

**SAN JUAN RIVER LARVAL RAZORBACK SUCKER AND COLORADO PIKEMINNOW MONITORING**

**FISCAL YEAR 2019 SCOPE OF WORK**

**SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. BUREAU OF RECLAMATION**

**FROM**

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**CONTRACT # GS-10F-0249X**

**1 OCTOBER 2018- 30 SEPTEMBER 2019**

**SAN JUAN RIVER LARVAL RAZORBACK SUCKER AND COLORADO PIKEMINNOW MONITORING  
FISCAL YEAR 2019 PROJECT PROPOSAL**

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**Project history:**

Surveys conducted in late 1980s documented small resident populations of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker in the San Juan River and the San Juan River arm of Lake Powell (Platania et al. 1991). Beginning in the mid-1990s, populations of these two species were augmented with annual hatchery stocking under the auspices of the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program (SJRBRIP). Currently, populations of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker persist in the lowermost 180 river miles of the San Juan River (between the Animas River confluence and the inlet of Lake Powell Reservoir). Annual investigations into the early life history of Colorado Pikeminnow began in 1991 when passive drift-netting for larval and young-of-year (YOY) fish was initiated in the San Juan River. The primary objectives of the passive drift-netting study were to 1) determine the temporal distribution of San Juan River ichthyoplankton in relation to the hydrograph, 2) provide comparative analysis of the reproductive success of San Juan River fishes, 3) attempt to characterize downstream movement of ichthyoplankton, and 4) attempt to validate the presumed spawning period of Colorado Pikeminnow.

Two stationary sites were used for the drift-net surveys. The upstream site was located 4.6 miles upstream of the Mancos River confluence in New Mexico. A second site was established in Mexican Hat, UT. The two field stations were separated by over 70 river miles. Results from eleven years of drift-net surveys (1991–2001) resulted in the collection of 11 larval Colorado Pikeminnow (Table 1) as well as information regarding the ichthyofaunal community of the San Juan River during the presumed spawning period of Colorado Pikeminnow (Platania et al. 2000, 2002).

In 1994, personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Colorado River Fishery Project (CRFP; Grand Junction, Colorado) stocked the first series of Razorback Sucker (n=672) in the San Juan River. Those fish, whose mean length and mass at the time of stocking were about 400 mm TL and 710 g, respectively, were released between Hogback, New Mexico and Bluff, Utah. In their 1995 report of activities, Ryden and Pfeifer (1996) suggested that most experimentally stocked 1994 San Juan River Razorback Sucker would achieve sexual maturity by 1996 thereby providing the potential for spawning during 1997–1998. The success of the experimental stocking study resulted in the development of a full-scale augmentation program for Razorback Sucker in the San Juan River.

At the November 1996 SJRBRIP Biology Committee integration meeting, it was suggested that the Colorado Pikeminnow, larval fish drift study be expanded to document spawning of Razorback Sucker. However, because reproduction by Razorback Sucker (March-May) occurred considerably earlier than Colorado Pikeminnow (June-July), separate

investigations of spawning periodicity and magnitude were deemed necessary. The initial attempt to document reproduction by Razorback Sucker stocked in the San Juan River took place in 1997. Low velocity monitoring sites were established in numerous locations adjacent to U.S. Hwy 163 and Utah State Hwy 262 (which parallels the San Juan River between Aneth and Bluff, UT) that appeared suitable for sampling with light-traps. Light-traps were set nightly in low-velocity habitats between Aneth and Mexican Hat from late March through mid-June 1997. Sampling success during the 1997 Razorback Sucker larval fish study was poor. While there were over 200 light-trap sets, those sampling efforts produced only 297 fish and larval Razorback Sucker was not present. While there were probably several variables that accounted for the poor light-trap catch rate, a principal factor was limited access to suitable habitats. A primary result of the 1997 study was the realization that being bound to specific collecting sites was an inefficient means of collecting the large number of larval fish necessary to document reproduction of a rare species.

In 1998, the Razorback Sucker larval fish sampling technique was modified to allow collections over a larger portion of the San Juan River and capture of a considerably larger number of larval fish. Navigation of the river by use of an inflatable raft provided the opportunity to sample habitats that were formerly either inaccessible or unobservable under the constraints of the 1997 sampling protocol. The primary collecting method was sampling low-velocity habitats with a fine mesh seine (0.8 mm mesh). The seining technique yielded over 13,000 specimens between river miles 127.5 and 53.3 with most these individuals ( $n=9,960$ ) being larval catostomids. Included in the 1998 larval fish catch were two larval Razorback Suckers (Table 2). The success of this project became evident as documentation of reproduction by Razorback Sucker continued in successive years. Between 1998 and 2017 there have been both spatial and temporal expansions upon this project but sampling methodology has remained relatively consistent.

The most significant change to the larval Razorback Sucker survey was the incorporation of the spawning periodicity of Colorado Pikeminnow using the same methodology. Beginning in July 2002, personnel began an active sampling regime that mirrored the sampling protocol successfully used to document reproduction by Razorback Sucker. This temporal expansion of the larval fish survey resulted in the monitoring of reproduction by the entire ichthyofaunal community.

Following the 2002 expansion of the San Juan River larval fish survey to actively sample for larval Colorado Pikeminnow, 1,110 individuals have been collected. Over 95% ( $n = 1,058$ ) of all larval Colorado Pikeminnow has been collected since 2014 (Table 1). Back-calculated spawning dates, based on Colorado Pikeminnow larvae, range from 23 May to 16 July and are associated with the descending limb of spring run-off and mean river temperatures typically above 18°C.

