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Implementation Committee

Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

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NEWS RELEASE

May 3, 2012

For Immediate Release

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM PREVIOUS DROUGHTS SHAPES ENDANGERED FISH RECOVERY ACTIONS

LAKESWOOD, Colo. – As 2012 shapes up to be a near record-setting drought throughout Upper Colorado River Basin rivers, the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program will use lessons learned from previous droughts to direct this year's endangered fish recovery actions. Accumulated knowledge of fish spawning patterns, movements, and habitat preferences during periods of low river flows will enable biologists to focus their time and efforts to best assist in the recovery of endangered Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, bonytail and humpback chub. This year, like every year since the Recovery Program began in 1988, those efforts will occur throughout nearly 900 miles of the Colorado, Gunnison, Green, White and Yampa rivers in Colorado and Utah.

Endangered fish recovery requires establishing and maintaining self-sustaining populations of endangered fishes and reducing the threats to their survival. Biologists from the states of Colorado and Utah, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Colorado State University's Larval Fish Laboratory will conduct this year's recovery work. Actions include managing flows; stocking of hatchery-raised razorback sucker and bonytail; obtaining Colorado pikeminnow and humpback chub population estimates; and controlling nonnative species that prey on native fish.

To cope with drought conditions, the Recovery Program will use water leases, contracts and other agreements established during its 24-year history to maintain adequate river flows that endangered fish need to

spawn and grow. All flows are provided in accordance with state water law, individual water rights and interstate compacts.

“In years like this it is important to closely manage flows during the heat of the summer,” said Recovery Program Director Tom Chart. “The endangered fish are hearty, long-lived species that evolved over thousands of years and have survived periods of both extreme high flows as well as drought. Last year, the fish experienced some of the highest flows in recent history. We hope the favorable river conditions we saw last year carry the endangered fish populations through what is shaping up as an extreme drought year.”

During the early 2000s, biologists learned that low flows and warmer than average temperatures benefitted nonnative smallmouth bass in the Yampa River. “Since then, biologists have identified prime smallmouth bass spawning habitat, can predict the height of spawning activity, and have adapted their coordinated nonnative fish removal efforts,” said Recovery Program Nonnative Fish Coordinator Patrick Martinez. “This year we really need to draw on those past experiences to keep smallmouth bass and other nonnative species in check.”

Depending on the river reach, biologists will remove nonnative smallmouth bass and northern pike. In some instances, white sucker, walleye and burbot will also be removed. All of these nonnative fish species pose a significant threat to endangered fish because they compete for food and space in the river and may eat the eggs, young, or even adults of endangered fish.

For more information, visit the Recovery Program’s website at ColoradoRiverRecovery.org or call 303-969-7322, ext. 227.

The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program is a cooperative partnership of local, state and federal agencies, water organizations, power customers and environmental groups established in 1988 to recover the endangered fishes while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts.

**NOTE TO EDITORS/REPORTERS: Fact Sheets and Questions and Answers are available at:
<http://coloradoriverrecovery.org/events-news/press-news-releases.html>.**