



NEWS RELEASE

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Water Releases from Elkhead Reservoir Aid Endangered Fish Recovery Research in Yampa River

LAKESWOOD, Colo. – Starting Thursday evening, Elkhead Reservoir in northwest Colorado will release water in the Yampa River to aid the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program. A relatively high volume of water will be released (~350 cubic-feet-per-second (cfs)) from Elkhead for four days to support a sustained flow of ~1000 cfs in the Yampa River at Maybell, downstream of Craig, Colo. The released water will take about 24 hours to reach Maybell and flows will return to pre-release levels at Maybell by August 24. All releases will be made through the dam outlets that are screened to prevent the escapement of nonnative fish.

The reservoir level is expected to drop 3 feet during the release period and stabilize by the middle of next week. This will not impact boat or angler access to the reservoir.

Each year since 2007, the Recovery Program has requested lower release rates of water (typically ~50-70 cfs) during 6-8 weeks this time of year, drawing down the reservoir over a longer period of time. These flows help provide better habitat conditions for endangered fish in the lower Yampa River during the summer and fall of low and normal water years.

This year's late summer high flows offer a different way to help the endangered fish.

“Higher natural flows this year in the Yampa and Green rivers should favor native fish over nonnative species,” said Recovery Program Director Tom Chart. “This year's Elkhead Reservoir releases will provide a rare opportunity for our researchers to capitalize on the wet conditions to more effectively manage the nonnative smallmouth bass and northern pike, which currently pose our greatest challenge to endangered fish recovery.”

In 2006, the Recovery Program funded \$13.2 million of a \$31 million enlargement of Elkhead Reservoir. The Colorado River District funded the remaining \$17.8 million and managed the enlargement project which nearly doubled the reservoir's storage capacity. This cooperative project entitled the Recovery Program to an annual release of 5,000 acre-feet of permanent water and up to 2,000 acre-feet of leased water to augment flows for the endangered fish in the Yampa River during middle and late summer. The additional water is used to meet the needs of people in the Yampa River Basin.

In addition, to flow management and nonnative fish control, the Recovery Program relies on an aggressive endangered fish stocking program, habitat development actions (building fish passages and screening irrigation canals) and long-term monitoring to achieve self-sustaining, endangered fish populations.

As the largest tributary to the Green River, the Yampa River plays an important role in the lifecycle of the endangered fish. In addition to directly providing habitat, the Yampa River delivers flows and sediment downstream to the Green River, helping to maintain hundreds of miles of river habitat considered vital to the recovery of the endangered fish.

The Recovery Program was established in 1988 to recover the endangered Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub and bonytail, while providing Endangered Species Act compliance for all historic and current water users throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin.

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The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program is a cooperative partnership of local, state and federal agencies, water organizations, power customers and environmental groups established in 1988 to recover the endangered fishes while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts. For more information, 303-969-7322, or ColoradoRiverRecovery.org.