

## **Celebrating a Milestone in Conservation – the Recovery of the Oregon Chub**

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A winter storm grounded me in Washington on February 19, keeping me from traveling to Portland to mark the recovery of the Oregon chub. But no amount of snow can keep me from celebrating this milestone in conservation history.

As small as the 3-inch chub is, it will forever be known for a giant accomplishment – becoming the first fish ever removed from the federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.

In only about 20 years, the chub has gone from the brink of extinction to thriving across its historic range in the Willamette River Basin. In 1993, the species numbered fewer than 1,000 fish in eight small populations. Thanks to a phenomenal conservation effort by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other dedicated partners, the Oregon chub has expanded to more than 80 populations with an estimated 140,000 fish.

That's truly remarkable. We simply don't see many species recover in what is, in biological terms, the blink of an eye.

While the Oregon chub isn't as iconic as other Pacific Northwest fish species like the salmon or steelhead, it's a vital part of the freshwater floodplain ecosystem of the Willamette River Basin – the lifeblood of western Oregon. As a result, partnership-driven efforts to help the chub recover have also benefited other species and local communities. Partners have improved management of the entire river system – providing increased recreational opportunities, better flood control, improved water quality and a healthier ecosystem for both wildlife and people.

The Endangered Species Act was the last line of defense for the Oregon chub, just as it is for hundreds of other native species facing extinction. With every species that is lost, we leave a more impoverished planet to future generations, and deprive them of the benefits of healthy ecosystems with vibrant biological diversity.

The chub's recovery shows how the ESA can and should work – bringing partners together to recover imperiled species and the ecosystems upon which they, and we, depend. In the case of the chub, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife led the charge, conducting research and monitoring, promoting habitat protection and improvements, and conducting reintroductions of the fish into unoccupied habitats.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff worked closely with them to support recovery efforts. For example, the staff of the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex did an amazing job of enhancing chub habitat on the refuge. Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program staff worked tirelessly with local landowners who willingly agreed to put an endangered species on their land. And staff from our Columbia River Fisheries Program Office and Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office laid the groundwork for the delisting action.

A broad spectrum of organizations and individuals made other key contributions to the chub's recovery, including the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and their Tribal Fish and Wildlife Program, which helped evaluate the impacts of stream management options on the chub. The Army Corps of Engineers played a vital role in implementing many of the stream management improvements vital to the chub's recovery. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service protected 623 acres of chub habitat through Wetlands Reserve Program conservation easements. Professors and students from Oregon State University's Department of Fisheries and Wildlife completed some of the important underlying science to guide recovery efforts. And perhaps most crucially, dozens of private landowners in the Willamette River Basin stepped up and provided habitat on their land. It has truly been a collaborative effort.

By ensuring the recovery of the Oregon chub, we have taken a giant step toward honoring our commitment to future generations.