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Secretary Salazar, Western Governors and Western Area Power Administration Join Together to Extend Program to Recover Endangered Colorado River Fish

DENVER, CO – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, Jr.; former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, Jr.; Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal; and Western Area Power Administration Administrator Timothy Meeks renewed their commitment to a nationally recognized program that is working to recover endangered fishes in the Upper Colorado River Basin while water development continues in accordance with state and federal laws.

These leaders signed an extension of a cooperative agreement for the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program that will extend the program through 2023. The extension will ensure continued cooperative work to recover the endangered bonytail, humpback chub, Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker while water development continues for agricultural, hydroelectric and municipal uses in the Upper Colorado River Basin.

Established in 1998, the Recovery Program is a voluntary, cooperative program involving federal and state agencies, water development interests, power customers and environmental organizations in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming.

“This extension of the Recovery Program’s cooperative agreement shows how far we’ve come in the last two decades,” said Secretary Salazar. “When this program began 21 years ago, it was the first conservation initiative of its kind. Never before had such a broad group of state and federal agencies come together formally to work side-by-side with water users, power customers and environmental organizations. I commend all of the program’s partners for developing creative and effective ways to meet the dual goals of endangered species recovery and water development.” he said.

The Department of the Interior recognized the Recovery Program with a Cooperative Conservation Award in 2008, citing the program’s excellence in conservation through collaboration and partnership.

“Balancing the needs of the environment with the beneficial use of our state’s water continues to be a challenge,” said Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, Jr. “On the Colorado River, we are working to recover endangered fish while protecting water users and ensuring the state can develop its entitlements under interstate compacts.”

“The agreement is an example of how an ongoing, highly successful cooperative program reflects the proper approach to providing endangered species conservation and recovery while concurrently working to resolve conflicts between endangered species recovery and the development and use of Compact-apportioned water resources in the Intermountain West,” said Governor Dave Freudenthal of Wyoming.

“I am pleased to extend Western’s participation in this worthwhile conservation effort,” said Western’s Administrator Tim Meeks. “Cost-based and clean, renewable federal hydropower is a critical and highly valued resource to our power customers who serve millions of consumers throughout the West. Through cooperation, we will continue to make progress on these fish recovery efforts in ways that enable Western to carry out our power marketing mission.”

“The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program is a mutually supported partnership,” said Jon Huntsman, Jr., former governor of Utah, who signed the agreement in July shortly before leaving office to assume the position of Ambassador to China. “It is important to note that because of the cooperation between the partners, water development along the river has continued to proceed without a single lawsuit.”

Recovery actions include instream flow protection, habitat restoration, nonnative fish management, propagation and stocking, and research and monitoring. To meet flow recommendations for endangered fish, water releases from federal reservoirs are being managed in a way that conserves fish, and Recovery Program partners are undertaking water leases, contracts and irrigation efficiency improvements.

Major habitat improvements completed include construction of fish passages at diversion dams, installation of fish screens to prevent fish from becoming trapped in irrigation canals, and development of floodplain wetland areas.

As a result of the cooperative effort, there are signs of recovery of the endangered fishes. Hatchery-raised, stocked razorback sucker are spawning in Upper Basin rivers and there is evidence that their larvae are surviving. Colorado pikeminnow and humpback chub populations fluctuate and, in some, cases are increasing. Stocked bonytail are being recaptured in several locations throughout the Green and upper Colorado rivers.

Since 1988, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has consulted on 1,693 projects depleting more than 2.3 million acre-feet of water per year in the Upper Colorado River Basin. The Recovery Program provides Endangered Species Act compliance for these projects.

For more information, call 303-969-7322, ext. 227, or visit the Recovery Program’s website: www.ColoradoRiverRecovery.org.

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