The results of the investigation into the early life history of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker is a foundation of work detailing the spawning periodicity of the entire ichthyofaunal community of the San Juan River. For the endangered fishes, catch data elucidates potential spawning areas, distribution, and displacement of propagules in the system and back-calculated spawning and hatching dates. The long-term data set (20 years) can track trends of the entire ichthyofaunal community by year, month, and river reach. The larval survey is also able to detect spawning by the rarest of the San Juan River fishes; Colorado Pikeminnow and Roundtail Chub, *Gila robusta*.

To date larval fish monitoring has collected and identified 10,407 larval or age-0 juvenile Razorback Sucker and documented reproduction by Razorback Sucker for 20 consecutive years (Table 2). Back-calculated hatching dates derived from individual Razorback Sucker larvae indicates spawning occurs prior to spring run-off often including the ascending limb of the spring hydrograph, and can persist into early summer (Farrington et al. 2017). Mean water temperatures during this period among all years ranged between 7.7–26.5°C. This minimum, maximum and subsequent range of temperatures at which successful spawning by Razorback Sucker has been documented is outside of the temperature range typically reported for this species (Bozek et al. 1990; Tyus and Karp, 1990; Muth et al. 1998; Bestgen et al. 2011).

Table 1. Summary of larval and YOY Colorado Pikeminnow collected in the San Juan River during larval drift-netting/larval seining (1991-2017) and back-calculated dates of spawning.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sample Method</i>	<i>Study Area (River Miles)</i>	<i>N=</i>	<i>Length mm TL.</i>	<i>Collection Date</i>	<i>Spawning Date</i>
1991-2001	Drift Netting	127.5, 53.3	11	8.5–9.2	26 Jul–03 Aug	15-18 Jul
2004	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	2	14.2, 18.1	22, 26 Jul	24, 25 Jun
2007	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	3	14.3-16.2	25, 27 Jul	26–29 Jun
2009	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	1	25.2	27 Jul	10 Jun
2010	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	5	12.6–21.4	20-23 Jul	15–27 Jun
2011	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	29	10.0–21.3	20, 21 Jul, 10,11 Aug	23 Jun–6 Jul
2013	Larval Seine	147.9 – 2.9	12	14.1–28.7	17–30 Jul	23 May–3 Jul
2014	Larval Seine	147.9 – 2.9	312	8.5–20.8	13–28 Jul	15 Jun–2 Jul
2015	Larval Seine	147.9 – 2.9	24	8.6–9.7	28–30 Jul	10–14 Jul
2016	Larval Seine	147.9 – 2.9	548	8.8–14.7	24–28 Jul	29 Jun–12 Jul
2017	Larval Seine	180.6 – 2.9	174	9.0–21.5	23 Jul–16 Aug	13 Jun–16 Jul

Table 2. Collection information of Razorback Sucker (*Xyrtex*) collected during the larval Razorback Sucker survey, 1998 – 2017.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sampling method</i>	<i>Study Area (River Miles)</i>	<i>River Miles sampled</i>	<i>RM Percent change</i>	<i>Specimens collected</i>	<i>Xyrtex n=</i>
1998	Larval seine Light traps	127.5 – 53.3	74.2	na	13,608	2
1999	Larval seine Light traps	127.5 – 2.9	124.6	+ 67.4%	20,711	7
2000	Larval seine Light traps	127.5 – 2.9	124.6	na	13,549	129
2001	Larval seine Light traps	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	+ 11.2%	95,629	50
2002	Larval seine Light traps	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	138,602	813
2003	Larval seine Light traps	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	112,842	472
2004	Larval seine	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	160,292	41
2005	Larval seine	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	109,368	19
2006	Larval seine	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	50,616	202
2007	Larval seine	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	53,084	200
2008	Larval seine	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	40,855	126
2009	Larval seine	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	72,404	272
2010	Larval seine	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	70,610	1,251
2011	Larval seine	141.5 – 2.9	138.6	na	28,258	1,065
2012	Larval seine	147.9 – 2.9	145.0	+ 4.6%	29,384	1,778
2013	Larval seine	147.9 – 2.9	145.0	na	25,842	979
2014	Larval seine	147.9 – 2.9	145.0	na	20,508	612
2015	Larval seine	147.9 – 2.9	145.0	na	17,787	1,205
2016	Larval seine	147.9 – 2.9	145.0	na	12,973	824
2017	Larval seine	180.6 – 2.9	177.7	+ 22.6%	31,587	360

## Project Modifications:

There have been numerous modifications to the field methodology of the larval fish survey over time as well as changes in reporting priorities, protocol, and format (Table 3). The extent of the study area and aspects of the longitudinal sampling have been modified to improve spatial comparisons. The study area was expanded in 1999, 2001, and 2012 by a total of 70.8 river miles (nearly double the length of the original study area) to include most of Reach 5 through Reach 1 (Shiprock NM to Clay Hills Crossing, UT; a total of 145.0 miles of critical habitat sampled). The expansions of the study area were a result of captures of larval Razorback Sucker at the top of the previous study area boundary. Within two years (and often the following year) of each study area expansion, larval Razorback Sucker was documented in the newly expanded study area. The most recent expansion occurred in 2017 when larval fish sampling was expanded to include the San Juan River between Farmington and Shiprock, NM (river miles 180.6 – 147.9). Both larval Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker larvae were collected within this reach in 2017. This “Expanded Study Area” is considered to be independent of the work proposed in this SOW with discrete sampling dates, SOW, and budget submitted to the SJRBRIP each fiscal year.

