



## NEWS RELEASE

July 12, 2012  
For Immediate Release

Contact: Sharon Whitmore, 505-761-4753  
sharon\_whitmore@fws.gov  
Tom Buckley, 505-248-6455  
tom\_buckley@fws.gov  
Debbie Felker, 303-969-7322, ext. 227  
debbie\_felker@fws.gov

### **SAN JUAN RIVER RESTORATION PROJECT BENEFITS ENDANGERED FISH**

ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico – Six miles of critical habitat for endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker along the San Juan River was recently restored with funding from a \$400,000 grant from the New Mexico Environment Department’s River Ecosystem Restoration Initiative. The Nature Conservancy administered the funds and coordinated restoration activities with the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Navajo Nation and the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program.

Restoration involved reconnecting secondary channels to the river’s main channel and removing non-native tamarisk and Russian olive vegetation to create backwater habitat for the endangered fishes. Work occurred at six key reaches of the San Juan River between the Hogback Diversion Dam and the New Mexico-Colorado state line on the Navajo Nation in New Mexico.

“Backwater habitat provides a safe haven for young fish by providing shallow, warm, slow-moving water that allows the fish to feed, grow and escape nonnative predators,” said San Juan Program Director Dave Campbell. “This is important to the fishes’ life cycle.”

The installation of Navajo Dam and other water projects along the river changed the timing and amount of river flows. Over time, the San Juan River became narrower, less complex and more channelized as nonnative vegetation expanded. This caused backwater habitats to become disconnected from the active river. Since then, the Bureau of Reclamation, water users and power customers have worked with the San Juan Program to time water releases from Navajo Dam to meet flow recommendations that will benefit the endangered fishes while meeting the water and hydropower needs of southwestern communities.

“This restoration project would not have been possible without the funding from the State of New Mexico and the cooperation of all parties involved,” Campbell said. “Work was completed this spring and we will evaluate the functionality of the restored sites over the next year as they become exposed to a full year of peak and base flows. This information will be used to assess how the sites are functioning and to identify additional locations and techniques for restoring additional sites.”

The San Juan River habitat restoration project was recently highlighted by the Department of the Interior’s Great Outdoors River Initiative as a model for cooperative efforts by federal, tribal and state agencies to recover endangered fishes while water development proceeds.

“As a partner to the San Juan Program and an organization committed to restoring and protecting healthy river ecosystems, we welcomed the opportunity to coordinate this project,” said Patrick McCarthy, director of Conservation Programs for The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico. “We know that restoring river habitat is ongoing and takes shared commitment and resources to accomplish. We appreciate the opportunity to work with others to achieve our mutual goals.”

The San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program is a cooperative partnership of American Indian Tribes; local, state and federal agencies; water organizations; power customers and environmental groups established in 1992 to recover endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

-###-

**NOTE TO EDITORS:** Photos are available from Debbie Felker, 303-969-7322, ext. 227, [debbie\\_felker@fws.gov](mailto:debbie_felker@fws.gov).