



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Missouri River

Missouri River Endangered Species: How Do the Service's Recommendations Benefit Them?

The Missouri River basin supports an abundance of wildlife, including three species that are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act: the endangered pallid sturgeon and least tern and the threatened piping plover.

Current operation of the Missouri River, which is heavily dammed and channeled, poses a threat to the survival of these three species.

In the final biological opinion, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommends returning the river to more natural flows - a modest spring rise and modest summer drop. These recommendations benefit river species in the following ways:

Spring release from Fort Peck Dam: A modest rise in spring flows from Fort Peck dam will maximize the amount of warm water habitat needed by native river species such as the **pallid sturgeon**. Cold water coming from the dam has caused limited production of these species in this reach of the river. The intentional spring release of warm water over the spillway will provide the biological cues to encourage successful spawning by pallids and other river fish.

Modified releases from Gavins Point Dam: The releases from Gavins Point dam will help create a semblance of the natural fluctuations of the Missouri River - rising water in the



Photos by Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

spring and the lowering of water in the summer will provide biological cues necessary for improved reproduction from the **least tern, piping plover, and pallid sturgeon**. The rising water washes nutrients into the river providing food for river species.

Shorebirds including the least tern and piping plover nest on sparsely vegetated sandbars. The higher spring flows scour channels and move sand downstream creating and maintaining high elevation

sandbars that provide resting and nesting habitat.

The declining water signals the birds that now is the time to nest to ensure the young are hatched with a maximum amount of available habitat.

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