



Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office Death Valley National Park



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Contact: Jeannie Stafford (FWS)
775-861-6336
Terry Baldino (NPS)
760-786-3279

Federal, State Resource Managers Act to Recover Rare Devil's Hole Pupfish

A panel of scientists and senior managers from federal and state conservation agencies are hopeful that a course of action developed last week in Las Vegas will reverse the decline of one of the most imperiled desert fish species in North America, the Devils Hole pupfish.

Native only to Nevada, the Devil's Hole pupfish, (*Cyprinodon diabolis*) has been on the federal list of endangered species since 1967. As of April 2006, only 67 pupfish were known to exist: 38 at Devils Hole at Death Valley National Park, and 29 at a refugia (concrete pool) near Hoover Dam. In May, resource managers established new propagation sites at the Fish and Wildlife Service's Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery in Arizona, and Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas.

Regional managers and biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and the Nevada Department of Wildlife used a formal, structured decision making process to evaluate risks and benefits of numerous management options presented by scientists. Based on options presented, the agency managers approved implementation of a number of actions intended to stabilize and recover the pupfish. The actions include:

--Consolidating all but two male pupfish that currently exist outside of Devil's Hole at Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery where biologists will work to propagate and rear the pupfish.

--Leave two male pupfish at Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay where biologists will use experimental reproduction techniques with hybridized female pupfish to develop pupfish that genetically resemble pure Devil's Hole pupfish.

--Tasking local resource managers and scientists with completing a comprehensive species management strategy that includes a propagation plan and genetics plan. Plans will include short and long term recommendations based on pupfish population levels at Devil's Hole and the success of propagation efforts at Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery.

Bob Williams, field supervisor at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office said agency biologists will continue to work collaboratively with scientists and other agencies using the resources and expertise available to manage the

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conservation of the pupfish. "Reversing the decline of the pupfish is difficult and compounded by the low numbers of reproducing adults, their short lifespan and the difficulty of propagating

them in captivity,” Williams said. “It’s incumbent upon us to make every effort possible to maintain this species.”

Since the April survey, scientists and agency biologists have taken several actions to recover the pupfish. An emphasis was placed on trying to understand how to propagate this pupfish in aquaria. In May, two pure male pupfish were moved from Devils Hole to Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay, and two females were moved from the Hoover Dam refuge after transfer and propagation protocols were established using hybridized pupfish. Although the fish did spawn, the eggs were not viable.

In July and August, two additional males and one female were transferred to Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay from Hoover Dam refuge. This month, all adult pupfish were removed from the Hoover Dam refuge after it became infested with invasive snails. The adults were moved to Mandalay Bay, Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery and a temporary holding facility near Hoover Dam Refuge.

Dr. Arcadio Valdes, a pupfish expert from *Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon*, Monterrey, Mexico, arrived in early August to assist in propagating pupfish at Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery. Dr. Valdes was successful in hatching Devils Hole pupfish in aquaria and is currently working with the Hatchery staff to develop the techniques that allow the larvae to mature into juvenile and adult pupfish.

All hybridized Devils Hole pupfish have been moved from Point of Rocks refuge and taken to Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery and Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay where they continue to successfully propagate.

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, 63 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.

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