Beginning in 2003, the entire study area (excluded the aforementioned Expanded Study Area) was sampled in single uninterrupted trips (10–12 field days per trip) rather than in two temporally discrete sections as done in previous years (1998 – 2002). Because of the increasing numbers of larval Razorback Sucker collected (as well as detailed information regarding the native fish community), the SJRBRIP Biology Committee voted to elevate the larval fish surveys from an “experimental” project to a monitoring program. This change allowed for comparisons of catch per unit effort (CPUE) data with the programs monitoring activities (i.e., small bodied fish, sub-adult and adult, habitat, etc.).

Conducting the larval Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow surveys under this new protocol not only provided discrete reach information but also provided greater temporal resolution in respect to the longitudinal distribution of Razorback Sucker larvae and the ability to correlate potential environmental cues required by Razorback Sucker for spawning. These same advantages also apply to Colorado Pikeminnow. Disadvantages to this top to bottom approach were that the duration of the monthly sampling trips (10–12 field days) made them more subject to abiotic fluctuations (floods, flow spikes). Large flood events reduce sampling efficiency as many low velocity habitats become flooded by rising water levels thereby transporting larval and early juvenile fish downstream. In addition, large flood events have necessitated premature termination of some survey runs, reducing the temporal resolution of the single-continuous pass effort. Annually, at least one trip (an average) had to be cut short due to large flood events or low water events in the lower canyon. The abbreviated trips were subsequently resumed once conditions improved (usually 1–2 weeks later). Additional costs were incurred because of the need to return to the field to complete the sampling effort for that month.

To reduce the variability of abiotic conditions as well as gain even greater temporal resolution of the longitudinal distribution of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker larvae, the protocol was modified to survey the upper and lower halves of the study area simultaneously. This effort began in 2007 and utilized two fully equipped and autonomous crews (Table 3). In 2008, additional participation of our staff with other SJRBRIP projects made the new simultaneous sampling effort a necessity so that our staff could meet obligations to assist the other researchers with their work. Beginning in 2011, the September sampling trip was

discontinued. The Biology Committee felt that the September survey did not provide enough data with respect to endangered fishes to warrant continuation.

In 2013 a new analysis of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker trend data was developed using mixture models (White, 1978; Welsh et al., 1996; Fletcher et al., 2005; Martin et al., 2005.). Mixture models can be particularly effective at modeling ecological data with multiple zeros to estimate occurrence and abundance separately (e.g., combining a binomial distribution with a lognormal distribution). Data collection for this new approach meant each seine haul was preserved independently along with physical descriptors of each haul. Beginning in 2014, the mixture model analysis was expanded to include annual trends for many of the common species collected.

Table 3. Summary of annual projects and project modifications of the larval fish surveys from 1997 to 2017.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sampling method</i>	<i>Study area (River Miles)</i>	<i>Specimens collected</i>	<i>Field modification</i>	<i>Laboratory modification</i>
1997	Light Trap Drift-nets	99 – 75	297		
1998	Larval Seine Light Trap Drift-nets	127.5 – 53.3	13,608	study area expanded; active sampling	
1999	Larval Seine Light Trap Drift-nets	127.5 – 2.9	20,711	study area expanded; upper-lower reaches sampled separately; nonsynchronous	
2000	Larval Seine Light Trap Drift-nets	127.5 – 2.9	13,549		
2001	Larval Seine Light Trap Drift-nets	141.5 – 2.9	95,629	study area expanded; upper-lower reaches sampled separately; nonsynchronous	
2002	Larval Seine Light Trap	141.5 – 2.9	138,602	study period expanded to September. Drift-nets no longer used.	
2003	Larval Seine Light Trap	141.5 – 2.9	112,842	upper-lower reaches sampled monthly in one uninterrupted trip (11-12 day runs)	CPUE data used for integration in reporting
2004	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	160,292		Reports merged, trend data reported
2005	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	109,368		

2006	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	50,616		
2007	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	53,084	Two rafts-two crews; upper-lower reaches samples synchronous	Analyzed catch with habitat data
2008	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	40,855		
2009	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	72,404	Specimens preserved in 95% ethanol	
2010	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	70,610		
2011	Larval Seine	141.5 – 2.9	28,258	September survey dropped from the monitoring	
2012	Larval Seine	147.9 – 2.9	29,384	Study area expanded	
2013	Larval Seine	147.9 – 2.9	25,842	Individual seine hauls preserved independently	Mixture Model analysis used for trend data
2014	Larval Seine	147.9 – 2.9	20,508		Mixture Model analysis used for several common species
2015	Larval Seine	147.9 – 2.9	17,787		Multiple covariates used in all mixture models
2016	Larval Seine	147.9 – 2.9	12,973		Additional covariates used in CPM mixture models
2017	Larval Seine	180.6 – 2.9	31,587	Study Area expanded	

### Objectives:

This work is being conducted as required by the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program Monitoring Plan and Protocol (2012). The objectives of this specific monitoring effort are identified and listed below. Where applicable, these objectives are related to the specific tasks listed in the 2016 Long Range Plan set forth by the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program (SJRBRIP).

