

RECOVERY PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S UPDATE
April 1999

Population Status: Little change in population status.

SPECIES	RIVER		
	GREEN	YAMPA	COLORADO
Colorado pikeminnow	Stable/increasing	Stable	Stable/increasing
Humpback chub	Stable/small	Stable?/small	Stable/doing well
Razorback sucker	<500 adults, very limited recruitment	Few adults, very limited recruitment	Few adults, no recruitment
Bonytail	Rare ---- all rivers		

Recovery goals: The Program has approved interim management objectives (target numbers of each species for the various river reaches). The Service has asked the Recovery Team to use the interim management objectives to draft specific recovery goals for the Upper Basin.

I. Instream Flow Identification and Protection

Goal: To protect sufficient instream flows to support self-sustaining populations of the fishes.

- Status:
- Over the past year, the Service, Reclamation, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board continued to work on delivery of water to the 15-Mile Reach of the Colorado River: 21,650 plus 10,000 acre-feet of water from Ruedi Reservoir and 6,000 acre-feet of water from Wolford Mountain Reservoir.
 - Peer review of the draft report for the Yampa River Low Flow Study is completed, and a revised draft based on reviewer comments was submitted to the Biology Committee for their review and approval at the February 1999 meeting. Comments from the Biology Committee are being addressed, and the report will again be submitted for approval at the March 30-31, 1999, Biology Committee meeting. Work on the Yampa River Management Plan continues; modeling is being done to assess the need for low-flow augmentation.

- Work has started on the Colorado River Coordinated Facilities Study to look at water facilities in the basin and options for managing the facilities to provide additional water for endangered fish recovery. A consultant has been selected, and organizational meetings have begun.
- Peer review of the synthesis report to be used in preparing a new biological opinion on Flaming Gorge operations is completed (8 of 9 peer reviewers responded), and the report is being revised by the Flaming Gorge Technical Integration Team. A revised draft will be submitted to the Biology Committee for their review and approval by April 1999.
- A draft of the Aspinall synthesis report is scheduled for completion by the end of April 1999 and will be circulated for internal review by the cooperating researchers.
- Biological data collected in 1998 under the study to assess and refine instream flow needs of fishes in the Duchesne River resulted in a better understanding of the distribution, relative abundance, and habitat use of native and nonnative fishes; work continues in 1999. Work on a model that will be used to identify possible coordinated operations of Duchesne River reservoirs to provide additional water for the endangered fishes has started; initial results indicate that more time and effort than initially anticipated will be required to complete this task.

Section 7 Consultation

Goal: To allow water development to proceed in the Upper Colorado River Basin in compliance with the ESA.

- Status:
- The draft biological opinion for the 15-Mile Reach on historic and new depletions was released on March 5, 1999. Copies of the draft opinion were made available to the Management Committee. Comments on the draft biological opinion are due in April. The next meeting of the 15-Mile Reach workgroup is May 13, 1999. A date for finalizing the biological opinion will be determined at that meeting.
 - The draft biological opinion for the High Savery project on the Little Snake River in Wyoming was released December 30, 1998.
 - From 1988 through the end of 1998, the Service consulted on 204 projects with a potential to deplete a total of 585,191 af in the Upper Colorado River Basin, of which 59 are historic depleting 462,055 af. Three of these "projects" are blanket consultations for depletions under 100 af, up to 6,000 af total. These consultations have covered 307 actual projects depleting a total of 4,798 af. (see Section 7 consultation list).

- The CWCB agreed to the contract for an additional 21,650 acre-feet of water from Ruedi reservoir this year. The amendment to the biological opinion was issued on January 6, allowing the Round II contracts to go forward.

II. Habitat Restoration

Goal: To provide or enhance habitat for the rare fishes through habitat development or management measures such as:

- fish passageways
- restoration of flooded bottomland habitats.

Status: • The fish ladder at Redlands Diversion Dam on the Gunnison River has been operational since June 1996. The ladder has been used primarily by native fishes, including 42 Colorado pikeminnow. Two of the pikeminnow have used the ladder twice. Native fishes that were marked and released above the dam dispersed upstream, some as far as 57 river miles to the base of the Hartland Diversion Dam.

