



# Arizona Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

## Accomplishment Report

November 2015



Brad Buechel, Chase Ehlo, and Mitch Thorson (AZFWCO) tag a Bonytail Chub on the Lower Colorado River, Arizona.

### **AZFWCO Staff**

#### ***Flagstaff***

Jess Newton, Project Leader  
Kirk Young, Project Coordinator  
Randy Van Haverbeke, Senior Fish Biologist  
Dennis Stone, Fish Biologist  
Michael Pillow, Fish Biologist  
Jim Walters, Biological Technician  
Rick Deshler, Biological Technician  
Vic Scott, Administrative Officer

#### ***Pinetop***

Vacant, Assistant Project Leader  
Jeremy Voeltz, Project Coordinator  
Jennifer Johnson, Fish Biologist  
Tim Grosch, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Biologist  
Vacant, Fish and Wildlife Biologist  
Vacant, Office Assistant

#### ***Parker***

Mitch Thorson, Fish Biologist  
Brad Buechel, Fish Biologist  
John Naugle, Biological Technician  
Sean O'Kray, Pest Control Worker



AZFWCO Mission: Working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and other aquatic organisms and their habitat in Arizona and the Southwest.



## Conserving Aquatic Species

Chase Ehlo, Mitch Thorson, Brad Buechel, and John Naugle surveyed Office Cove in the Bill Williams National Wildlife Refuge over a two week period to provide a population estimate for the backwater and to collect large (>400 mm) Razorback Sucker to stock into the lower Colorado River. Each week, the crew deployed five trammel nets that fished over a one-night period in the same locations. After the second week, all native fish that were 400 mm or larger were removed and transported to Needles Dredge Yard where they were released in hopes of reaching the spawning areas located in the main stem Colorado River.

Chase also worked to finalize a final report detailing acoustic telemetry efforts on Razorback Sucker and Bonytail Chub in the lower Colorado River that will be submitted to the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program.

Kirk Young and Jess Newton participated in a conference call with Fisheries leadership and Arizona Game and Fish Department regarding Willow Beach NFH trout stocking at Willow Beach and below Davis Dam. AZFWCO will be working with Ecological Services to finalize the proposed action and obtain environmental reviews prior to anticipated stockings in late 2016 or early 2017.

Randy Van Haverbeke, Dennis Stone, Michael Pillow, Jim Walters, and Rick Deshler participated in the October/November monitoring and



**Chase Ehlo and Mitch Thorson (AZFWCO) pull in a trammel net set in Office Cove on the Bill Williams National Wildlife Refuge in order to provide a population estimate for the backwater and to collect large Razorback Suckers to stock in the Lower Colorado River.**

translocation trip in the Little Colorado River (LCR) to monitor the Humpback Chub (HBC) population. Following the trip Randy, Dennis, and Michael entered and double checked the data collected from each camp. Dennis and Michael then compiled and wrote the trip report titled: "Fall 2015 Monitoring of Humpback Chub (*Gila cypha*) and other Fishes in the Lower 13.57 km of the Little Colorado River, Arizona." This

report also provides an overview of our Humpback Chub translocation effort.

Dennis compiled all data sheets, Access and Excel files, and the trip report affiliated with the fall 2015 monitoring and translocation efforts in the LCR, and delivered them to Grand Canyon Monitoring and Research Center (GCMRC), in partial fulfillment of our contractual obligations. Dennis also provided GCMRC with eight Humpback Chub mortality specimens from the LCR in 2015 to use for various studies, and he provided Dave Topping (USGS) with some relevant publications for a talk he is conducting concerning fish and turbidity.

Randy continued to analyze and incorporate 2015 findings into the Little Colorado River annual monitoring report due in January. Michael assisted Randy in analyzing spring Little Colorado River data by compiling capture histories for all captured HBC from 2001-2015. These capture histories can then be modeled and analyzed in program MARK to supplement our standard population abundance estimate calculations and incorporated in the annual report.



**Bonytail chub captured in Office Cove on Bill Williams National Wildlife Refuge in November 2015. This fish was presumably stocked in 2006.**



## Conserving Aquatic Species (*continued*)

Randy attended a meeting with Ecological Services (ES) to discuss upcoming LTEMP EIS and Navajo Generating Station (NGS) topics. He also attended a meeting with ES and personnel from the Navajo Generating Station (NGS) and Salt River Project to discuss potential conservation measures associated with NGS's re-licensing process.

Randy attended a Humpback Chub

recovery team meeting in Denver, acting as a science team member. This was largely an introductory meeting consisting of members from the writing, science, and implementation teams. The recovery plan process was discussed, including the concepts and processes of developing a Species Status Assessment document.