- 1) Conduct larval fish sampling to determine if (Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker) reproduction is occurring, locate spawning and nursery areas, and gauge the extent of annual reproduction. (Task 4.1.2.1)

- 2) Determine the spawning periodicity of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker (utilizing back-calculated spawning and hatching formulas) between mid-April and August and examine potential correlations with temperature and discharge.
- 3) Document and quantify reproduction, survival, and recruitment. (Task 4.4.1.1).
- 4) Document and track trends in the use of specific mesohabitat types by larval Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker. (Task 4.2.3.2).
- 5) Analyze and evaluate monitoring data and produce Annual Fish Monitoring Reports to ensure that the best sampling design and strategies are employed. (Task 4.1.1.2)
- 6) Provide detailed analysis of data collected to determine progress towards endangered species recovery in the San Juan River. (Task 5.1.1.3)
- 7) Identify principal river reaches and habitats used by various life stages of endangered fish. (Task 4.2.4.1)
- 8) Deposit, process, and secure San Juan River fish specimens, field notes, and associated data at an organized permanent repository. (Task 4.1.2.5)
- 9) Provide annual updates on the rate of opercular deformities found in Razorback Sucker. (Task 4.1.7.2)
- 10) Monitor TNC's restoration sites for the presence of endangered species, and compare species composition and relative abundance of fishes captured in restoration sites to nearby control sites. (Task 4.3.2.1)

### **Hypotheses:**

When possible, the following hypotheses from the 2012 SJRRIP Monitoring Plan and Protocol will be annually evaluated. Exceptions are noted below in italics.

- 1) Densities of larval fishes will be influenced by specific mesohabitat types.
- 2) Relative abundance of larval fishes will be highest in mesohabitat types that contain cover, inundated vegetation and submerged debris, which provides protection from aquatic and avian predators.

*Previous attempts to evaluate the effect of cover type on larval fish density have proven problematic. Even at the small scale (ca. 5–15 m<sup>2</sup>) of the individual mesohabitats being sampled, cover type is rarely distributed throughout site. Therefore it is not possible to say with certainty that cover type is resulting in increased abundance of fish.*

- 3) Elevated spring discharge increases relative reproduction of native fishes, as determined by annual relative abundance and distribution of native larval fishes.

- 4) Elevated spring discharge decreases reproductive success of non-native fishes, as determined by annual relative abundance and distribution of non-native larval fishes.
- 5) Modification of physical attributes of San Juan River by natural flow regime mimicry, mechanical creation of nursery habitats and decreased entrainment of adults into irrigation canals will result in increased relative abundance, expanded distribution, and multiple ontogenetic life stages of larval Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker.

*Attributing an increase in abundance, distribution, or presence of multiple ontogenetic stages to any one of the factors listed in Hypothesis 5 is difficult or not possible. A variety of management actions preclude the ability to specifically attribute a response in the fish community to any of the factors listed in Hypothesis 5. For example, the stocking of thousands of adult Razorback Sucker, and hundreds of thousands of juvenile Pikeminnow annually could result in increases in abundance, distribution, or the presence of multiple ontogenetic stages. Monitoring of mechanically created habitats is ongoing, and details pertaining to that effort are listed within the methods section of this document.*

- 6) Modification of biological attributes of San Juan River fish community (non-native removal and native fish stocking) will result in increased relative abundance, expanded distribution, and multiple ontogenetic life stages of larval Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker.

*See comments regarding Hypothesis 5.*

### **Study Area:**

The study area encompasses the San Juan River between Shiprock, New Mexico (RM 147.9) and the Clay Hills Crossing boat landing (RM 2.9) just above Lake Powell in Utah (145.0 river miles). As in all post 1999 sampling efforts, the study will include making collections in reaches of the San Juan River under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.

### **Methods:**

#### *Field Work:*

Sampling to meet the study objectives of this SOW will be conducted in the San Juan River between RM 147.9 and RM 2.9 from mid-April through early August using sampling techniques that will provide sufficient numbers of fish necessary to meet study objectives 1–7, 9 and 10. Access to the river will be gained through the use of inflatable rafts equipped with all of the necessary equipment and provisions needed for trips of up to seven days. A day and a half is added before and after each field survey for field preparation, gear maintenance, and clean up. The study area will be divided into an “upper” section (Shiprock, NM, to Sand Island, UT) and a “lower” section (Sand Island, UT, to Clay Hills crossing, UT). Separate field crews will launch simultaneously in each of the two sections and proceed through their designated study area. The vehicle and raft trailer used by the field crew working in the upper section will be left at the Shiprock launch site and subsequently be shuttled to the Sand Island BLM ranger station, UT. The vehicle shuttle (with trailer) for the upper reach sampling effort was typically performed en gratis by personnel from the Farmington Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office. Between

2008 and 2010, personnel from the N.M. Fishery Resources Office stationed in Farmington performed this service. Beginning in 2011, ASIR personnel shuttled vehicles for the upper end crew. At this time, there is no charge for this service.

The sampling crew for the lower reach will launch from, and store their vehicle and raft trailer at Sand Island, UT, where a commercial shuttle will take the vehicle to Clay Hills crossing, UT. The cost for this service is included under the travel and per diem section of our budget.

Because crews sampling the lower section of the study area will be in a high use recreational area, advance reservations are required. All trips for 2019 must be scheduled by late January 2019 and submitted to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Office at Monticello, Utah. Designated camping permits for our lower reach sampling crews will be obtained and must be strictly adhered to in addition to other BLM- San Juan River Recreation Area regulations (i.e., low impact and pack-out policies). Low flow conditions often prevalent during the study period make several sections of the river more difficult to navigate (especially in the lower reach). Our field crews are required to render assistance to boaters stuck in rapids or otherwise in distress and report all such encounters to the appropriate BLM personnel.

Sampling efforts for larval fish will be concentrated in low velocity habitats and employ small mesh seines (1 m x 1 m x 0.8mm) to collect fish. Individual seine hauls will be preserved independently at each site. Habitat designations will also be recorded by seine haul. Retained specimens will be placed in Whirl-paks containing 95% ethanol (EtOH) and a tag inscribed with unique alphanumeric code that is also recorded on the field data sheet. For each sample site, the lengths (to 0.1 m) of each seine haul and total number of hauls will be measured and recorded. Capture densities for seine samples will be reported as the number of fish per 100 m<sup>2</sup>.

