

## **Remote Biologist for San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program**

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### **Background**

The San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program's (SJRIP) mission is to recover the Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker while allowing water development and management activities to continue in the San Juan River Basin. In pursuit of this mission, the SJRIP funds projects under six major program elements. These elements include: management and augmentation of populations and protection of genetic integrity; protection, management, and augmentation of habitat; management of nonnative aquatic species; monitoring and evaluation of fish and habitat in support of recovery actions; program coordination and assessment of progress toward recovery; and, information and outreach. Principal investigators representing various federal and state agencies, tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations are contracted to perform tasks associated with the SJRIP's mission. Most of these entities reside outside of the basin and, as a consequence, extensive travel costs are incurred to complete this work.

Beginning in 2008, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) New Mexico Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NMFWCO) was able to fill a position that was stationed in the Farmington/Shiprock, New Mexico Area. This position focused primarily on endangered fish monitoring, nonnative fish control, and rare fish augmentation. Additionally, assistance was provided to the Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife (NNDFW) with daily operations at a selective fish passage near Fruitland, New Mexico and with daily operation/maintenance at the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry (NAPI) Razorback Sucker grow-out ponds. Since this position was located in the Four Corners Area, the incumbent was extremely knowledgeable of various access points on both the San Juan and Animas Rivers, he was available to provide reconnaissance prior to the initiation of sampling trips, and he assisted with other research projects including the shuttling of support vehicles and equipment. In addition, his location allowed for quick response times to all program participants in cases of emergency (i.e., equipment issues/loss, injury, Gold King mine spill, etc.). In January 2016 the individual filling this position retired from federal service and that position has remained vacant ever since.

As the SJRIP moves forward with on-the-ground projects, having a highly-qualified individual that is knowledgeable of the issues and surrounding area would greatly benefit the SJRIP. Efforts to hire a qualified individual began in 2017 and a selection was made in March 2018. Since this individual has yet to begin employment we are still uncertain on scope of the projects/tasks they will be asked to participate on. Therefore, similar to the FY 2018 SOW, a list of potential projects and activities this individual could participate on during FY 2019 are listed below:

- Nonnative fish removal
- Rare fish augmentation
- Daily operation of selective fish passage
- NAPI pond management and maintenance
- Maintenance of remote passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag antennas including data input
- Other activities yet to be identified
- Assistance on other program projects including: larval, small and large-bodied fish community monitoring, habitat restoration projects
- Assist researchers with shuttling of vehicles and equipment
- Operation of future larval entrainment wetland/impoundment

### **Schedule:**

#### Annually

Calcein Study	April
Support of Diet Study	June-September
Rare fish augmentation	September-October
Adult Fish Monitoring	September
Fish Passage	March-October
NAPI ponds	March-December
Remote PIT tag antennas	year-round
Other Program activities	year-round
Larval entrainment wetland	seasonally
SJRIP Meetings	February, May, November, one workshop annually

During the May 2017 Coordination Committee Meeting we were asked to modify the scope of work to include potential budget changes resulting from approval of a remote biologist position and a more detailed list of potential position responsibilities. Represented below are those responsibilities and their associated budget adjustments for those projects led by or involving the NMFWCO. This list does not include participation on other yet to be determined projects that are led by other entities:

#### *Nonnative fish management – support of diet study in FY 2019*

288 hours = (\$8,902) Savings

- The incumbent would be expected to participate on all field activities associated with this project including two tagging trips and nine nonnative fish removal trips. Each of these trips consists of five days in the field and three days for trip preparation and gear cleanup (8 days/trip x 9 hours/day x 4 trips = 256 hours). As needed, the incumbent would be responsible for routine maintenance and upkeep of sampling gear and would be asked to provide shuttling service when available.

#### *Augmentation*

120 hours = (\$3,709) savings

- The incumbent would be responsible for assisting the lead biologist with annual augmentation activities associated with Razorback Sucker and Colorado Pikeminnow. This task includes assisting in the placement and removal of block nets used for soft releases and assisting hatchery personnel with the tempering and release of all fish. Since this position will be located in the Farmington area, the incumbent would be tasked with identifying and assessing potential stocking locations to expand range and reduce potential for catastrophic loss of an entire year class at a single stocking location.

Operation of Larval Fish Entrainment Wetland/Impoundment

- Once constructed, the incumbent would be responsible for operating the water control associated with this wetland/impoundment to maximize native larval fish entrainment. Other duties would include assistance with monitoring of larval fish within the impoundment, aquatic vegetation control, and light maintenance of all water control structures and levees. Associated costs would be shared with the NAPI Ponds project.

*Sub-adult and Adult Fish Community Monitoring*

198 hours = (\$6,120)

- The incumbent would assist the USFWS' Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (GJFWCO) with annual monitoring of sub-adult and adult fishes in the San Juan River from Bloomfield, New Mexico downstream to Mexican Hat, Utah (RM 196.0-53.0) or Clay Hills Landing. This would consist of 22 days of work (17 days @ 9 hours/day – 198 hours).

**Budget at full funding level:**

<b>FY 19</b>	<b>\$76,939</b>
<b>FY20</b>	<b>\$78,093</b>
<b>FY21</b>	<b>\$79,264</b>