Randy reviewed a draft report from the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish

Recovery Program on abundance estimates of Humpback and Roundtail Chub in Westwater Canyon, Utah. He also reviewed the fall 2015 LCR Humpback Chub monitoring and translocation trip report written by Dennis and Michael and he is reviewing the draft Biological Assessment for the LTEMP EIS.

## Conserving, Restoring, and Enhancing Aquatic Habitats

Jeremy Voeltz and Jess Newton assisted in the review and ranking of grant proposals submitted to the Desert Fish Habitat Partnership (DFHP). Six proposals were ranked. The number of proposals to be funded will be determined in May 2016 when DFHP funding levels are determined.

Jeremy and Jess attended the annual meeting of the DFHP in Las Vegas, NV. Following that, Jess, Jeremy, and Chase Ehlo attended the Desert Fishes Council annual meeting in Death Valley, CA. Major discussion topics for the DFHP meeting included the on-going search for a new coordinator, coordination with other NFHP Partnerships and the NFHP Board, past and current project tracking and reporting, FY16 project recommendations, outreach opportunities, coordination with Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, Science and Data committee updates, and annual reporting.

Tim Grosch met with Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) Landowner Relations Program, NRCS staff, and two separate landowners to discuss potential habitat enhancement projects in the White Mountain area. The proposed projects will be evaluated to determine if Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW) funding will be available.

Tim accompanied Kyle Dutro from AGFD Landowner Relations Program on a site visit to several ongoing projects located throughout the White Mountain area. Over several days, the two looked at a native fish refugia pond and a solar well project along the Blue River,



**Jeremy Voeltz (AZFWCO) evaluates a road crossing on an Apache Trout recovery stream on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation.**

grassland restoration projects along the Arizona-New Mexico state line, as well as another solar well project near Heber, Arizona.

Jeremy, Tim, and Jennifer Johnson evaluated several more road crossings on Apache Trout recovery streams on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation as part of a project to assess fish passage problems for Apache Trout. The initial evaluations will be completed in the spring of 2016. If any culverts need modification, future projects will be developed with the White Mountain Apache Tribe.

Jeremy, with assistance from the Regional Office, AGFD and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) finalized a Cooperative Agreement extension for Gila Trout conservation activities in Arizona and New Mexico funded by the Western Native Trout Initiative. Work on this project will be completed by November of 2016.

Mitch Thorson worked with Brad Buechel in coordinating a visual inspection of Davis Lake located on Cibola National Wildlife Refuge. Davis Lake could potentially become a site for an MSCP off-channel habitat project in California.

## Managing Aquatic Invasive Species

AZFWCO Parker staff took Quagga Mussel into any Quagga free precautionary measures to prevent the transfer of adult and veliger stage of backwaters on the lower Colorado River by setting out and thoroughly drying the nets and equipment used in the Office Cove survey

## Fulfilling Tribal Trust Responsibilities

AZFWCO's Flagstaff office hosted an annual Region-2 Fisheries & Tribal coordination meeting led by Assistant Regional Director, Stewart Jacks. Several Arizona Tribes attended and main agenda items included FWS National Fish and Aquatic Conservation Strategic Plan, Region-2 Emphasis Areas, Recreational Fisheries Management, and joint fisheries conservation work. This meeting was one of three held in Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona.

## Enhancing Recreation Fishing and Public Use of Aquatic Resources

USFWS Region-2 Fisheries (including AZFWCO) and AGFD had our annual coordination meeting to discuss collaborative trout stocking programs across the state. One focus of the meeting centered on our cooperative efforts at Willow Beach National Fish Hatchery to repair hatchery infrastructure needed for rearing Rainbow Trout and planning for the upcoming stocking program in the lower Colorado River (scheduled to begin in winter 2016/2017).

## Workforce Management, Training, and Scientific Capacity

Rick Deshler received his Ten-Year Federal Service Pin in an award ceremony at the regional All Employ Meeting in Albuquerque, NM.

Tim Grosch met with Kris Randall and Jennifer Kaplan in Phoenix to discuss PFW procedures. The group went over landowner agreements as well as touched on the HabITS database. The group will continue to cover items as they come up while Tim continues to learn the process.

Tim also participated in a Region 2 PFW monitoring working group conference call. During the call the group discussed a way to standardize monitoring efforts across the region. One idea is to implement the use of tablets with monitoring forms that can be used in any geographic location.

Tim attended a Southwest Willow Flycatcher (SWFL) Modeling workshop in Phoenix. The course was offered through USGS and was instructed by Jim Hatten. The goal of the training is to teach individuals how to run the Landsat-based SWFL habitat model on a laptop or workstation. The course was very informative and gave insight on how to predict suitable habitat for special status species.

