

**COLORADO RIVER RECOVERY PROGRAM  
FY 2012-2013 PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK for:  
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT – NONNATIVE FISH MANAGEMENT**

**Project No.: PIP 12L**

**Lead Agency:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Program Director’s Office)

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**Date:** June 17, 2011

**Category:**

**Expected Funding**

**Source:**

- Ongoing project
- Ongoing-revised project
- Requested new project
- Unsolicited proposal

- Annual funds
- Capital funds
- Other (explain)

**I. Title of Proposal:** Communications/Public Involvement Plan for Nonnative Fish Management

**II. Background**

**Situation**

This communication plan addresses nonnative fish management. Recovery goals for the endangered fishes identify nonnative fish as a primary threat to the continued existence or reestablishment of self-sustaining endangered fish populations. The overall goal of nonnative fish management is to attain and maintain fish communities where populations of endangered and other native fish species can persist and thrive, and the recovery goals for the endangered fishes can be achieved. All actions involve research studies to identify the levels of management needed to achieve and sustain recovery.

There are more than 50 nonnative fish species in the Upper Colorado River Basin. Negative interactions with certain warmwater nonnative fish species have contributed to declines in endangered and other native fish populations. Some nonnative fish prey upon endangered and other native fishes — eating their eggs and young, and in some cases, larger fish. Nonnative fish also compete with native fish for food and space. Although smallmouth bass and northern pike

**Situation (Continued)**

appear to pose the greatest threat to endangered fish at this time, state and federal biologists are mindful of other nonnative fish species in the system (i.e., channel catfish, burbot, walleye, largemouth bass and crayfish) and are monitoring them to determine if further management actions should be proposed.

Before 2003, the Recovery Program focused most of its public involvement efforts on other program elements. Earlier experimental efforts to manage nonnative fish primarily involved removal and relocation of northern pike in the Yampa River. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources had also removed limited numbers of nonnative fish.

In 2003 and 2004, the Recovery Program expanded efforts to identify management actions to minimize or remove the threat of nonnative fishes to survival of the endangered fishes as described in the recovery goals. From late April through October, biologists worked in sections of river in Colorado and Utah to experimentally manage the targeted species. Where appropriate, biologists transferred fish from the river to local ponds and reservoirs that were publicly accessible to anglers.

Both years, the Recovery Program prepared and implemented a comprehensive communications plan to raise public awareness about the purpose of nonnative fish management. Efforts included developing informational materials and posting them on the Recovery Program's public website; informing members of Congress and other elected officials; and proactively seeking news media coverage, including inviting reporters to accompany biologists as they conducted their work. In 2003, public meetings were held in Grand Junction, Steamboat Springs and Craig, Colorado. Public meetings were not held in 2004 because the nature of the planned work did not change from the previous year. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources developed and implemented its own communication plan to support the Recovery Program's communication efforts. The plan included presentations at Regional Advisory Council meetings in Green River and Vernal, Utah.

In 2004, Recovery Program partners adopted a nonnative fish management policy that addresses the process of identifying and implementing nonnative fish management actions needed to recover the endangered fish. The policy provides a consistent message that is used as part of a strategic communications effort to gain agency and public understanding and support for these actions. Researchers continued removal efforts (channel catfish removal occurred only in Yampa Canyon.) Previous communication strategies continued with the exception of public meetings which were not held because there was no new information to convey.

In 2005, removal efforts expanded again to include additional river reaches, work crews, and removal trips. The Information and Education (I&E) Coordinator interviewed principal investigators to learn about their interactions with the public and to gain ideas on how to improve outreach efforts. Based on their feedback, it was determined that the public was beginning to

## **Situation (Continued)**

reluctantly accept the Recovery Program's actions to remove the nonnative fishes. The Recovery Program produced a bookmark-sized information piece to provide with boat permits at Dinosaur

National Monument to inform boaters about the work. This resulted in better acceptance among boaters who had previously complained about the noise from researchers' equipment.

In 2006, research efforts expanded again and channel catfish removal occurred only in Yampa Canyon. The Nonnative Fish Coordinator produced weekly trip reports to improve communication. A public meeting was held in August in Craig, Colorado, to address the public's concerns. The meeting was orderly with few members of the public in attendance.