Native species large enough to be positively identified will be measured (standard length) and returned to the river. Post-larval endangered fish species collected during this study will be photographed, a small portion of tissue from the caudal fin clipped and retained in 95% EtOH (in the case of potential Razorback Sucker hybrids) and scanned with a FS2001 PIT tag reader for the presence of a PIT tag. Specimens of sufficient size but lacking a PIT tag will be injected with a tag following the protocols established by the program (Davis 2010). All PIT tag information will be recorded in the field data sheet and subsequently forwarded to the SJRBRIP for integration in the program's PIT tag database.

For each sampling locality, river mile will be determined to the nearest tenth of a mile using the most current SJRBRIP Standardized Map Set. Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) coordinates and zone will be determined with a Garmin Navigation Geographic Positioning System Instrument for each sampling locality. Mesohabitat type, length, maximum and minimum depths, water clarity (determined with a Secchi disc), and substrata will be recorded for each sampling locality. A minimum of one digital photo will also be taken of each specific habitat sampled.

Each of the six River Ecosystem Restoration Initiative (RERI) sites located between river miles 132.2 and 127.2 will be the subject of repeated monthly monitoring. The goal of these collections is to detect the presence of endangered species, and compare species composition and relative abundance of fishes captured in restoration sites to nearby control sites. If a site cannot be effectively sampled (e.g. too deep or swift), photos will be taken, habitat conditions noted, and no collection made. Beginning in 2011, ASIR researchers defined 15 monitoring sites located in lateral washes and canyons throughout the study area to assess persistence of backwater habitats. Monitoring sites will be visited in each survey. If suitable nursery habitat exists at the time of

visitation they will be sampled. If the sites are dry or contain isolated pools, photographs will be taken and field notes written detailing condition of the habitat. Conditions of all monitoring sites and RERI restoration sites will then be related back to discharge at time of visitation.

All collections that contain Razorback Sucker will be examined for frequency and severity of opercular deformities. The opercula are not fully developed until at least the post-flexion mesolarval stage of development. Because of this, only Razorback Sucker greater than 15 mm TL (the size at which the opercula should be fully developed) will be examined for opercular deformities. Individuals will be examined on both the left and right sides. Severity of shortening will be assessed and rated as level 0 (no opercular deformity), level 1 (slight shortening), or level 2 (severe shortening). Annual rates of opercular deformities will be plotted and compared to the long-term data set (1999-present).

#### *Field Work, Safety:*

Personnel participating in fieldwork are required to successfully complete an International Rescue Instructors Association (IRIA) level 2 swiftwater rescue class and American Red Cross CPR/AED training. Type III personal flotation devices (PFD's) will be worn by sampling personnel at all times while working. As PFD's lose flotation capacity due to UV exposure, compression of material, and oil and grit impregnation, and since each crewmember's PFD will be used for approximately 60 days per season, the PFD's will be annually replaced. Simms Guideweight Gore-Tex waders and boots will be issued to all personnel along with 3 mm neoprene gloves (necessary in April and May). In addition to personal camping gear and rain suits, all personnel will be required to provide and use wide brimmed hats, sunscreen, and sunglasses (provided at no cost to the program).

All rafts used for this project will carry an extensively stocked first aid kit replete with items necessary for most minor medical situation. Additionally, the first aid kit will contain a suite of items (i.e., splints, neck braces, butterfly stitches, snakebite kits) needed to address more serious medical conditions. Because ethanol is used in the preservation of specimens, several vials of eyewash solution will be incorporated into each first aid kit. First aid kits will be inventoried after each sampling trip and used and/or expired items replaced. In the upper reach of the study area, personal cell phones and PDA's will be used (at no cost to the program) to contact outside parties should a medical situation arise. In the lower study area reach (canyon bound; where cell phones do not have service) an Iridium 9505-satellite phone will be provided for sampling crews. Both sampling crews will be equipped with SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger units to be used in case of an emergency.

All preservation fluids will be transported in heavy-duty LPDE carboys. Extensive exposure to UV light makes the carboys susceptible to decomposition and cracking and requires that they be inspected monthly and not used for more than two years. Safety rope throw bags will be similarly inspected and retired from use accordingly. Rafts will be equipped with raft recovery (Z-line) kits, and repair kits, extra oars and oar blades, and two spare hand pumps to help ensure that crews do not become stranded due to raft damage. BLM regulations also mandate that an extra PFD and emergency whistle be carried by all boaters.

*Laboratory Work:*

Samples will be returned to the lab immediately after each field trip is completed and processed following a multi-step procedure. To maintain the larval fish in good condition (necessary to ensure accurate identification) the samples must be transferred from whirl-packs to glass jars and the field fluids replaced with new preservation fluids. Cyprinid and catostomid larvae are extremely small and transparent especially at early developmental stages. To minimize the potential loss of fish in individual seine hauls, it is best to retain the entire contents of each seine haul. A negative result of this technique is that, in addition to larval fish, whirl-pack samples usually contain considerable debris, detritus, and silt. Another important step in processing of individual samples is to separate fish from the detritus. This necessary portion of the process is labor intensive and can be quite tedious. During this process initial sorting of fish based on age class (age 0 [larvae] and age 1+) occurs. Samples that contain a large number of larval fish, especially proto or mesolarvae, often must be sorted twice to ensure all larvae are located within a sample.

