

**COLORADO RIVER RECOVERY PROGRAM
FY 2008-2009 PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK for:
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT – NONNATIVE FISH MANAGEMENT**

Project No.: PIP 12L

Lead Agency: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Program Director’s Office)

Submitted By: Debbie Felker, CRRP
P.O. Box 25486, DFC, Lakewood, CO 80225
303-969-7322, ext. 227; debbie_felker@fws.gov

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Category:

Expected Funding

Source:

- Ongoing project
- Ongoing-revised project
- Requested new project
- Unsolicited proposal

- Annual funds
- Capital funds
- Other (explain)

I. Title of Proposal: Communications/Public Involvement Plan for Nonnative Fish Management

II. Background

Situation

This communication plan addresses nonnative fish management. Recovery goals for the endangered fishes identify nonnative fish as a primary threat to the continued existence or reestablishment of self-sustaining endangered fish populations. The overall goal of nonnative fish management is to attain and maintain fish communities where populations of endangered and other native fish species can persist and thrive, and the recovery goals for the endangered fishes can be achieved. All actions involve research studies to identify the levels of management needed to achieve and sustain recovery.

There are more than 50 nonnative fish species in the Upper Colorado River Basin. Negative interactions with certain warmwater nonnative fish species have contributed to declines in endangered and other native fish populations. Some nonnative fish prey upon endangered and other native fishes — eating their eggs and young, and in some cases, larger fish. Nonnative fish also compete with native fish for food and space. The nonnative fishes of greatest concern to the Recovery Program are smallmouth bass, northern pike, and channel catfish.

Situation (Continued)

Prior to 2003, the Recovery Program focused most of its public involvement efforts on other program elements. Earlier experimental efforts to manage nonnative fish primarily involved removal and relocation of northern pike in the Yampa River. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources had also removed limited numbers of nonnative fish.

In 2003 and 2004, the Recovery Program expanded efforts to identify management actions to minimize or remove the threat of nonnative fishes to survival of the endangered fishes as described in the recovery goals. From late April through October, biologists worked in sections of river in Colorado and Utah to experimentally manage the targeted species. Where appropriate, biologists transferred fish from the river to local ponds and reservoirs that were publicly accessible to anglers.

Both years, the Recovery Program prepared and implemented a comprehensive communications plan to raise public awareness of the purpose of nonnative fish management. Efforts included developing informational materials and posting them on the Recovery Program's public website; informing members of Congress and other elected officials; and proactively seeking news media coverage, including inviting reporters to accompany biologists as they conducted their work. In 2003, public meetings were held in Grand Junction, Steamboat Springs and Craig, Colorado. Public meetings were not held in 2004 because the nature of the planned work did not change from the previous year. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources developed and implemented its own communication plan to support the Recovery Program's communication efforts. The plan included presentations at Regional Advisory Council meetings in Green River and Vernal, Utah.

In FY 2004, Recovery Program partners adopted a nonnative fish management policy that addresses the process of identifying and implementing nonnative fish management actions needed to recover the endangered fish. The policy provides a consistent message that is used as part of a strategic communications effort to gain agency and public understanding and support for these actions. Researchers continued removal efforts (channel catfish removal occurred only in Yampa Canyon.) Previous communication strategies continued with the exception of public meetings which were not held because there was no new information to convey.

In FY 2005, removal efforts expanded again to include additional river miles, work crews, and removal trips. The I&E Coordinator interviewed principal investigators to learn about their interactions with the public and to gain ideas on how to conduct better outreach efforts. Based on the researchers' feedback, it was determined that the public was beginning to reluctantly accept the Recovery Program's actions to remove the nonnative fishes. The Recovery Program produced a bookmark-sized information piece to provide with boat permits at Dinosaur National Monument to inform boaters about the work. This resulted in better acceptance among boaters who had previously complained about the noise from researchers' equipment.

Situation (Continued)

In 2006, research efforts expanded again and channel catfish removal occurred only in Yampa Canyon. The Nonnative Fish Coordinator produced weekly trip reports to improve communication. A public meeting was held in Craig, Colorado, in August, to address the public's concerns. The meeting was orderly with few members of the public in attendance.

In 2007, research efforts changed very little. Outreach efforts continued as in the past. At the time that this scope of work was prepared, a public meeting was scheduled to occur on August 14, in Grand Junction. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information to anglers in the area who continue to believe that the Recovery Program is removing channel catfish (the anglers' preferred sportfish.)

In addition to active removal, the Recovery Program continues to consider other nonnative fish management options which include: screening reservoir outlets; berming ponds to prevent nonnative fishes from escaping into the rivers; developing agreements to regulate stocking of nonnative fishes and change state bag and possession limits; and conducting research to identify the sources of nonnative fish.

