

I. Project Title: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Program Management

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IV. Abstract:

The ongoing work of the Recovery Program Director's Office is to ensure timely and effective planning, implementation, coordination, and administrative support of the Recovery Program by coordinating and implementing recovery activities; conducting Program planning and evaluation; managing the Recovery Program annual budget; providing staff assistance to [Program committees](#); and directing and coordinating Service Recovery Program activities. These tasks were carried out by Recovery Program staff including the director, deputy director, coordinators for the major recovery elements, and administrative staff. Significant FY19 accomplishments include supporting Service leadership in finalizing a 5-year review for bonytail; coordinating water releases and flow management to improve habitat conditions for endangered fish; managing the inundation of six floodplain wetlands to support wild recruitment of razorback sucker; beginning diet studies to assess propagation techniques for bonytail; implementing the [Upper Colorado River Basin nonnative and Invasive Aquatic Species Prevention and Control Strategy](#) with our state partners; refining the web-based [Species Tagging, Research and Monitoring System \(STReaMS\)](#) for data management and access; expanding outreach efforts in many locations within the basin; coordinating conversations around the continuation of the Program after the current funding deadline of September 2023 passes; and managing the Program's annual budget.

V. Study Schedule: 1989-ongoing

VI. Relationship to RIPRAP:

General Recovery Program Support Action Plan:

- VII.A.1 Assure consistency of RIPRAP with currently approved recovery plans.
- VII.A.2 Recognize the role of the UCREFRP in revised recovery plans
- VII.A.3 Update, refine, and prioritize recovery actions (RIPRAP) annually.

- VII.A.5 Update recovery goals/plans.
- VII.A.5e Conduct species status review and update recovery goals at least every 5 years.
- VII.A.7 Monitor and assess Recovery Program accomplishments annually.
- VII.A.8 Develop biennial work plan to address priority needs.
- VII.B Actively participate in Recovery Program committees and secure funding for annual work plan and larger projects.
- VII.C Manage, direct, and coordinate Recovery Program activities.

VII. Accomplishment of FY 2019 Tasks and Deliverables, Discussion of Initial Findings and Shortcomings:

A. Program Director & Staff

1. Directed and coordinated implementation of recovery efforts as described in the RIPRAP and the Biennial Work Plan in the areas of: a) instream flow protection; b) habitat restoration; c) nonnative fish management; d) propagation/genetics; e) research, monitoring, and data management; and d) information, education, and public involvement. Program coordinators are: Don Anderson for instream flow protection and fish passages/screens; Kevin McAbee for nonnative fish management; Tildon Jones for habitat management; Julie Stahli for research & monitoring, and database management; Melanie Fischer for information, education, and public involvement and Cheyenne Owens for propagation and genetics.

Maintained tracking system of Program reports and due dates to ensure timely accomplishment of Program objectives.

Significant Program accomplishments/activities in 2019 included:

Instream Flow & Habitat Management

- Maintained critical flows and operated fish screens and passages in multiple river basins.
- Continued collecting, processing, and managing river temperature data in the Yampa, White, Green, Colorado, and Gunnison rivers.
- Managed flows in the 15-Mile Reach via coordination with other Colorado River water users, reservoir operators, and the State Engineer's Office.
 - Released dedicated fish pool water to the 15-Mile Reach during late August and September to support rapidly declining flows.
- Managed flows in the Yampa River via coordination with other river users, reservoir operators, and the State Engineer's Office.
 - A total of 5,000 acre-feet of water was released from Elkhead Reservoir to supplement instream flows for the endangered fish.
- Coordinated with a White River Planning Team to develop *Review of Fish Studies With Interim Flow Recommendations for Endangered Fishes of the White River, Colorado and Utah* to support White River management planning efforts which will continue in FY20.
- Continued operation of Flaming Gorge Dam under the [Biological Opinion](#) and [ROD](#) and [Study Plan to Examine the Effects of Using Larval Razorback Sucker Occurrence in the Green River as a Trigger for Flaming Gorge Dam Peak Releases](#).

- Operated to meet spring flow targets and recommended base flow temperatures in Reach 1 and at the confluence with the Yampa River, and to provide floodplain connection in Reach 2 of the Green River coincident with the presence of wild-produced larval razorback sucker. Larval trigger operations filled a record number of six wetlands with larval razorback sucker. Design work is underway to convert the Stirrup wetland into an additional wetland that can be managed to provide valuable larval nursery habitat, with construction planned in 2020.
- Coordinated completion of a draft report entitled *Evaluation and Suggested Revisions of Flow and Temperature Recommendations for the Endangered Fish in the Green River Downstream of Flaming Gorge Dam*, in conjunction with the “GREAT”, which was distributed to the Committees for review.
- Operated the Aspinall Unit on the Gunnison River under Aspinall EIS and ROD to achieve the Program’s spring and base flow targets for the Gunnison River. Monitoring to evaluate effects of Aspinall operation as per the [Aspinall Study Plan](#) is ongoing.

