



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

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Nonnative Fish Management Key Messages -- 2009

- 1. The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program seeks to recover four species of endangered fishes while water development proceeds.** Established in 1988, the Recovery Program is a voluntary, cooperative program involving state and federal agencies, environmental groups and water and power user organizations in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. Its purpose is to reestablish and maintain self-sustaining populations of the endangered humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow, and razorback sucker in the Upper Colorado River Basin while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts.
- 2. Recovery goals identify nonnative fishes in the Colorado River system as one of the major threats to the endangered fishes.** As the Department of the Interior agency responsible for administering the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has prepared recovery goals that identify site specific management actions to minimize or remove threats and specify the numbers of endangered fish required for self-sustaining populations. Included are activities to minimize impacts from nonnative fishes. Downlisting of the fishes from “endangered” to “threatened” and removing the species from Endangered Species Act protection (delisting) will be considered once the necessary management actions are achieved and the fish populations have met recovery goal criteria.
- 3. Recovery Program partners, including the states of Colorado and Utah, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are working together to manage nonnative fishes.** State and federal governments have dual responsibilities to manage both native and sportfish. In 2004, Recovery Program partners adopted a Nonnative Fish Management policy which formalizes an agreement to manage nonnative fishes in the Upper Colorado River Basin.
- 4. Smallmouth bass, northern pike, and channel catfish are the nonnative fish species of primary concern.** These species share the same habitats as endangered fish and are known to compete for food and to prey on young native fish. Since 2003, researchers have documented a significant increase in the numbers of smallmouth bass in the Colorado, Green, and Yampa rivers in Colorado and Utah. The Recovery Program is working closely with its partners to identify how these fish entered the system and to determine effective management actions to reduce their threat to endangered and other native fish. In 2009, the Recovery Program will conduct research to determine if other nonnative fish species of concern -- white sucker and common carp -- can be effectively reduced in a portion of the Yampa River.

Key Messages (continued)

5. The Recovery Program is conducting nonnative fish management to determine if populations of targeted nonnative fishes can be reduced to a level that will enable the endangered and other native fishes to coexist and thrive. Since 2000, biologists have transferred northern pike from the Yampa River to area fishing ponds as part of a study to determine if reducing the abundance of this top predator species would result in a positive response by native and endangered fishes. Northern pike are also being removed from the Green River in Utah. In 2003, biologists noticed a significant increase in abundance and distribution of smallmouth bass in portions of the Yampa, Colorado and Green rivers in the states of Colorado and Utah. As a result, smallmouth bass have been targeted for removal since 2004.

Currently, smallmouth bass and northern pike are considered to be the greatest immediate threat and most removal research and management actions focus on these two species. Continued sampling will determine if management efforts have reduced the numbers of targeted nonnative fishes in sections where they were removed. Monitoring of endangered and other native fishes will determine if Recovery Program activities, which include nonnative fish management, result in increased numbers of endangered fishes. This information will help identify the level of management needed to minimize the threat of nonnative fishes to the endangered fishes to satisfy criteria necessary to recover these species. An annual assessment of data will determine future nonnative fish management actions.

6. Nonnative fish management strives to reduce impacts on sportfishing. Efforts are being made to implement management actions that will lessen the impact on sportfishing opportunities. In locations where nonnative fishes will be removed in the state of Colorado, efforts will be made wherever practical to relocate these fish to local ponds and reservoirs that are publicly accessible to anglers. In the state of Utah, all removed fish will be euthanized to prevent transfer of fish diseases.

7. Nonnative fish management is expected to benefit all native fish species. Nonnative fish management may also benefit other native fish species such as the roundtail chub, bluehead sucker, flannelmouth sucker and speckled dace. Rapidly increasing numbers of nonnative fish currently dominate the Upper Colorado River system resulting in a decline of the native species. By working proactively to maintain balance in the river system, it is hoped that these native fish species will continue to thrive and not require state or federal protection as threatened or endangered.

8. Nonnative fish management is one of many recovery actions that enables use and development of water from the Upper Colorado River Basin to proceed in compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Since 1988, recovery actions implemented by the Recovery Program have provided ESA compliance for 1,675 water projects depleting approximately 2.3 million acre-feet of water in the Upper Basin. Implementation of nonnative fish management actions is important because it is one of the measures the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service uses to determine if progress toward recovery of the endangered fish is sufficient to allow the Recovery Program to continue to provide ESA compliance for water development and use (including hydropower).

9. Nonnative fish management is only one piece of the recovery puzzle. Recovery efforts are also underway to provide river flows, restore habitat, construct fish passages and screens, produce and stock endangered fish and monitor results. Numerous studies and activities are being conducted on rivers in the Upper Basin.

Key Messages (continued)

10. More information:

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