- A fish passage structure was constructed at the Grand Valley Irrigation Company Diversion Dam on the Colorado River in January 1998. Ten adult Colorado pikeminnow were captured above the GVIC dam between 19 August and 24 September 1998. It is unknown whether these fish used the fish passage structure or swam over the dam during high spring flows. Providing fish passage at this structure, Price-Stubb, and the Grand Valley Project Diversion Dam will restore 55 miles of historically-occupied habitat for endangered fishes.
- Design options have been developed for restoring fish passage at the Price-Stubb Diversion Dam. Construction was tentatively scheduled to begin in the fall of 1998. However, complex issues (e.g., potential effects of passage restoration on railroad, highway, Reclamation's siphon, and Ute pumping; ownership of property and FERC license) have caused delays. Construction is now expected prior to runoff in FY 00.
- Pre-construction activities are on-going through FY 99 to restore fish passage at the Grand Valley Project Diversion Dam. Construction is scheduled to begin during FY 2000.
- Between March 1997 and March 1998, levees were breached at 8 sites along the Green River, resulting in 1216 to 1734 floodable acres (depending on flows), and filling out the 8-site block design recommended by the Levee Removal Evaluation Group and subsequently approved by the Biology and Management committees. A report based on preliminary results of data collected from 1996 through 1998 was submitted to the Recovery Program in December 1998.

- Both public and private lands continue to be screened for contaminants and relative floodability (pre-acquisition; pre- and post-restoration). Land acquisition activities have resulted in acquisition of 8 properties (580 acres) along the Green and Colorado rivers thus far.

III. Nonnative Fishes and Sportfishing

Goal: Minimize the impacts of nonnative fishes and incidental take associated with sport fishing on the endangered fishes.

- Status:
- Successful incorporation of the final Nonnative Stocking Procedures into Colorado's stocking regulations (January 1999).
 - Mechanical removal of channel catfish from the Ouray and Gray Canyon reaches of the Green River, Utah, continued in 1998 and will continue in 1999. Data from 1998 are still being analyzed.
 - Mechanical removal of nonnative cyprinids from backwater nursery areas used by native fishes in reaches of the Green and lower Colorado (Utah) rivers was started in 1998 and is scheduled to continue through 2001. In 1998, a total of 36,080 nonnative cyprinids (1,139 other nonnatives) was removed from backwaters of the Green River, and a total of 16,498 nonnative cyprinids (763 other nonnatives) was removed from backwaters of the lower Colorado River.
 - The project to mechanically remove small nonnative cyprinids and centrarchids from backwaters on the Colorado and Gunnison rivers, Colorado, was not initiated as planned in 1998 due to funding problems between the Recovery Program and state budget processes. These problems have been solved, and the project will be initiated in 1999.
 - Mechanical removal of channel catfish from reaches in Yampa Canyon on the Yampa River was initiated in 1998 and will continue in 1999. In 1998, a total of 1,346 channel catfish was collected.
 - The study to evaluate the precision and accuracy of ISMP backwater sampling on the Colorado River (Grand Valley) in terms of its ability to collect and assess the relative abundance of nonnative fishes continued in 1998 and will continue in 1999. Results of the study will be used to guide decisions regarding sport fish management and control of nonnative fishes in the Colorado River and its floodplain in the Grand Valley.
 - The project to assess removal and translocation of northern pike from the Yampa River to ponds in the Yampa Valley was initiated in 1998. Translocations are planned in 1999 after CDOW identifies suitable private or public ponds, lakes, and reservoirs to receive these fish.

IV. Stocking Native Fishes

- Goal:
- Produce a sufficient supply of hatchery reared fish to support research and recovery activities.
 - Conserve the genetic diversity present in the wild.
- Status:
- The Program approved the 5-year stocking plan for razorback sucker, Colorado pikeminnow, bonytail and humpback chub in the Yampa and upper Colorado rivers developed by Colorado Division of Wildlife.
 - During the fall of 1998, 375 razorback suckers ranging in size from 4-19 inches were stocked in the Gunnison River. To date the Program has stocked 4,938 juvenile, subadult and adult since 1995. Thirty-eight of these stocked fish have been re-captured.
 - During the fall of 1998, 389 razorback sucker averaging about 16 inches were stocked into the middle Green River. In addition, 125, 10-inch razorbacks were stocked into the Stirrup, a depressed wetland where the fish can overwinter.
 - In October 1998, 2,484 and 3,796 bonytail (about 5 inches in length) were stocked in the Colorado and Green rivers, respectively.
 - Construction of 12, 0.4 acre ponds at the Wahweap State Fish Hatchery will be completed this summer.
 - Expansion of the 24 Road Hatchery Building in Grand Junction, CO, will be completed this summer. This building will be used to hatch and raise early life stages of Colorado pikeminnow.