Mission

To support the Recovery Program's success in recovering the endangered fishes while water development continues by promoting public understanding of the rationale and processes relative to nonnative fish management, and to promote public confidence that the Recovery Program's nonnative fish component is driven by science and is clear, open, and honest.

Goals

- Educate target audiences about the endangered fishes and the threats to their survival, emphasizing the impacts from nonnative fishes.
- Establish and maintain positive relationships with communities in the affected river basins.
- Increase understanding of, and support for, the management actions the Recovery Program is taking to reduce the threats to endangered fishes from nonnative fishes.
- Improve communication among agencies conducting nonnative fish management actions.
- Ensure that all participating agencies use the same message to convey the purpose of their actions related to nonnative fish management.

Target Audiences

- Landowners Adjacent to Rivers
- News Media
- Anglers
- Local Sportfishing Groups
- Rafting and Fishing Guides
- Elected Officials at All Levels
- Agency Line Staff and Volunteers
- Recovery Program Partners
- General Public

III. Strategies/Dates

To achieve success, it is imperative that this plan be considered “a work in progress,” with the flexibility to update as necessary.

1. MAINTAIN ACTION PLANNING TEAMS. The magnitude of this plan requires clear planning and direction from those with the authority and responsibility to implement recovery actions. Three communication teams have been established -- two for Colorado and one for Utah. The purpose of these teams is to clearly define and implement strategies numbered 4-11, tailoring them to meet the needs of each particular community where work will occur. Team members are asked to review the communication plan and associated educational materials in draft and to provide feedback about comments received in their respective communities and how outreach efforts can be improved.

In Colorado, teams were established for both the Yampa and Colorado rivers in recognition of different communication needs for each river basin. Members include:

- Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW): area and district wildlife managers and aquatic biologists for the Yampa and Colorado River basins; Public Information Specialist Randy Hampton; principal investigators for the projects
- Colorado Department of Natural Resources: Endangered Species Program Director Tom Blickensderfer and/or other designee
- State Park Managers (Yampa River/Elkhead Reservoir/Highline Lake)
- Yampa River Basin Partnership representative(s)
- Recovery Program: Debbie Felker, I&E Coordinator and Pat Nelson, Nonnative Fish Coordinator
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Project Leaders Chuck McAda and Dave Irving and principal investigators

Strategies/Dates (continued)

Colorado Team (continued):

- Colorado State University: Project Leader John Hawkins
- Colorado River Water Conservation District – Martha Moore
- Others whom the State of Colorado may want to include

Utah team members include:

- Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR):
 1. Media Specialist Mark Hadley
 2. Conservation outreach (public affairs) managers and endangered fish and sportfish biologists and managers in the UDWR's Northeastern and Southeastern regions
 3. Aquatic program coordinators in the UDWR's administrative office in Salt Lake City
- Recovery Program: Debbie Felker, I&E Coordinator and Pat Nelson, Nonnative Fish Coordinator
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Project Leader Dave Irving and principal investigators
- Others whom the State of Utah may want to include.

RESPONSIBILITY: Program Director's Office; States of Colorado & Utah; Service
COMPLETION DATE: Ongoing.

2. **PROMOTE KEY MESSAGES AND NONNATIVE FISH MANAGEMENT POLICY.** Update key messages to ensure accuracy. Messages explain the purpose and goals of the Nonnative Fish Management program element with emphasis on research findings that clearly demonstrate the prevalence and negative effects of nonnative fish, and the benefits of relocating sportfish in Colorado and providing alternate, accessible fishing sites according to the State's aquatic management plan. Messages will be used by all Recovery Program partners and participating agencies. Approved messages help ensure that all agencies involved with nonnative fish management projects convey the same information to those with whom they come in contact.

RESPONSIBILITY: Program Director's Staff, I & E Committee, Participating agencies

COMPLETION DATE: Complete message review: April 1
Use key messages: ongoing.

Strategies/Dates (continued)