The application window for the Desert Fish Habitat Partnership Coordinator position closed in November. Jeremy Voeltz is in the process of contacting qualified applicants to set up interviews in early December.

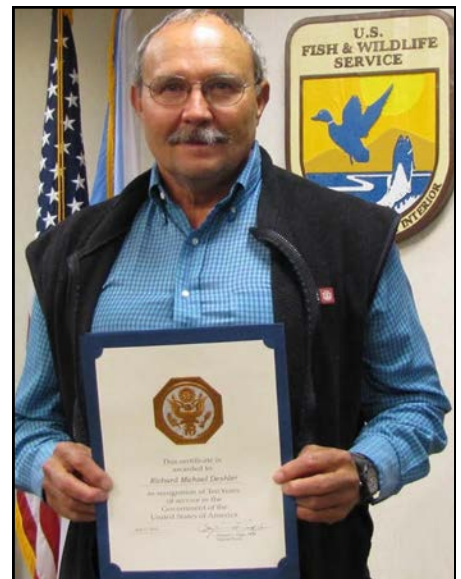
Jeremy modified, archived, and/or entered new projects into FONS to be considered for funding in FY16.

Chase Ehlo began work as a fish biologist at AZFWCO in Parker, AZ. He came to us from Marsh and Associates, LLC where he spent several years working with a variety of endangered desert fishes. Chase traveled to the AZFWCO Flagstaff office to participate in Employee Orientation with Kirk Young and Vic Scott.

Chase also obtained two remote PIT scanners from the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program and deployed them into Office Cove on the Bill Williams National Wildlife Refuge. Additional efforts will be expanded in the future to other backwaters.

Jess Newton, Randy Van Haverbeke, Dennis Stone, Michael Pillow, and Vic Scott participated in an impromptu meeting with Stewart Jacks on Nov. 5th while he was in Flagstaff for the tribal coordination meeting.

Kirk Young, Randy, Dennis, and Michael packed-up field equipment and office supplies that were being stored in our laboratory space and moved them to our storage area in the Forest Service greenhouse facility. We will no longer be renting the laboratory space. Michael also spent some time cleaning out and re-organizing the storage area as well as unpacking boxes and organizing all equipment in the storage area.



**Rick Deshler (AZFWCO) received his Ten-Year Federal Service Pin at an award ceremony at the Regional Office in Albuquerque, NM in November.**

Michael Pillow completed the Scientific Integrity required online course through DOI Learn and Jennifer Johnson completed recertification of her Agricultural Commercial Applicator license and four hours of EEO and diversity training.

Michael also worked with Vic Scott and the October LCR volunteers to acquire and process appropriate travel documentation.

Randy completed EPAPs for Dennis, Michael, Jim Walters, and Rick Deshler.





John Naugle (AZFWCO) shows off a fish captured in Bill Williams National Wildlife Refuge to a group of local elementary school students on a field trip to the refuge.

Jennifer Johnson checked in on our two Apache Trout in the Classroom tanks at Alchেসay High School and Seven Mile Elementary. The Apache Trout are doing well and the students are looking forward to Apache Trout fry arriving in late January. Our display tank at the Nature Center is also doing well and has received many positive comments from

the local community.

Jeremy Voeltz and Jess Newton set up the Desert Fish Habitat Partnership outreach display at the 47th annual meeting of the Desert Fishes Council, held this year in Death Valley, California. DFC is one of DFHP's original, and strongest, partner organizations.

Chase Ehlo spoke with several students from surrounding elementary schools on an educational field trip at the Bill Williams National Wildlife Refuge about the conservation and management of Razorback Sucker and Bonytail on the lower Colorado River.

AZFWCO personnel participated with Bill Williams National Wildlife Refuge outreach program. The staff demonstrated to over 100 students how to identify and tag native fish using Passive Integrated Transponders.

Did you know AZFWCO has a facebook page? We post information on our staff, upcoming projects, educational events, and volunteer opportunities across the state. We currently have 707 "likes" from 20 countries. Check us out at [www.facebook.com/AZFWCO](http://www.facebook.com/AZFWCO).

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- ◆ Glen Canyon Dam Fish Annual Cooperators Meeting in Flagstaff, December 14 & 15
- ◆ Colorado River Aquatic Biologists Meeting in Laughlin NV – January 6th & 7th
- ◆ Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program's 36th Annual Researchers Meeting in Durango CO -- January 12-13
- ◆ Arizona-New Mexico Chapter American Fisheries Society annual Meeting in Flagstaff, AZ -- February 4-6