In 2007, research efforts changed very little. Outreach efforts continued as in the past. A public meeting was held August 14, in Grand Junction. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information to anglers in the area who continue to believe that the Recovery Program is removing their preferred sportfish. Only four members of the public attended.

Research efforts were unchanged in 2008 and outreach efforts were similar to previous years. No public meetings were held.

In 2009, the Information and Education Committee determined that communication efforts regarding nonnative fish would switch to removal and management as secondary messaging. The Committee decided that information releases and talking points developed in the future would stress tangible benefits of the Recovery Program while pointing out that nonnative fish removal is necessary to achieve those benefits. The benefits include: recovery of four endangered fish species found only in the Colorado River basin; continuation of water development while recovery occurs; and the collaborative program that is a model for other endangered species recovery efforts.

In 2010, the Recovery Program began to put more emphasis on the importance of developing a long-term commitment to prevention in its Nonnative Fish Management Strategies, as well as a re-commitment to focusing control actions at the sources (spawning areas) of these problematic nonnative fish species. In addition, efforts were increased to raise awareness of the program in the Yampa River Basin through participation in three out of four water forums sponsored by the Community Agricultural Alliance.

In 2011, messaging in key messages and questions/answers changed from previous years to better reflect the emphasis on prevention. The Recovery Program issued two versions of a news release related to nonnative fish management. The Colorado version announced that smallmouth bass would not be translocated to Elkhead Reservoir due to research findings that showed many smallmouth bass placed in the reservoir in past years subsequently escaped over the spillway

### **Situation (Continued)**

during periods of high flows and reentered the Yampa River. The Colorado Division of Wildlife spoke with the manager of Elkhead State Park and other key stakeholders in advance of the news release to explain the reason for this change and the science behind it. CDOW will continue to work with the Recovery Program to shape messages and identify the need for public meetings.

The Utah version announced that projected high flows from higher than normal percentages of snowpack in the Green and Yampa River subbasins may help the endangered fishes by reducing populations of some species of nonnative fishes.

In addition to active removal, the Recovery Program continues to consider other nonnative fish management options which include: strict implementation of the Nonnative Fish Stocking Procedures, including screening pond and reservoir outlets and berming ponds to prevent nonnative fishes from escaping into the rivers; changes in state bag and possession limits in rivers; conducting research to identify the sources of nonnative fish, and addressing illegal stocking of nonnative fishes.

### **III. Study Schedule:**

Initial year: FY 2001

Final year: Ongoing

### **IV. Relationship to RIPRAP:**

VI. INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR THE ENDANGERED FISHES AND THE RECOVERY PROGRAM.

### **Mission**

To support the Recovery Program's success in recovering the endangered fishes while water development continues by promoting public understanding of the rationale and processes relative to nonnative fish management, and to promote public confidence that the Recovery Program's nonnative fish component is driven by science and is clear, open, and honest.

### **Goals**

- Educate target audiences about the endangered fishes and the threats to their survival, including nonnative fishes.
- Maintain positive relationships with communities in the affected river basins.

### **Goals (Continued)**

- Increase understanding of the management actions the Recovery Program is taking to reduce the threats to endangered fishes from nonnative fishes.
- Improve communication among agencies conducting nonnative fish management actions.

Ensure that all participating agencies use the same message to convey the purpose of their actions related to nonnative fish management.

- Promote sport fisheries that are compatible with the preservation of native aquatic communities and the recovery and perpetuation of endangered fishes.

### **Target Audiences**

- Landowners Adjacent to Rivers where Work Occurs
- News Media
- General Public
- Anglers
- Local Sportfishing Groups
- Rafting and Fishing Guides
- Elected Officials at All Levels
- Agency Line Staff and Volunteers
- Recovery Program Partners

### **V. Strategies/Dates:**

To achieve success, it is imperative that this plan be considered “a work in progress,” with the flexibility to update as necessary.