3. **MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, STATE AND LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS AND THEIR STAFFS.** Distribute news releases and other information materials. Proactively notify affected officials or staff by phone or in person if a significant issue arises in their district so they are not caught off guard by constituent comments. Offer briefings to elected officials, with emphasis on local and state legislators, district/state Congressional staff, county commissioners and local sheriffs. Briefing teams will vary depending on state/jurisdiction and nature of inquiry.
RESPONSIBILITY: I & E Coordinator, Legislative Affairs Specialists from participating agencies (States of Colorado and Utah, FWS), Endangered Species Program Director at Colorado DNR – Tom Blickensderfer
COMPLETION DATE: March/April to distribute news releases/other information; other communication ongoing as needed
4. **NEWS MEDIA.** Prepare and distribute advance and follow-up news releases to media, members of Congress, and Recovery Program partners. Call or visit key reporters to make sure they understand the issue and the work plans. Identify and seek support of a local organization(s) to issue releases or provide supportive statements (e.g., Yampa River Basin Partnership). Invite reporters to accompany biologists as they conduct their work.
RESPONSIBILITY: I & E Coordinator and Action Planning Team(s)
COMPLETION DATE: March/April to distribute news releases and call/visit key reporters; ongoing communication with press as needed
5. **LANDOWNER CONTACTS.** Identify and seek permission from landowners to access their property as part of recovery actions.
RESPONSIBILITY: Principal investigators
COMPLETION DATE: March
6. **ESTABLISH LOCAL SPOKESPERSON(S).** Identify key local spokespersons representing the Recovery Program, Colorado and Utah Divisions of Wildlife, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service who will respond to local news media inquiries, speak at public meetings and work with the I&E Coordinator to prepare appropriate information materials and identify issues/questions raised in the community that should be addressed.
RESPONSIBILITY: Action Planning Teams and I & E Coordinator
COMPLETION DATE: Ongoing
7. **STAFF/VOLUNTEER TRAINING.** All staff and volunteers conducting the field work, as well as others who might receive questions from the public and congressional staff, will receive the key messages and project-specific questions/answers in writing with verbal explanation from their project leader/supervisor. This will be incorporated

into training that staff/volunteers receive about the work to be performed.
Staff/volunteers

Strategies/Dates (continued)

- should be clearly told that their agency is actively involved with, and supportive of, the project and is working in partnership with other organizations.
RESPONSIBILITY: Action Planning Team Members
COMPLETION DATE: At least two weeks before field work begins.
8. **ANGLER ROUNDTABLES/PUBLIC MEETINGS.** The Recovery Program will work the States of Colorado and Utah each year to determine whether or not to hold public meetings (and angler roundtables) and, if warranted, to coordinate and host those meetings.
RESPONSIBILITY: Appropriate agency contacts/I&E and Nonnative Fish Coordinators
COMPLETION DATE: As needed
9. **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION.** Post news releases and questions/answers to Recovery Program and agency websites and the Yampa River Basin Partnership listserv.
RESPONSIBILITY: I&E Coordinator and Agencies
COMPLETION DATE: As soon as materials are developed. Update as needed.
10. **FISHING AND RIVER GUIDES.** Distribute news release(s) and questions/answers, and other related information to commercial fishing and rafting guides.
RESPONSIBILITY: Action Planning Teams and I&E Coordinator
COMPLETION DATE: March/April
11. **BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT/DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT BOAT PERMITS.** Work with BLM and NPS to prepare appropriate materials that explain this project for inclusion with boat permit distribution.
RESPONSIBILITY: I & E Coordinator
COMPLETION DATE: December
12. **AGENCY PUBLICATIONS.** Publish an article(s) about this work in publications produced by participating agencies and/or Recovery Program partners.
RESPONSIBILITY: Action Planning Teams and I & E Coordinator
COMPLETION DATE: Ongoing

Evaluation

- Document print and broadcast news media placements.
- Document the number of angler roundtables and/or public meetings held, including attendance numbers and general attitude of those who attend.
- Have project leader/supervisor ask work crews/volunteers for feedback on the questions/comments they received from people they met while conducting the work.
- Document the number of articles published in agency/partner publications.
- Document contacts made with members of Congress and their staffs and feedback received.
- Determine feasibility of implementing nonnative fish control in the Yampa River in light of results of landowner willingness to allow access and trespass to conduct control activities.
- Prepare an annual report to Recovery Program committees.

IV. Budget

The information and education coordinator's salary and travel expenses are covered in the Program Director's budget.

	<u>FY 2008</u>	<u>FY 2009</u>
Paid advertisements to announce public meetings*	\$3,000	\$3,000
Printing costs for educational materials**	<u>\$2,000</u>	<u>\$2,000</u>
TOTAL	\$5,000	\$5,000

*Public Meetings

If determined necessary, public meetings would be held in Grand Junction, Craig, and Steamboat Springs, Colorado. This budget is based upon placing two paid ads each in the daily newspapers in these communities (total of 6 ads) at an estimated cost of \$500 each.

**Printed educational materials:

1. Bookmark-size information card to be distributed to boaters. Black and white, two sides, card stock. Quantity: 3,000. Estimated cost: \$300.
2. Laminated fact sheets to distribute to river guides. (8 ½ X 11, black and white, two sides, text weight – 12 fact sheets, quantity 50 each. Estimated cost: \$1,000.)
3. Informational signs for kiosks at Yampa State Wildlife Area and Loudy-Simpson ponds (24 X 36, four-color, waterproof material. Quantity: 2 @ \$350 each = \$700.)