



News Release

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Two Fishes Considered for Endangered Species Protection -One Warranted, One Not Warranted-

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has found that protection under the Endangered Species Act for the headwater chub is justified but precluded by higher priority listing actions. The Service also considered the Lower Colorado River basin population of the roundtail chub and determined it does not warrant further consideration at this time since its population was not discernible from that of the upper basin. Today's finding is the result of the Center for Biological Diversity's 2003 petition to protect the chubs under the Act.

The headwater chub will be added to the candidate species list, prioritized and its status will be monitored annually.

"The headwater chub warrants protection, however, we'll have to defer to other species experiencing even greater threats," said Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, the Service's acting Southwest Regional Director. "Being placed on our candidate list puts this fish on everyone's radar screen and focuses conservation efforts. The fish doesn't need emergency room measures but it does need care."

The headwater chub is threatened primarily by predation and competition with nonnative fishes, and also habitat destruction due to dewatering, impoundment, channelization, and channel changes caused by alteration of riparian vegetation and watershed degradation from mining, livestock overgrazing, roads, water pollution, urban and suburban development and groundwater pumping.

The State of New Mexico lists the roundtail chub as endangered under its Wildlife Conservation Act and is seeking to add the headwater chub to its list as well. The Colorado River basin states signed a conservation agreement for three fish species in 2004 that includes the roundtail chub. This precipitated the Arizona and New Mexico game and fish departments to create statewide conservation efforts. Arizona has developed a draft agreement and strategy for several native fish species, including the roundtail and headwater chub, which is broadly supported by state and Federal cooperators.

"We're very encouraged by the state-led efforts to conserve these and other native fishes," said Dr. Tuggle. "We will continue to assist with and evaluate these efforts as we monitor the status of this candidate species."

The headwater chub (*Gila nigra*) grows to about 8 inches, is dark gray to brown with silvery sides and lives in the upper and middle reaches of moderately sized streams. Headwater chub occurred in a number of tributaries of the Verde River, most of the Tonto Creek drainage, much of the San Carlos River drainage, and parts of the upper Gila River in New Mexico. Today, they occur in the same areas, but have a smaller distribution.

The 9- to 14-inch roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*) is an olive-gray to silver minnow with a lighter belly. The species was historically considered common in deep pools and eddies of large streams throughout its range in the upper and lower Colorado River basins in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona.

The 2003 petition singles out the lower basin – Arizona and New Mexico – population for protection as a Distinct Population Segment under the Act. “After review of all available scientific and commercial information, we found that the roundtail chub in the Lower Colorado River basin is not discernable from the upper basin population,” said Tuggle. “It therefore doesn’t qualify as a Distinct Population Segment under the Endangered Species Act and policies.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies. Visit the Service’s website at <http://www.fws.gov>.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Photographs of the chubs are available by contacting Jeff Humphrey (602-242-0210 or jeff_humphrey@fws.gov) or at <http://www.fws.gov/arizonaes/>.