V. Research, Monitoring, and Data Management

- Goal: To support recovery activity, monitor endangered fish status and trends, and maintain Recovery Program data archives.
- Status:
- The humpback chub population in Black rocks canyon was estimated to be around 1,528 with 888 to 2750 representing the 95% confidence range. Estimates for other populations of humpback chub are being made.

Comparison between 1994 and preliminary data of 1998 from the Colorado pikeminnow population estimates in the Colorado River suggests about a 40% increase in catch rate and 33% increase in number of adult fish.

VI. Public Involvement, Information, and Education

Goal: To promote public understanding, appreciation, and support for efforts to recover the endangered fish.

- Status:
- The Program's Information and Education Coordinator resigned in November 1998. The Program Director's office is in the process of hiring a new coordinator (the job announcement closed on March 8) and hopes to have someone on board by May 1999.
 - The Information and Education Committee recently prepared a "white paper" identifying: 1) issues and concerns related to the Program's public involvement efforts; 2) recommendations for discussion and consideration by the Management Committee; and 3) an action plan for activities the Committee will implement as a result of their assessment and planning process. Key recommendations in the white paper include: integrating public involvement planning into the Program's decision-making process, improving our capacity for effective public involvement, and improving internal communication, all of which call for a more active role for the Information and Education Coordinator. The Management Committee was pleased to hear these recommendations at their recent meeting, and agreed to discuss them in more detail at their next meeting (May 12).
 - The Recovery Program Web site (web address <http://www.r6.fws.gov/coloradriver>) continues to serve the Program well and is updated on an as-needed basis. The site contains excellent place for the general public to find descriptions of the Program's purpose and activities, and it has more than 60 photos of endangered fish, research activities, hatchery facilities and scenic river shots.
 - The most recent issue of the Program's newsletter was distributed in November 1998. This issue featured articles on bonytail stocking, coordinated reservoir operations, Grand Valley Irrigation Company fish passage, floodplain restoration, and the Ouray National Fish Hatchery.

VII. Program Management

Goal: To ensure effective implementation and coordination of the Recovery Program

- Status:
- The funding authorization legislation for Colorado River and San Juan Recovery Programs is anticipated to be introduced in the House by Representative Hansen and in the Senate by Senator Allard (R-Colorado). Several Program participants went to Washington D.C. in late March and visited the Congressional delegation and representatives of the Service, Reclamation, and the Secretary of the Interior. *Henry Maddux and Dan McAuliffe will brief the Committee on the status of the long-term funding legislation. The Committee will discuss how to proceed with passage during*

the current session of Congress.

- Extending the Recovery Program beyond 2003 - Program participants have been discussing how best to do this over the past year. With regards to Program participants providing annual funding after 2003, Wyoming is willing to sign an extension saying they'll provide the necessary in-kind contributions for their full participation in the Program, but they're not willing to sign one that says they'll contribute a set dollar amount each year. The Management Committee may need to develop a process to resolve differences on this issue. *The Committee will discuss the issues surrounding how to extend the Recovery Program beyond the 2003 date in the current Cooperative Agreement.*
- Program participants will travel to Washington, D.C, April 21-28 to brief Congressional representatives (as well as Department of Interior personnel and environmental groups) on progress in the Program and inform them of the Program's FY 2000 budget requests.
- The FY 99 Work Plan was approved by the Implementation Committee on September 10, and implementation has been underway since that time. Funding transfer agreements, which fell behind schedule last year, were initiated and completed on time this year.
- Service Section 6 Funding : The allocation of Section 6 funds to the Mountain Prairie region of the Fish and Wildlife Service continues to shrink. The Service would like to re-evaluate their annual commitment \$200,000 in Section 6 funds to the Program when the Program gets long-term funding. *Ralph Morgenweck will discuss his concerns about the impact of the \$200,000 commitment on other Regional endangered species priorities.*
- The Program participants' web site has been up and running since December. This password-protected site has much more detailed information than the general Program web site. Contents include: upcoming meeting dates and times; meeting agendas and summaries; a bibliography of the Program library; the RIPRAP; and numerous other Program documents. This site is a key part of the Program's electronic communications and is continuously being updated and expanded. The Program Director's office also is working on developing a comprehensive, web-based tracking system for program activities including research, Recovery Action Plan items, final reports, etc.