After the fish are separated from the debris, personnel with San Juan River Basin larval fish identification expertise will identify individual specimens to species. Stereomicroscopes equipped with transmitted light bases (light and dark field) and polarized filters (that enhance the delineation of myomeres, pterygiophores, and fin rays) will be used to assist with the identifications. Larval fish keys are referenced to assist in species specific determinations (e.g., Contributions to a guide to the cypriniform fish larvae of the Upper Colorado River System [Snyder 1981], Catostomid fish larvae and early juveniles of the Upper Colorado River basin, Morphological descriptions, comparisons, and computer interactive key [Snyder and Muth 2004], and Identifications of larval fishes of the Great Lakes Basin [Auer 1982]). Age-0 specimens will be separated from age-1+ specimens using published literature on growth and development (Snyder 1981, Snyder and Muth 2004).

Age classes will be enumerated, measured (minimum and maximum size [mm standard length] for each species at each site), and catalogued in the Division of Fishes of the Museum of Southwestern Biology (MSB) at the University of New Mexico (UNM). Both total length (TL) and standard length (SL) of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker will be obtained using electronic calipers and stereomicroscope mounted micrometers. The ontogenetic stage of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker obtained in this study shall be determined based on the definitions provided by Snyder (1981).

*Quality Assurance and Quality Control:*

The qualifications of the investigators include extensive experience working on large data sets from multiple river systems over several decades. This experience has resulted in the implementation of numerous protocols that assure the quality of the finished data files. The field sampling crew has been kept constant, which ensures that the collection of the raw data is standardized between trips and that errors are minimized. Field notes and raw data sheets will be checked for any errors prior to being entered into spreadsheet data files. Any errors will be corrected by crossing out the original data and writing the correct data on the sheet in pencil (all corrections will include the initials of the person making them). All data will be entered into spreadsheet templates designed for the particular type of data being entered (i.e., site locality and physical conditions data, sample size and habitat data, fish species and age-class data). These

template files are customized using drop-down lists to facilitate more efficient data entry while also assuring that the correct values are entered (i.e., eliminates typographical errors) within each field. After all data is imported into the main database, all data values will be checked. Data checking will include cross-referencing the field notes and raw data sheets with the values entered into the main database. Upon completion of the quality assurance and quality control steps listed above, the data will then be analyzed and tabulated. All the computed results will be examined and cross-checked with the original data files. Outlying values will be identified by using advanced sorting features on multiple data fields. Missing or incorrect data will be identified by using advanced sorting features and by running multiple queries written for this purpose. Checking the cross-tabulation of data will ensure that the sum of values is in agreement with the individual values (e.g., total number is equal to the sum of the total number of each age-class). Any corrections to the data will be made directly to individual tables within the main database.

### *Analysis:*

Modeling ecological data with multiple zeros can be particularly effective when using mixture models (e.g., combining a binomial distribution with a lognormal distribution) to estimate occurrence and abundance separately (White, 1978; Welsh et al., 1996; Fletcher et al., 2005; Martin et al., 2005). Long-term Razorback Sucker (1999–2017) and Colorado Pikeminnow (2003–2017) sampling-site density data will be analyzed using PROC NLMIXED (SAS, 2016), a numerical optimization procedure, by fitting a mixture model using the methods outlined in White (1978). Covariates specific to Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow mixture models are listed in Tables 4 and 5 of this proposal. Logistic regression will be used to model the probability a site was occupied, and the lognormal model will be used to model the distribution of abundance given that the site is occupied. Models provide four parameter estimates for each year ( $\delta$  = probability of occurrence,  $\mu$  = mean of the lognormal distribution,  $\sigma$  = standard deviation of the lognormal distribution, and  $E(x)$  = estimated density). Model parameter estimates will be annual plotted and compared to the long-term data set to address Objectives 1 and 3–7 of this proposal.

Additional samples (i.e. each seine haul preserved individually) were taken between 2013 and 2017 to increase the overall sample size and provide supplemental information on habitats (i.e., habitat type, habitat location, and cover type) in order to address Objective 4 and 7 of this proposal. Field sampling efforts occurred in nine habitat types (backwater [BW], cobble shoal [CS], eddy [ED], embayment [EM], pool [PO], pocketwater [PW], run [RU], sand shoal [SS], and slackwater [SW]). These habitat designations follow those used by the SJRBRIP as defined in Bliesner et al. (2008). Additionally, four categories were assigned to habitat depending on where the sample was taken. Shoreline (SH) indicates all samples taken along the land-water interface, open-water (OP) indicates samples taken away from the shoreline, and mouth (MO) or terminus (TR) indicates samples taken from those locations within a backwater or embayment.

Habitat-specific density data (i.e., providing information on habitat type, habitat location, and cover type) have only been available since 2013. These data provide information on the specific habitat features used by Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow. Habitat-specific density data are also analyzed using PROC NLMIXED (SAS, 2016), using the same methods outlined previously, to assess differences among models. A simplified list of five habitats (BW, EM, RU, LV [combining CS, PW, SS, and SW], and NZV [combining ED and PO]) is used for

the purpose of statistical analysis since several habitats shared nearly identical low velocity (LV) or near zero velocity (NZV) conditions. General linear models will be used to incorporate covariates to model  $\delta$ ,  $\mu$ , and  $\sigma$ . Covariates considered to model habitat-specific density data are year, reach, habitat type, and habitat location. Random effects models are used with the joint binomial and lognormal likelihood to provide random errors for the Site\*Year combinations. Bivariate normal errors with mean zero and covariance are assumed for each Site\*Year combination. A random error will be added to the logit of the binomial parameter  $\delta$ , and a second random error was added to the log of the  $\mu$  lognormal parameter. Adaptive Gaussian quadrature as described in Pinheiro and Bates (1995) is used to integrate out these random effects in fitting the model using the SAS NLMIXED procedure. Goodness-of-fit statistics (logLike and AIC<sub>C</sub>) are generated to assess the relative fit of data to various models. The approach used to analyze habitat data between 2013 and 2017 and scheduled for use in 2018, will be used in 2019 in order to further elucidate fish and habitat relationships and fulfill Objectives 4, 6 and 7 of this proposal.