#### **1. COORDINATE RECOVERY PROGRAM COMMUNICATION WITH AGENCIES THAT CONDUCT NONNATIVE FISH MANAGEMENT ACTIONS.**

The magnitude of this communication plan requires clear planning and direction from those with the authority and responsibility to implement recovery actions. In FY 12-13, Recovery Program staff will continue to work with I&E Committee members to conduct agency review of outreach materials prior to their distribution and receive agency feedback. I&E Committee members will also communicate with their respective field level personnel to gauge public and landowner reaction to ongoing work and alert Recovery Program staff to issues that need to be addressed.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Program Director’s Office; I&E Committee

**COMPLETION DATE:** Ongoing

**Strategies/Dates (Continued):**

2. **PROMOTE KEY MESSAGES AND NONNATIVE FISH MANAGEMENT POLICY.** Update key messages to ensure accuracy and reflect tangible benefits to the Recovery Program. Messages explain the purpose and goals of the Nonnative Fish Management program element and stress program benefits. Messages are to be used by all Recovery Program partners and participating agencies. Approved messages help ensure that all agencies involved with nonnative fish management projects convey the same information to those with whom they come in contact.  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** Program Director's Staff, I&E Committee, Participating agencies  
**COMPLETION DATE:** Message review: April  
Use key messages: ongoing
3. **MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, STATE AND LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS AND THEIR STAFFS.** Distribute news releases and other outreach materials. Proactively notify affected officials or staff by phone or in person if a significant issue arises in their district so they are not caught off guard by constituent comments. Offer briefings as needed to elected officials, with emphasis on local and state legislators, district/state Congressional staff, county commissioners and local sheriffs. Briefing teams will vary depending on state/jurisdiction and nature of inquiry.  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** I&E Coordinator/Committee  
**COMPLETION DATE:** March/April to distribute news releases/other information; other communication ongoing as needed
4. **NEWS MEDIA.** Prepare and distribute advance and follow-up news releases to media, members of Congress, and Recovery Program partners. Call or visit key reporters to make sure they understand the issue and the work plans. Identify and seek support of a local organization(s) to issue releases or provide supportive statements. Invite reporters to accompany biologists as they conduct their work.  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** I&E Coordinator/Committee  
**COMPLETION DATE:** March/April to distribute news releases and contact key reporters; ongoing communication with press as needed
5. **LANDOWNER CONTACTS.** Identify and seek permission from landowners to access their property as part of recovery actions.  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** Principal investigators  
**COMPLETION DATE:** March

### Strategies/Dates (Continued):

6. **PUBLIC MEETINGS.** The Recovery Program will work with the States of Colorado and Utah each year to determine whether Recovery Program presence is necessary at public meetings which could include angler roundtables, wildlife commission and regional advisory council meetings.  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** Appropriate agency contacts/I&E and Nonnative Fish Coordinators  
**COMPLETION DATE:** As needed
7. **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION.** Post news releases and questions/answers to Recovery Program and agency websites.  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** I&E Coordinator and Agencies  
**COMPLETION DATE:** As soon as materials are developed. Update as needed.
8. **DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT BOAT PERMITS.** Work with NPS to prepare and distribute appropriate materials that explain this project to include with boat permit distribution.  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** I&E Coordinator  
**COMPLETION DATE:** December
9. **AGENCY PUBLICATIONS.** Publish an article(s) about this work in publications produced by participating agencies and/or Recovery Program partners. Encourage agency publications to review submissions to their media to ensure that published articles are consistent with recovery program messages, goals, management plans, and agreements.  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** I&E Coordinator/Committee  
**COMPLETION DATE:** Ongoing
10. **SIGNAGE.** Work with state and federal agencies to produce and install signs as needed at key locations to inform anglers and others about nonnative fish management actions.  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** I&E Coordinator  
**COMPLETION DATE:** Ongoing

### Evaluation

- Document print and broadcast news media placements.
- Document the number of angler roundtables and/or public meetings held, including attendance numbers and general attitude of those who attend.
- Have project leader/supervisor ask work crews/volunteers for feedback on the questions/comments they received from people they met while conducting the work.
- Document the number of articles published in agency/partner publications.

- Prepare an annual report to Recovery Program committees.

#### IV. Budget

The I&E Coordinator’s salary and travel expenses are covered in the Program Director’s budget.

	<u>FY 2012</u>	<u>FY 2013</u>
Paid advertisements to announce public meetings	\$3,000	\$3,000
Production costs for educational materials**	<u>\$2,000</u>	<u>\$2,000</u>
TOTAL	\$5,000	\$5,000

\*\*Educational materials:

1. Bookmark-size information card to be distributed to boaters. Black and white, two sides, card stock. Quantity: 3,000. Estimated cost: \$100
2. Informational signs (24 X 36, four-color, durable outdoor material, with bases)  
Quantity: 4 @ \$475 = \$1,900)