UPPER COLORADO RIVER ENDANGERED FISH RECOVERY PROGRAM
DIRECTIVE OF THE
RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE REGARDING
NONNATIVE FISH MANAGEMENT IN THE YAMPA RIVER BASIN

On February 2, 2004, the Implementation Committee of the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) adopted a *Nonnative Fish Management Policy*. The purpose of this policy is to: (1) recognize the serious threat posed by nonnative fishes to the continued existence and recovery of the endangered humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow, and razorback sucker in the Upper Colorado River Basin; and (2) facilitate implementation of actions by the Recovery Program and its participants to adaptively manage nonnative fish populations. The policy states: *"The overall goal of nonnative fish management is to attain and maintain fish communities where populations of the endangered and other native fish species can persist and thrive, and the recovery goals for the endangered fishes can be achieved".*

The Management Plan for Endangered Fishes in the Yampa River Basin (Yampa Plan) was initiated in January 2005 through a cooperative agreement signed by the Colorado River Water Conservation District, States of Colorado and Wyoming, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Yampa Plan (and accompanying environmental assessment) describes anticipated human water needs during the next 40 years and prescribes measures to minimize adverse impacts to the four endangered fishes due to current and projected future water depletions from the Yampa River and its tributaries. Primary among those prescribed measures are: (1) 12,000 acre-foot enlargement of Elkhead Reservoir to provide up to 7,000 acre-feet of water for augmentation of July-February base flows in the Yampa River to support populations of the endangered fishes; and (2) continue and expand ongoing management actions to control populations of predatory and competitive nonnative fish species, considered to pose a significant threat to endangered and other native fishes.

Nonnative fish management actions implemented by the Recovery Program are recommended by the Biology Committee based on review of data and input from the principal investigators. Actions under the Yampa Plan have been underway for 2 years and similar, but smaller-scale efforts (focused mainly on nonnative northern pike) were underway for several years before the Yampa Plan was initiated. During this time, native fish have declined precipitously in abundance while the abundance of certain nonnative fish species (especially smallmouth bass) has dramatically increased in some river reaches.

It is the consensus of the Recovery Program's Implementation Committee that effective implementation of the Yampa Plan requires: (1) thorough assessment of current efforts to control problematic nonnative fish species in the Yampa River; and (2) development of a stronger adaptive-management framework to identify nonnative fish management actions of sufficient scale and intensity to achieve measurable success criteria based on fish population responses over the shortest plausible timeframe. This decision is consistent

with the 2004 Nonnative Fish Management Policy, which states: *"Management of nonnative fish species will initially follow an experimental approach to develop effective strategies and identify the levels of management necessary to minimize or remove threats to the endangered fishes. An annual assessment of data will determine future nonnative fish management strategies, including possible changes to the list of target nonnative fish species, geographic scope of management areas, and methods employed. However, this adaptive process should not unduly delay timely and effective actions to minimize or remove the nonnative threat to the endangered fishes".*

The Implementation Committee agrees that the approach to nonnative control on the Yampa and elsewhere should be highly proactive and similar to capital projects, i.e., substantial and expensive action is taken based on hypotheses that native fish will benefit from these projects and then the projects are adjusted if the benefits are not realized. The Implementation Committee therefore directs that this approach be followed by the Program Office in preparing for the following steps to be taken at the Recovery Program's December 2006 Nonnative Fish Management Workshop and be followed by the Biology Committee in completing these steps at that Workshop:

1. Develop a Nonnative Control Strategy Document including a set of nonnative control actions for the Yampa River of sufficient scale and intensity that can achieve specific quantitative goals over the shortest plausible timeframe (as an example only, a small-bodied native fish population of X% in low velocity habitat within Y years).

2. Assess these measures against the current strategies for nonnative control in the Yampa Plan and the Plan's likelihood of achieving the quantitative goals.

3. Based on the assessment, recommend adjustments to the current strategies, even if the effectiveness of those adjustments may be unproven.

4. Establish a timeframe for implementing the adjustments and a progress reporting schedule through the Program's committee process.

5. Evaluate the effectiveness of control actions, and refine and update the Nonnative Control Strategy and control actions at the annual nonnative fish management workshops.

These actions, in concert with (1) ongoing Recovery Program planning, (2) completion and application of the Research Framework[1], and (3) revision of the recovery goals, will continue to improve the effectiveness of recovery actions over time, help prioritize the allocation of Recovery Program resources, and expedite recovery of the endangered fishes.

[1] The Research Framework project is evaluating the effectiveness of Recovery Program activities in addressing threats to the endangered fishes and examining how environmental correlates affect dynamics of fish populations. Although completion of Phase 1 of this project is behind schedule, a status report with a plan to get it back on track will be presented at the October 3, 2006, Biology Committee meeting.

Approved by the Recovery Implementation Committee, October 6, 2006.

10/13/06

J. Mitch King, Chair — Date