The results in the annual report will pertain almost exclusively to age-0 fish (i.e., age-1+ are not “larval fish” and are not the focus of this effort, they are not included in analysis). The exception to this will be age-1+ augmented Colorado Pikeminnow. Capture data for all Colorado Pikeminnow is analyzed and trend data reported. The number of all other fish age-1+ collected during the study will be presented as an Appendix.

Hatching dates of Razorback Sucker larvae will be calculated by subtracting the average length of larvae at hatching (8.0 mm TL) from the total length at capture (for proto- and mesolarvae) divided by 0.3 mm (Bestgen et al. 2002), which is the average daily growth rate of wild larvae observed by Muth et al. (1998). Spawning dates for Razorback Sucker will then be calculated once hatching dates have been established using the negative exponential equation  $y=1440.3e^{-0.109x}$  (Bestgen et al. 2011) where y is the temperature dependent incubation time (in hours), e is the base of the natural logarithm, and x is the mean daily temperature on the hatching date.

Hatching dates for larval Colorado Pikeminnow will be calculated using the formula:  $A=-76.7105+17.4949(L)-1.0555(L)^2+0.0221(L)^3$  for larvae <22 mm, where A= post-hatch age in days, and L= length (mm TL). For larvae 22-47 mm TL the formula  $A=-26.6421+2.7798L$  will be used. Both hatching date formulas are taken from Nesler et al. (1998).

Spawning dates for larval Colorado Pikeminnow will be estimated by adding five days to the post-hatch ages to account for incubation time at 20 – 22 °C (Nesler et al. 1988). Hatching and spawning dates for both endangered species will then be compared with the discharge and temperature data during that period within the study area in order to fulfill Objective 2 of this proposal.

It is important to note that included in the SJRIP Fiscal Year 2018 Annual Budget and Work Plan is a study titled “*Determining daily growth rates of larval Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker in the San Juan River*” (SOW 18 27). Using proven otolith aging techniques, length-age relationships for Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker collected from the San Juan River will be determined. This study is the first of its kind that will establish growth rates for Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker that are specific to the San Juan Basin. Once completed, this study will provide the basis for all back-calculated Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker spawning and hatching dates.

This study will be initiated prior to spring runoff and completed during mid-summer (late July or early August). Daily mean discharge and temperature (mean, maximum, and minimum)

during the study period is acquired from U.S. Geological Survey Gauge (# 09379500) near Bluff, Utah and Four Corners Bridge (#09371010).

Table 4. Covariates used in mixture models for Razorback Sucker.

<b>Covariate</b>	<b>Description</b>
Year	The calendar year in which the larval survey took place.
Reach	Each of the 5 geomorphic reaches (5–1) within the study area.
Mean March, April and May temperature.	Daily mean temperature data was taken from USGS gage #09379500 near Bluff, Utah.
Mean March, April and May discharge.	Daily mean discharge data (cfs) was taken from USGS gage #09379500 near Bluff, Utah.
Annual # stocked.	The number of Razorback Sucker stocked within a calendar year. Fish stocked in a given year were used as a covariate for larval captures during the following larval survey year (i.e. 1+ overwinter periods).
Cumulative # stocked	The number of Razorback Sucker stocked during the time period between 1998 and the year prior to the larval survey year. (e.g. 5,000 fish stocked between 1998–2000 would be used as a covariate for 2001 larval capture data).
Fall monitoring captures.	All fall monitoring captures of adult Razorback Sucker. Fish collected during a given year were used as a covariate for larval captures during the following larval survey year (i.e. 1+ overwinter periods).

Table 5. Covariates used in mixture models for Colorado Pikeminnow.

<b>Covariate</b>	<b>Description</b>
Year	The calendar year in which the larval survey took place.
Reach	Each of the 5 geomorphic reaches (5–1) within the study area.
Mean June and July temperature.	Daily mean temperature data was taken from USGS gage #09379500 near Bluff, Utah.
Mean June and July discharge.	Daily mean discharge data (cfs) was taken from USGS gage #09379500 near Bluff, Utah.
Cumulative # stocked	The number of age-0 Colorado Pikeminnow stocked during the time period between 1998 and five years prior to the larval survey year. (e.g. 100,000 fish stocked in 2000 would be used as a covariate for 2005 larval capture data).
Fall monitoring captures 400+ mm TL.	All fall monitoring captures of Colorado Pikeminnow greater than 400 mm TL. Fish collected during a given year were used as a covariate for larval captures during the following larval survey year (i.e. 1+ overwinter periods).

*Reporting and Permitting:*

Beginning in 2004, data from the two San Juan River larval fish surveys (Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow) were analyzed collectively and presented in a single report. This created a whole picture of the reproductive activities of the entire ichthyofaunal community in the San Juan River using the same criterion used as the other monitoring programs. The report will be disseminated as outlined by the program office.

In addition to the annual report of the study provided to the SJRBRIP, reports summarizing fish collecting activities and specimens captured are also required annually under scientific collection permits provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. The aforementioned reports include (at a minimum) site localities, GPS coordinates, and fish collected. An annual report of activities is a BLM (Monticello Field Office) requirement under our access permit to the San Juan River below San Island (Bluff, UT) and designated camps in the lower reaches of the river. Annual Mussel-free permits will also be acquired by all trip leaders for use in Utah and Glen Canyon National Park.

