

Grand Junction *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office*

Interior Region 7



Photo by Mike Gross USFWS

Grand Junction FWCO biologists electrofishing the banks of the Colorado River at Palisade, Colorado, below Price Stubb Diversion Dam, while conducting Colorado Pikeminnow population estimates. May 19, 2020

Highlights - May 2020

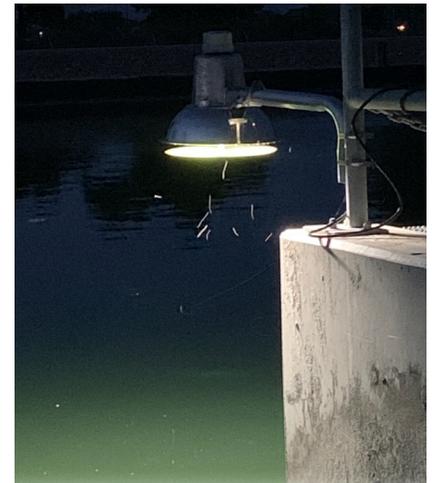
- **Ouray National Fish Hatchery, Grand Valley Unit (Ouray NFH-GVU)**
 - May Activities:
 - Larval Bonytail arrive from Southwestern Native Aquatic Resources & Recovery Center
- **Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO)**
 - May Activities
 - Field season commences on upper Colorado River after COVID-19 delay
 - Grand Valley Water Users and Redlands Diversion Dam fish passages open for Spring
 - Grand Junction FWCO coordination with partners update

May 2020

*Ouray National Fish Hatchery, Grand Valley Unit
May Activities: Larval Bonytail arrive from Southwestern
Native Aquatic Resources & Recovery Center*



May 12, Ouray National Fish Hatchery, Grand Valley Unit (Ouray NFH-GVU) received the yearly crop of 15,000 newly hatched Bonytail larvae from Southwestern Native Aquatic Resources & Recovery Center (SNARRC) in Dexter, New Mexico which houses upper Colorado River Bonytail broodstock. This batch of Bonytail will be reared for approximately one-and-a-half years at Ouray NFH-GVU, at which point they will be 10” to 14” and released into the Colorado River between Rifle and Fruita, Colorado. Before the young fish enter the grow-out ponds at Horsethief Canyon Native Fish Facility (HCNFF), biologists will monitor plankton blooms, inoculating the ponds if necessary to ensure an adequate natural plankton rich diet waiting for the new larval fish. Additionally, “bug lights” are also added to the ponds which will further enrich their diet, attracting and dispersing copious amounts of invertebrates above the pond kettle for them to feed on. Ouray NFH-GVU has released approximately 42,753 Bonytail in the upper Colorado River since 2014. Current yearly production goals are 10,000 Bonytail per year with hopes of boosting populations of these animals which are in steep decline in the upper Colorado River basin. Out of the four endangered fish that are endemic to the upper Colorado River, Bonytail are the most endangered. Photos by USFWS Ouray NFH-GVU staff.



Top Left: Haden VanWinkle pulling a plankton net across one of two Bonytail fry ponds before deploying the newly hatched fish. It’s important to have a healthy, diverse planktonic community for these small fish to feed on as soon as they are introduced into the pond. **Top Middle:** A captured gravid Daphnia zooplankton full of eggs. Bonytail fry find them delicious and nutritious. **Top Right:** A “bug light” attached to the Bonytail larval pond. It attracts flying insects and whips them into the water, further adding to the natural diet of the young fish.



Bottom Left: Brian Scheer and Haden VanWinkle acclimating a plastic bag holding 5,000 Bonytail. Receiving pond water and sodium bicarbonate is used to manipulate the temperature and PH within the bag. The temperature and PH of the pond water and bag water must be comparable before releasing the fish into the pond. **Bottom Right:** Once the fish are sufficiently acclimated, they are released into the grow-out pond at HCNFF where they will live throughout the warm summer/fall months, after which they are transported to the 24 Road Hatchery indoor facility for the cold winter months.

