



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

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Water Facts Related to Recovery of Endangered Fish in the Upper Colorado River Basin

Providing adequate flows for the endangered fish is critical to their recovery. The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) continues to work cooperatively with water organizations and power customers in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming to ensure that water is available for the humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow, and razorback sucker.

The Recovery Program's water-management actions benefit recreational, municipal, and agricultural water users, as well as the endangered fishes. All water resources are managed in accordance with state water law, individual water rights, and interstate compacts to provide adequate instream flows for the endangered fishes while meeting water needs of growing western communities. This is accomplished through water leases and contracts, coordinated water releases from upstream reservoirs, efficiency improvements to irrigation systems, and re-operation of federal dams and reservoirs.

Recent Accomplishments

- Voluntary releases of water from upstream reservoirs are coordinated to enhance spring peak flows in the Upper Colorado River for the endangered fishes. During late summer, certain volumes in some reservoirs are available for the fish releases. Conservation projects built in western Colorado's Grand Valley create additional storage in Green Mountain Reservoir which is released in the late summer to augment flows in the Colorado River for endangered fish. The releases also benefit recreation, water quality, and other native fishes.

Reservoir contribution from 1997-2011 for spring and summer flows to the 15-mile reach of the Colorado River	
Reservoirs	Acre-Feet
Granby	39,914
Green Mountain *	532,000
Palisade Bypass	93,038
Ruedi	272,287
Williams Fork	89,342
Willow Creek	9,853
Windy Gap	3,718
Wolford Mountain	137,879
Total	1,178,030

*Note: Dillon Reservoir outflows must be passed through Green Mountain Reservoir to travel to the 15-Mile Reach, upstream of the confluence of the Gunnison and Colorado rivers near Grand Junction, Colo., and are included in the Green Mountain outflows.

- An environmental impact statement on re-operation of Aspinall Unit dams on the Gunnison River to help recover the endangered fishes has been prepared, with a record of decision anticipated by spring of 2012. The Aspinall Unit is comprised of three reservoirs – Blue Mesa, Crystal, and Morrow Point.
- A 13,000 acre-foot enlargement of Elkhead Dam and Reservoir in northwest Colorado, completed in 2006, provides up to 5,000 acre-feet of permanent water and 2,000 acre-feet of leased water each year to enhance base flows for endangered fish in the Yampa River. It also provides additional water to meet the needs of people in the Yampa River Basin. This project is a collaborative effort of the Colorado River Water Conservation District and the Recovery Program and is a unique example of water development and environmental interests working together to achieve common goals.
- A final environmental impact statement and biological opinion was completed in January 2006 on the operation of Utah’s Flaming Gorge Dam to help meet flow and temperature recommendations for the Green River. The Bureau of Reclamation’s record of decision (ROD) was executed in February 2006, and Reclamation has been operating the dam under the ROD since that time.
- The Recovery Program provides Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance for 2,001 water projects depleting more than 2.8 million acre-feet per year. No lawsuits have been filed on ESA compliance for any of these water projects. The second table below describes the same water projects by river basin, including the White River.

**Summary of Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultations
(1/1988 through 12/31/2011)**

State	Number of Projects	Historic Depletions	New Depletions Acre-Feet/Year	Total Depletions Acre-Feet/Year
Colorado	1,167	1,915,682	206,416	2,122,098
Utah	219	517,670	91,051	608,721
Wyoming	377	83,498	34,248	117,746
Regional	238	(regional)	(regional)	0
Total	2,001	2,516,850	331,715	2,848,565

**Summary of Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultations
(1/1988 through 12/31/2011) By River Basin**

River	Number of Projects	Historic Depletions Acre-feet/year	New Depletions Acre-feet/year	Total Acre-feet/year
Colorado/Eagle	452	1,013,351	124,864	1,138,214
White	24	3,587	4,962	8,549
Yampa/Little Snake	74	167,854	54,263	222,117
Green	154	126,244	60,572	186,816
Gunnison/Uncompahgre	345	503,500	37,900	541,400
Dolores	70	280,614	2,969	283,583
Duchesne	4	421,700	29,238	450,938
Price	2	0	6,447	6,447
Regional	876		10,500	10,500
TOTALS	2,001	2,516,850	331,715	2,848,565

Tangible Benefits to the Endangered Fishes

These water projects, along with other Recovery Program management actions, provide tangible benefits to the endangered fishes. For example:

- Colorado pikeminnow populations show long-term stability throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin.
- Recaptures of stocked razorback sucker have been reported in the Colorado, Green, and Gunnison rivers of the Upper Basin. Stocked razorback sucker are surviving to sexual maturity, spawning, and producing young. This species spawned in the lower White River for the first time in 2011.
- Three humpback chub, two razorback sucker and thousands of other native fish have used the fish passage at the Grand Valley Project Diversion Dam near Grand Junction, Colorado.
- Since 2009, recaptures of hatchery-raised bonytail that have survived for more than a year are increasing. This evidence of year-long survival offers encouragement for reestablishing self-sustaining populations of bonytail.
- The Recovery Program has begun experimenting with higher releases from Elkhead Reservoir during the summer to benefit native fish in the Yampa River.

The Recovery Program is currently working on draft flow recommendations for the White River below Kenney Reservoir. The White River plays an integral role in habitat protection for native fish. It is regarded as an important tributary for recovery of the endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

In the Upper Colorado River Basin, the lower White River supports a strong population of Colorado pikeminnow. For the first time since biologists began sampling, razorback suckers were found spawning in the high flows of 2012. It was a major discovery for the recovery of these fish. The abundance of Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, and other native fishes is likely related to an unaltered flow regime. These flow recommendations should be available in late 2012.

For More Information

For more information about the Recovery Program, visit our website at: ColoradoRiverRecovery.org or contact Debbie Felker at 303-969-7322, ext. 227, or debbie_felker@fws.gov.

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