

COLORADO PIKEMINNOW

MY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Ptychocheilus lucius

BY THE NUMBERS

I can live up to 40 years, grow nearly 6 feet in length and weigh up to 80 pounds. Today, most of us only reach 2 to 3 feet in length because of water temperatures and less food.

HOW TO IDENTIFY ME

My scientific name translates to “folded lip” and “pike” in reference to my large mouth folding behind my jaws, and my long streamlined body. My fins are also set far back on my body. I have small eyes and no teeth. I am olive-green and gold in color, with a silvery-white belly. Early settlers called me “Colorado white salmon” because of my looks and migratory behavior.

WHY I MATTER AND WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

I was once very abundant in the Colorado River and its **tributaries** in states from Wyoming and Colorado to California, and I was an important food source for people (Figure 1). Today, many dams prevent me from migrating to my **spawning** and feeding grounds. Other invasive* non-native fish also have outcompeted me for food. Losing a place to live and lack of food has limited my ability to survive and reproduce. People are working together now to help recover me. They are constructing ways for me to swim around dams; restoring backwater habitat our young fish need to grow; working with dam owners to regulate water flows for my survival; and removing non-native fish that eat young pikeminnows and outcompete me for food.

MY STATUS

We were federally listed as endangered in 1967. Today, you will only find two wild populations of us – in the upper part of the Colorado River and in the Green River, and their tributaries. We also are being raised at special hatcheries and stocked into the San Juan River to establish a third population that will spawn new generations in the future.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Colorado pikeminnow is the largest minnow in North America.
- Scientists believe the species has been around for more than 3 million years.
- They were once so abundant that fishermen would catch them in rivers using pitchforks.
- Colorado pikeminnow need free-flowing passage up and down the river to migrate to spawning areas from their home range.
- They are known for long-distance spawning migrations of more than 200 miles.
- They thrive in warm rivers with large spring flows that create habitat and stimulate spawning migration, and with lower stable flows during the rest of the year to maintain nursery habitats for young pikeminnow.
- They reproduce at 5 (male) to 7 (female) years of age.
- Tiny just-hatched pikeminnow drift in the river current for long distances before settling to eat and grow.
- Young pikeminnow feed on insects and **plankton**, and adults feed mostly on fish.
- Adults are built for life in muddy water. They are able to detect chemical and electrical signals of their prey, so they can hunt in the dark murky water.
- Adults live in the main channel of the river, and juveniles live in slower waters or along shorelines.
- Their large mouth and streamlined body make them efficient predators in fast-flowing water.
- Colorado pikeminnow have no teeth! They have a bony, circular structure within their throat to process food, called **pharyngeal teeth**.

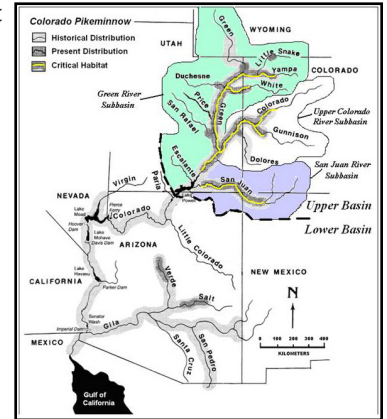


Figure 1 – Historic and current distribution of the Colorado pikeminnow.

* A **native** species is a species that has always occurred in an area naturally, and was not introduced by humans. An **invasive** species is not **native** to an area and can cause harm to native plants and animals.

Fish illustration by Laury Zicari, USFWS, Retired.



Website: www.fws.gov/fisheries



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MORE ABOUT US



Adult Colorado pikeminnow collected on the Green River in Desolation Canyon, Utah.



A healthy young Colorado pikeminnow caught at Redlands fish passage in Colorado. A fish passage is built so that a fish can navigate around dams and swim upstream.



These young-of-year Colorado pikeminnow were captured while seining in the middle Green River. Biologists sample for young endangered fish to measure the adult's reproductive success.



Typical Colorado pikeminnow canyon habitat on the Yampa River, Colorado, close to where it enters the Green River in Dinosaur National Monument.

YOU CAN HELP ME

Get to know me, if you don't already. Help make me visible to people who don't have the chance to see me by sharing your stories about me. Get involved in efforts to help conserve my habitat and maintain my populations into the future.