May 2020

Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

May Activities: Field season commences on upper Colorado River following COVID-19 delay



Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (Grand Junction FWCO) kicked off their field season May 19 after a slight delay due to COVID-19 safety precautions. Two electrofishing jetboats in addition to two electrofishing rafts are being used on the upper Colorado River near Grand Junction as part of a Colorado Pikeminnow population monitoring project to help better understand their survival rates and abundance in the upper Colorado River. Grand Junction FWCO biologists will conduct various projects to benefit the endangered fishes of the upper Colorado River in 2020 including:

- Humpback Chub population estimates in the Black Rocks area of the Colorado River.
- Riverwide monitoring of the entire fish community (all life stages) within the Gunnison River from Delta, Colorado to its confluence with the Colorado River and in the Colorado River from that confluence downstream to the Utah state line.
- Non-native fish removal on the upper Colorado and Gunnison rivers.
- Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker population estimate studies on the San Juan River.
- Operation of the Grand Valley Water Users and Redlands Diversion Dam selective fish passages.
- Assisting with Smallmouth Bass and Northern Pike removal on the Yampa River.



Photo by Mike Gross USFWS

Two electrofishing rafts prepare to get underway on the Colorado River below Price Stubb Diversion on the Colorado River upstream of Palisade, Colorado.

Electrofishing entails emitting non-lethal pulses of electricity flowing between a submerged cathode and anode. This pulsing electricity stuns nearby fishes in such a way that they swim toward the anode, where they can be scooped up by a netter, typically standing on the bow of the boat. Once the targeted fish is



Photo by Tyler Sexton USFWS

Colorado Pikeminnow

captured, biologists will gather various scientific data including PIT tag number, GPS coordinates, length, weight, sexual maturity information and much more. Grand Junction FWCO uses rafts (photo on top left) and jetboats (photo on bottom left) as their primary means of electrofishing.



Photo by Mike Gross USFWS

Two electrofishing jetboats on the first day of the field season preparing to launch on the Colorado River at Fruita, Colorado.



Photo by Travis Francis USFWS

Grand Junction FWCO biologists holding endangered Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker caught while sampling the banks of the Colorado River near Salt Creek.

May 2020

Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office May Activities: Redlands Diversion Dam fish passage opens for Spring



With river levels on the Gunnison River starting to rise, Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (Grand Junction FWCO) opened up the Redlands Diversion Dam (RDD) fish passage the week of May 18. This important passage typically open from early snow runoff in Spring until late fall when river temperatures plummet. RDD fish passage provides access to 50 river miles of designated endangered fish Critical Habitat on the Gunnison River and has passed roughly 163,492 native fish since opening in 1996. Photos by Mike Gross USFWS unless otherwise stated.



Redlands Diversion Dam on the Gunnison River in Orchard Mesa, Colorado was built in 1918. Until the fish passage was constructed in 1996 (a time span of nearly 80 years), native fish were unable to continue up river past this point, leading to the decline of native fish populations on the Gunnison River.



Below these grates is the entrance to the RDD fish ladder. Migrating fish will enter here, eventually swimming around the dam to continue their journey up river.



Fish swim up these baffles and are held in the final "V trap" chamber before being released on their way up the Gunnison River.



Once the fish trap is drained, the fish are gathered and sorted before being sent on their way.



The fish are brought from the fish trap to a sorting table where they are separated by species.



Biologists are given the opportunity to acquire important data on endangered fish including, length, weight, PIT tag numbers, sexual maturity and more.



Fish are then released from the holding tank into the Gunnison River above the dam, giving them access to nearly 50 miles of Critical Habitat that had been inaccessible for almost 80 years.