*Meetings:*

Researchers are required to attend four meetings annually and report on annual monitoring projects. The two pre-set annual meetings (February and May) require researchers present PowerPoint presentations outlining the results and that years findings. Each meeting lasts about three days (which includes travel time).

*Products:*

A draft report of the 2019 larval Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow sampling activities will be prepared and distributed to the San Juan River Basin Biology Committee for review by 31 March 2020. Upon receipt of written comments, that report will be finalized and disseminated to members of the San Juan River Basin Biology Committee by 30 June 2020 in order to meet Objective 5 of this proposal. Electronic copies of the 2019 collection data will be transferred to the San Juan River database manager. Fish collected from this study will be curated in the Division of Fishes, Museum of Southwestern Biology (MSB), Department of Biology, at the University of New Mexico under a MSB contract with the SJRBRIP in order to fulfill Objective 8 of this proposal. Original field notes will be retained in the Division of Fishes and collection information electronically stored in a permanent MSB database program. These data and any maps generated from them will be available to the San Juan River Basin Biology Committee via hard-copy reports and electronically.

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## Appendix A. Response to reviewer's comments.

	21	<i>(21) RBS/CPM Larval Surveys (Combined SOW)</i>	
<b>PO</b>	<p><b><i>How can the technical aspects of this SOW be improved?</i></b>  <i>Why are efforts not consistent with the SOWs covering the upper river and downstream of the waterfall?</i></p> <p>Response: The long-term monitoring project is meant to provide the recovery program with baseline data regarding initiation, magnitude, and duration of the spawning activities of both endangered species as well as the entire ichthyofaunal community. It tracks larval fish habitat use and availability prior to spring runoff, during runoff, and into the summer base flow period. It monitors fish health through the quantification of opercular deformities in larvae. It has been used to evaluate the success of management actions such as augmentation efforts (i.e. do hatchery fish successfully establish and reproduce), high discharge events from Navajo Reservoir, and constructed habitats such as the phase I and II RERI sites. It provides the necessary numbers, and range of ontogenetic larval stages, that have been used by other SJRBRIP researchers to meet their study objectives (e.g. dietary differences among the three native suckers [KSU], opercular deformity rates within the three native suckers [ASIR], number of effective breeders [USFWS], daily larval growth rate analysis [ASIR], detailed reach study [Keller-Bliesner], occurrence of Razorback Sucker hybridization [UNM]).</p> <p>The SOW covering the upper river is meant to document the upstream distributional boundaries of Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow. Timing of sampling activities within this reach are informed by what is collected through the concurrent long-term monitoring, and efforts are made to sample during the <i>peak</i> of Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow spawning and larval occurrence.</p> <p>The SOW covering work downstream of the waterfall is also designed to sample during the time of year when the collection of larval endangered fishes is the greatest. It is a pilot study that examines spatial and temporal differences in species composition, abundance, and density with concurrent monitoring data of the section of river immediately upstream (Reach 1). The goal is to provide the recovery program with information regarding the loss of endangered fish larvae over the waterfall.</p> <p>Both of the SOW's for the upper river and the area below the waterfall are meant to supplement the long-term monitoring dataset and provide a "big picture" assessment of endangered species spawning and larval occurrence throughout the entire length of critical habitat. The aforementioned attributes and strengths of the long-term larval fish monitoring would be degraded if the amount of effort for it were consistent with work being conducted below</p>		

	<p>the waterfall and in the upper river reach.</p> <p>Thank you for taking time to review the document.</p> <p><b>What is this SOW's contribution to recovery?</b>  <i>The Program needs further discussion of the appropriate frequency and spatial extent of its monitoring efforts to best understand the target fish community. These may be important consideration in the future so more effort can be devoted to management actions that directly benefit recovery rather than monitoring populations.</i></p>
<p><b>Ross (PR)</b></p>	<p><b>How can the technical aspects of this SOW be improved?</b>  <i>Tables 1 &amp; 2. I am curious why you did not show equivalent data for Colorado Pikeminnows and Razorback Suckers. For instance, lengths, date of capture, and spawning date are given for Colorado Pikeminnow but not for Razorback Suckers.</i></p> <p>Response: These tables were generated during the early years of the study with an effort made to present them in a manner that provided the most pertinent data for each species. For example, early in the Colorado Pikeminnow study, captures of larvae were rare and the data was more of a presence/absence data set. So the table focused on data that could be gleaned from individual fish.</p> <p>Conversely, the numbers of Razorback Sucker collected increased relatively rapidly during the early years of the study and this table was intended to contrast those increasing numbers with what was being collected within the entire San Juan River. It also provided the reader with a chance to contrast overall captures of larvae with those of larval Colorado Pikeminnow by comparing the two tables.</p> <p>As the numbers of larval Colorado Pikeminnow have substantially increased in recent years, it is recognized that a new table structure that is consistent between the two species, and retains the pertinent information currently presented, is warranted for future SOW's.</p> <p><i>Overall, the technical aspects of this proposal are excellent.</i></p> <p>Thank you for reviewing the document.</p> <p><b>What is this SOW's contribution to recovery?</b>  <i>Larval fish monitoring is one of the three key monitoring programs (along with small-bodied monitoring and adult monitoring) that allow assessment of progress towards recovery. Integration of larval abundance patterns of Colorado Pikeminnows and Razorback Suckers with the two other monitoring programs is helpful in identifying possible bottlenecks to recovery.</i></p>