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Project will Restore Native Minnow to Rio Grande

The reach of the Rio Grande that flows through Big Bend National Park will play an important role in recovering a native fish that has been absent from Texas waters for more than fifty years.

According to a rule published today in the Federal Register, the Rio Grande silvery minnow will be reintroduced into its namesake river under a provision of the Endangered Species Act that allows local communities greater flexibility in establishing parameters for reintroduction.

Approximately 500,000 Rio Grande silvery minnows will be placed into the river on Dec. 17. (Media – please note you are invited to cover the event. Information follows news release.)

The release supports the agency’s plan to recover the rare minnow so that it no longer needs the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

Reintroduced minnows in the Texas reach of the river will be considered nonessential and experimental. The designation is allowed under section 10(j) of the ESA which encourages the reintroduction of a species by reducing regulations. “Using a nonessential, experimental designation ensures that the daily activities of water users and landowners are unaffected by the reintroduction,” said Benjamin N. Tuggle, Southwest Regional Director for the Service. “Community leaders told us they were supportive of the reintroduction program but emphasized they needed to count on reliable flows and water delivery. We can satisfy both fish and human needs.”

The Rio Grande silvery minnow is a small fish that was once one of the most abundant and widespread of the native fishes in the Rio Grande and Pecos River. It existed from northern New Mexico to the Gulf of Mexico in Texas. Today the endangered silvery minnow occupies only about five percent of its historic range in the middle Rio Grande in New Mexico. Throughout much of its historic range, the decline of the Rio Grande silvery minnow has been attributed to modification of the flow regime, channel drying, reservoirs and dams, stream channelization, decreasing water quality and perhaps interactions with non-native fish. During it various life stages, the silvery minnow uses low velocity habitats with a sandy and silty substrate associated with a meandering river that includes side channels, oxbows, and backwaters.

The Service’s preferred approach to recovering the Rio Grande silvery minnow is to create self-
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500,000 Rio Grande Silvery Minnows Released into River at Big Bend National Park

More than 50 years have passed since the native fish swam in Texas waters

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is pleased to invite you to attend the initial release of 500,000 Rio Grande silvery minnows into the Rio Grande at Big Bend National Park. The fish will be distributed into holding cages at four sites where they will stay overnight to acclimate. The next day, the fish will be released from the cages into the Rio Grande.

The release supports our plan to recover the rare minnow so that it no longer needs the protection of the Endangered Species Act. The Rio Grande silvery minnow will be reintroduced into its namesake river under a provision of the Endangered Species Act that allows local communities greater flexibility in establishing parameters for reintroduction.

Who: US Fish and Wildlife Service

What: Release of native fish into Big Bend reach of the Rio Grande

Where: Big Bend National Park, Texas
Meet at the Rio Grande Village located 20 miles east of the Park Headquarters

When: Tuesday, Dec. 16 at 1 p.m.

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