May 2020

Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office May Activities: Grand Valley Water Users fish passage opens for Spring



River levels on the Colorado River were also on the rise the week of May 18 allowing Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (Grand Junction FWCO) biologists the opportunity to open up the Grand Valley Water Users (GVWU) (aka Government Highline) fish passage in Debeque Canyon for the season. As with the fish passage at Redlands Diversion Dam, the GVWU fish passage typically opens from early snow runoff in spring until late fall when river temperatures drop significantly. This very important structure has increased access to 44 miles of endangered fish Critical Habitat on the upper Colorado River and has passed approximately 141,343 native fish since first being opened in 2004. Photos by Mike Gross USFWS unless otherwise stated.



The Grand Valley Diversion Dam, completed in 1916 channels water from the Colorado River to large tracks of farmland in western Colorado. It was one of the first reclamation projects on the Colorado River and is the oldest roller dam in the U.S. Until this fish passage was constructed in 2004, native fish were unable to continue up river past this point for nearly 90 years, significantly impacting native fish populations on the upper Colorado River.



Fish swim up these baffles one by one until being held in the final "trap" chamber before being released above the dam and free to swim up the Colorado River.



Selective fish "V trap" in the final chamber.



The final holding chamber is drained daily. Any fish that swam into the trap are sorted.



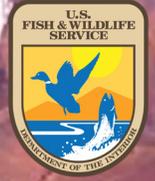
Scientific data including PIT tag number, species, length, weight, sexual maturity and more are recorded. Numbers of passing fish are tracked from year to year.



The fish are then released into the Colorado River above the dam, giving them access to 44 miles of Critical Habitat that had been inaccessible for almost 90 years.

May 2020

*Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office:
Coordination activities with partners*



5/1/2020:

Grand Junction FWCO is working with Bureau of Reclamation drafting a new five year funding agreement for monitoring Razorback Sucker in Lake Powell

5/27/2020:

Ouray NFH-GVU met with School District 51 staff to coordinate plans to begin operation of the new recirculating hatchery system at Palisade High School. The tentative plan is to fill this system with water mid-June and, if all is functioning well,, bring in 2020 year class Razorback Sucker in mid-July.

Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office Staff

**Project Leader - Dale Ryden
Administrative Officer - Vacant 37 months**

Grand Junction FWCO Staff:

**Fish Biologist - Darek Elverud
Fish Biologist - Travis Francis
Fish Biologist - Ben Schleicher
Biological Science Technician - Andrew Disch
Biological Science Technician - William Hilzer
Biological Science Technician - Lucas Laurita
Biological Science Technician - Tyler Sexton
Biological Science Technician - Tyler Trump
Biological Science Technician - Nathan Vargas
Biological Science Technician - Tyler Walton
Biological Science Technician - Vacant 11 months**

Ouray National Fish Hatchery - Grand Valley Unit Staff:

**Fish Biologist - Brian Scheer
Fish Biologist - Vacant 9 months
Biological Science Technician & Educational Outreach - Mike Gross
Biological Science Technician - Haden VanWinkle**



Two electrofishing jetboats on shore at Canyonlands, Utah- Photo by Erik Kopperud USFWS

Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office About Us



The Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office in Grand Junction, Colorado (formerly known as Colorado River Fishery Project, aka CRFP) consists of both a field office (FWCO) and an endangered fish hatchery, known as the Ouray National Fish Hatchery-Grand Valley Unit.

The CRFP field office was established in 1979 to perform research and management actions aimed at helping recover four endangered fish species of the upper Colorado River basin: Razorback Sucker, Colorado Pikeminnow, Humpback Chub, and Bonytail.

Ouray NFH-GVU was established in 1992 as CRFP's endangered fish propagation center and currently produces over 20,000 endangered Bonytail and Razorback Sucker annually.

The Grand Junction Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office works in the Colorado, Gunnison, San Juan and Yampa rivers in Colorado, Utah and New Mexico, as well as in Lake Powell in Utah.

Ouray National Fish Hatchery Grand Valley Unit

Current fish on station:

Razorback Sucker 11,800 (150mm-250mm)

Razorback Sucker 49,000 (fry)

Bonytail 10,300 (100mm-200mm)

Bonytail 15,000 (fry)