Ryden named researcher of the year

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist Dale Ryden has spent countless hours navigating rivers and lakes in the San Juan and Upper Colorado river basins during the past two decades. A foremost expert on river habitat and fish populations, he has a rare knowledge of how endangered fishes behave throughout their life cycles.

Ryden has stocked and monitored thousands of endangered fishes and identified their habitat preferences and spawning areas. He has also conducted and studied nonnative fish removal activities and their effects on endangered fish populations.

"Dale's 20 years of experience on the San Juan River makes him one of the most knowledgeable and respected members of our Biology Committee," said Dave Campbell, program director for the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program, who co-presented the award. "He brings a wealth of knowledge and experience that can only be gained from spending decades working on the river."

Ryden originally pursued a career as a history professor at Mesa State College in Grand Junction.

"Somehow, I got hooked on biology and before I knew it, I had switched my major," he said.

Ryden earned his bachelor's degree in biology at Mesa State and pursued graduate studies at California State University–Fresno and Moss Landing Marine Laboratories. Early in his career, he worked for the California Department of Fish and Game on mitigation issues for endangered species such as the San Joaquin kit fox and blunt-nosed leopard lizard.

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

DALE RYDEN HOLDS AN ENDANGERED RAZORBACK SUCKER RAISED AT THE OURAY NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY GRAND VALLEY UNIT.

Ryden later returned to Grand Junction, Colo., where he earned his reputation as a leading researcher for endangered fishes. He currently oversees endangered fish recovery projects for Colorado River Fishery Project offices in Grand Junction and in Vernal, Utah.

He has published two journal articles about his work in the San Juan River Basin and has authored numerous research publications. He also made contributions to the flow recommendations report for the reoperation of Navajo Dam and the San Juan Program's long-term monitoring protocols.

"Dale's history and experience with the San Juan River is invaluable to folks who have not worked with the endangered fishes that long," said Mark McKinstry, a program manager and biologist with the Bureau of Reclamation in Salt Lake City, who joined with Campbell to co-present the award. "Dale carries on his ambitions as a history teacher with his vast knowledge of the San Juan River fishes and his willingness to share that knowledge with new biologists. It's important to have that kind of continuity in long-term programs."

Ryden would be the first to say how fortunate he is to work with endangered fishes and all of the people involved with their recovery.

"I've been blessed to be able to work with so many brilliant and inspirational people throughout my career," he said. "Both recovery programs are populated with amazing researchers who have dedicated their careers to trying to achieve the recovery of these rare and historic fishes. To be recognized by my peers, whom I believe are all as worthy (and probably more so) as myself, is truly a great honor."