



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service – Region 2 Southwest Region Fisheries Program

# Drought/Fire Contingency Planning Arizona Fishery Resources Office

### Issue:

Arizona, and much of the Southwest, has been under drought conditions for years, with no end in sight. These drought conditions have resulted in the loss and/or degradation of habitat for many of Arizona's native, threatened, and endangered fish, as well as valuable recreational sport fisheries throughout the state. Along with drought conditions comes the increased threat of catastrophic wildfires. In 2002, Arizona's largest wildfire in history, the Rodeo-Chedeski Fire, burned 469,000 acres, which resulted in the loss of habitat and native fish populations within many streams throughout the burned area. In 2003, the Aspen Fire burned approximately 84,750 acres in southeastern Arizona, and resulted in an emergency multi-agency effort to salvage a Gila chub population from Sabino Creek. Although the salvaging of Gila chub from Sabino Creek was "in the nick of time," drought conditions remain and the threat of other catastrophic wildfires remains. Drought and wildfires can result in depressed population sizes and possible loss of year classes of native fish. The possibility also exists for entire fish populations to be lost before being secured in refugia. When streams and fish populations are lost due to drought or wildfire, recovery and delisting efforts are delayed.



D. Sanders

*Wildfires have severe negative impacts not only on the landscape but on fish populations and their habitats, as well.*

### Accomplishments:

In FY 2003, AZFRO coordinated and hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Arizona Fisheries Coordination Meeting, which is held to discuss fishery resource activities, accomplishments, and needs in Arizona and the southwest. As a result of this meeting, it was agreed upon that a plan was needed for how resource managers within the state would work together to conserve native fish in the event of a drought or fire. AZFRO has begun efforts to develop a Drought/Fire Contingency Plan for all of Arizona's native fish. Other past efforts include rescuing threatened Spikedace and Apache trout from streams impacted by drought conditions, and working with the White Mountain Apache Tribe in developing a Loach minnow Drought Contingency Plan.



J. Wood

*Gila chub are rescued from Sabino Creek before ash-laden runoff from the Aspen Fire enters the creek and destroys this population.*

### Future Outlook:

Increased efforts need to be devoted to the development of a Drought/Fire Contingency Plan and the implementation of actions identified within so that drought conditions and catastrophic wildfires do not cause native, threatened, and endangered fish and valuable recreational sport fisheries to be severely impacted or irreversibly damaged. The drafting of a successful contingency plan and implementation of actions can only happen by maintaining and/or establishing positive working relationships with Federal, State, Tribal, and other partners. A successful contingency plan will identify procedures for collecting, transporting, and holding fish; will identify refugia for fish populations salvaged from the wild; will comply with Endangered Species Act regulations; and will be agreed upon by all partners involved. Implementation of a Drought/Fire Contingency Plan will require cooperation among Fishery Resources Offices, Hatcheries, and Health Centers in the rescuing of fish populations from the wild, examining fish for disease and pathogens, and holding multiple populations of multiples species for what could be several decades.



R. Sorenson

*Federal, State, Tribal, NGO, and Private partners meet to strategize cooperative efforts for the benefit of fishery resources throughout the state.*

### Contact:

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