Nonnative Fish Management

- Program partners continued to implement [Upper Colorado River Basin Nonnative and Invasive Aquatic Species Prevention and Control Strategy](#).
- The Program Director’s Office continued coordination of in-river nonnative fish removal efforts over 600+ miles of river.
- Program stakeholders continue to work towards fish escapement prevention projects at Ridgway, Red Fleet, and Starvation Reservoirs.
- Continued to track the emerging threat of grass carp, through testing ancillary captures of adults to determine if they are fertile or sterile fish. Stocking of fertile grass carp is illegal in both Utah and Colorado, where adults are captured.

Propagation & Data Management

- Continued hatchery production and numbers of stocked bonytail and razorback sucker with all stocking goals met or exceeded.
- Began diet studies to determine optimal nutritional requirements of bonytail, based on observations of high mesentery fat levels. Obtained funding to support study and analysis at Bozeman Fish Technology Center.
- Refinement of the web-based [Species Tagging, Research and Monitoring System \(STReaMS\)](#) with individuals and detections growing over time.
- Created standardized GIS layers to ensure consistent data records and uploaded that information into STReaMS to provide locational data on all encounters.

Research & Monitoring

- Completed multiple final reports in various recovery elements.
- Coordinated multiple endangered species monitoring projects, including Colorado pikeminnow adult estimates in the Colorado River and humpback chub estimates in Desolation Canyon.

Information and Education

- Accelerated and expanded outreach efforts, including:
 - Extensively visited field locations to promote understanding and awareness of the endangered fish in communities in western Colorado and eastern Utah.

- With Palisade High School and FWS hatchery personnel, established an aquaculture facility that will raise endangered fish in a river ecology class.
2. Conducted Program planning and evaluation:
 - Reviewed and updated the RIPRAP, documenting changes from previous version; submitted recommended RIPRAP revisions to the technical, Management, and Implementation committees for review; published final, revised [RIPRAP](#) (with progress information included) to web.
 - Requested, revised as needed, and posted FY 2018 [project accomplishment reports](#) to the web.
 - Continued to implement peer review to ensure the technical and scientific integrity of Recovery Program activities.
 - Provided updates of [depletion consultations](#). Through December 2018, the Program had provided Endangered Species Act Compliance for more than 2,100 water projects which can deplete more than 2.86 million af of water from the upper basin.
 - Coordinated stakeholder discussions about what the Program may look like when the current Cooperative Agreements expire in 2023. Developed a selection tool to gather input on the scope of the Program after 2023, based on the input of subject matter experts across the Program. Finalized a recommendation for discussion by representatives of the Management Committee during FY20.
 3. Monitored the FY19 Recovery Program annual budget and modified as necessary.
 - a. Developed annual funding table.
 - b. Monitored payment and expenditure of Section 7 funds in the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation account.
 - c. Calculated FY 2019 annual agency contributions and depletion charge increases based on the Consumer Price Index.
 - d. Assisted with preparations for non-Federal Program participants' Recovery Program trip to Washington, D.C. to brief key people in the Department of the Interior, the Office of Management and Budget, national environmental groups, Congressional delegations, and authorizing and appropriation committees. Prepared [Program Highlights briefing book](#), continuing the feature “centerfold” highlighting the challenge of nonnative fish management.
 4. Provided staff assistance to the [Implementation](#), [Management](#), and technical committees:

- a. Prepared and distributed agendas and related documents in coordination with committee chairs. Arranged meetings and conference calls. Continued using web conferencing where applicable.
 - b. Prepared and promptly distributed concise, accurate meeting summaries. Coordinated presentations at Annual Researchers Meeting.
 - c. Maintained Recovery Program administrative record (primarily on [web](#)).
 - d. Provided additional staff assistance to committees as needed.
 - e. Recovery Program committee and related activities publicized on the Program listserv and posted on [Program web pages](#).
 - f. Attended Implementation, Management, and technical committee meetings.
 - g. Maintained Recovery Program [technical report library](#) and database.
 - h. Continued to maintain the fws-coloriver electronic mailing list for Program participants as well as a contact list for all committees and interested parties.
 - i. Continued to revise and maintain [Program website](#) with up to date information.
5. Directed and coordinated Service activities related to the Recovery Program.
- a. Drafted Colorado pikeminnow SSA, with help from Region 2.
 - b. Assisted Regional Director Walsh in completing a 5-year review for bonytail. No change in status was recommended
 - c. Drafted proposed rules to reclassify humpback chub and razorback sucker to threatened status.
 - d. Administered funding for Service Recovery Program activities.
 - e. Conducted monthly Service conference call.
 - f. Coordinated with and provided staff support to Service management on Recovery Program activities and issues. Drafted basis for [annual Sufficient Progress memo](#) (new, abbreviated version) and worked with Recovery Program participants and Service to finalize. Implemented process to maintain Program sufficient progress review while reducing workload of formal Service "sufficient progress" memo from annual to biennial.
 - g. Provided annual Recovery Data Call information.

B. Fish and Wildlife Service Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office staff:

