed and submitted to Biology Committee for review in May 1999. The Biology Committee did not reach consensus; the report needs to be approved by Management Committee.
- >*26, IA3d **✓** Bypass tubes and the spillway at Flaming Gorge Dam were to used release 10,500 cfs (first high release since 1983), and Recovery Program resources were mobilized to collect physical and biological data during the release.
- 27, IIA1a(3) **✓X** Efforts to finish construction at Leota and Johnson were admirable, but these sites will need more work to make them completely drainable.
- >*27, IIA2 **✓** Acquired easements on 401 acres (6 properties).
- 29, IVA1a&b **✓** Green River endangered fish augmentation plan completed and accepted by the Recovery Program.
- >29, IVA1c **✓** Some mature stocked razorbacks were captured on the razorback spawning bar.

YAMPA/LITTLE SNAKE RIVERS

- 30, IA4a3 **✓** Yampa synthesis report completed.
- >*30, IA4a(1) **✓** Steamboat water leased to augment late summer flows.
- 30, IA4a3(c)
32, IIA2 **✓** August - October base flow recommendations for the Yampa River upstream of Yampa Canyon completed.
- 32, IIIB2 **X** Potentially large numbers of nonnative fishes escaped from Elkhead Reservoir during drawdown.

DUCHESNE RIVER

- 33, ID1 ✗ LATE. Duchesne River Coordinated Reservoir Operations evaluation behind schedule. No substantive reports have yet been submitted. Lack of progress on this project effects projects in item I.C. and will affect refinement of flow recommendations for the Duchesne River (I.A.2.). Last word from BOR was that a contractor had been hired to do additional modeling.

COLORADO RIVER ACTION PLAN

- >*38, IA4c
(several) ✓ Flows in the 15-Mile Reach maintained at >1,630 cfs through most of the late summer and fall to meet the wet year flow recommendations.
- >*39, IA4c3(c)ii) ✓ Colorado River Coordinated Reservoir Operations has enhanced peak flows during 1997–1999.
- 40, I ✓ 15-Mile Reach Programmatic Biological Opinion completed.
- >*40, IA3c3(g)ii) ✓ Phase 1 of the Coordinated Facilities Study completed and Phase II begun.
- >*43, IIA5d ✓ Acquired easements on 25 acres (1 property).
- >*44, IIIB1 ✓ Fish barrier net installed in Highline Reservoir. Evaluation of the barrier's effectiveness is ongoing.
- 45, IVA3a&b ✓ Colorado River augmentation plan completed and accepted by the Recovery Program.