



U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office

Conserving the biological diversity of the Great Basin, eastern Sierra, and Mojave Desert

Moapa Dace Numbers Up



The continued efforts of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and its partners appear to be benefitting the Moapa dace, an endangered fish found only in the Warm Springs area of the Moapa Valley in southern Nevada.

Biologists conducted a snorkel survey in the Muddy River system during the first week of August 2012, and counted 1,181 Moapa dace. The count represents an increase of 65 percent over the number of dace

found a year earlier in August 2011 (713 fish). This is the first time since February 2007 that the Moapa dace population has topped 1,000 fish.

“This milestone could not have been reached without the focus and coordinated efforts of everyone involved,” said the Service’s state supervisor Ted Koch. “Our staff and all of our partners in this effort should be proud of this accomplishment.”

The Service’s partners, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Moapa Band of Paiutes, Moapa Valley Water District, Clark County Desert Conservation Program, the Nature Conservancy, NV Energy, Coyote Springs LLC, and local landowners, have expanded efforts in recent years to protect and restore habitat for

Moapa Dace—Endangered (*Moapa coriacea*)

Maximum length: 5 inches

The Moapa dace is a small, bronze-colored minnow occurring only in several warm springs and outflows in the upper Muddy River in Clark County.

Moapa dace are omnivorous drift feeders, consuming insects and plant material. In 1979, the Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge was established to protect habitat for the Moapa dace and other native species. Spring outflows and small streams on and immediately below the refuge provide the only remaining spawning habitat for this species.

The species was historically common in 25 springs and about nine miles of outflow streams and river channel. Threats include water depletion due to diversions and groundwater pumping, spring modifications for agriculture, and the introduction of non-native fishes.

the native aquatic species in the upper Muddy River system while also controlling threats from non-native species.

“The Southern Nevada Water Authority is very pleased with the strides being made in restoring this habitat,” said Robert Johnson, SNWA land manager for the Warm Springs Natural Area. “It is rewarding to see that our efforts, and the efforts of the partnering agencies, are providing measurable contributions toward preserving the Moapa dace.” The Moapa dace is endemic to the thermal springs and streams that form the headwaters of the Muddy River (which eventually joins the Colorado River at Lake Mead). The Warm Springs area, which includes the 116 acre Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge, is home to other endemic aquatic species including the Moapa White River springfish and numerous invertebrates such as springsnails, water bugs, and riffle beetles. The Moapa Valley National Wildlife Refuge is part of the Service’s Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Desert Complex).

“Because Service staff had restored habitat on the wildlife refuge, most of the dace in the system have generally been found there,” said Shaun Sanchez, manager of the Desert Complex. “Obviously, the additional restored habitat off of the refuge and the elimination of non-native competitor and predatory fish gives the dace more of a fighting chance.” In the mid-1990s, non-native mollies and blue tilapia decimated the Moapa dace population and other native fish in the Muddy River. NDOW leads the effort to eliminate the non-native species.

“Controlling the exotic fish is time-consuming, costly, and challenging,” said Jon Sjoberg, NDOW’s supervising fisheries biologist. “We are pleased that the increased control efforts appear to be showing promise.”

“While we celebrate the nearly 1,200 endangered dace now in the Moapa Valley, we remain cautiously optimistic about the long-term outlook for the Moapa dace,” Koch said. We know that recovery of the species is still a long way off.”