



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - P.O. Box 25486 - Denver Federal Center - Denver, CO 80225 - (303) 969-7322 - Fax (303) 969-7327

NEWS RELEASE

April 21, 2009
For Immediate Release

Contact: Debbie Felker, Recovery Program
303-969-7322, ext. 227
Randy Hampton, Colorado Division of
Wildlife – 970-255-6162

BIOLOGISTS RESUME RESEARCH STUDIES IN COLORADO AND UTAH IN EFFORT TO RECOVER ENDANGERED FISH

LAKEWOOD, Colo. – The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) announced today that research studies have resumed in sections of the Colorado, Duchesne, Green and Yampa rivers in the states of Colorado and Utah to help recover four species of endangered fish – the humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. Biologists from the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado State University, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will conduct the work.

Management of nonnative fish species is a primary goal of this year's research work. Northern pike and smallmouth bass have been identified as two nonnative fish species that pose a significant threat to endangered and other native fishes. Northern pike and smallmouth bass are active predators that eat other fish and compete for food and space in the river. For nearly a decade, Recovery Program researchers have worked to reduce the populations of these nonnative fish species to a level where endangered and other native fishes can co-exist and thrive.

“Although we still have a long way to go to manage nonnative fishes in critical habitat in the Upper Colorado River Basin, we are encouraged by data that indicate we are making progress, especially with northern pike” said Recovery Program Director Bob Muth. “We’ve seen a shift from large-sized, adult northern pike in a 70-mile reach of the Yampa River to smaller, juvenile fish. Last year, we noted that the overall abundance of northern pike in the Yampa neared its lowest level since our management efforts began in 1999.”

Similar reductions of adult northern pike populations have occurred in critical habitat in the Green River. Since removal efforts began in 2001, northern pike abundance has decreased by more than 90 percent.

Management of smallmouth bass populations remains problematic as researchers noted strong reproduction in 2006 and 2007 in sections of the Green and Yampa rivers. In 2008, the entire Upper Colorado River Basin experienced a return to higher and cooler flows and smallmouth bass reproduction was greatly diminished in all rivers. Efforts to remove smallmouth bass in 2007 and 2008 in the Yampa and Green rivers showed limited success. However, smallmouth bass populations on the Colorado River continued to decline for the third consecutive year. This year, removal efforts will continue and crews will coordinate sampling trips to address smallmouth bass movement.

“Our crews are experienced in working with both native and nonnative fish species in these river systems,” Muth said. “Their shared expertise helps focus our efforts on the most efficient and effective research techniques to help us achieve our goals. As in the past, northern pike and smallmouth bass removed from rivers in Colorado will be relocated to ponds or reservoirs wherever possible to help provide sportfishing opportunities.”

Nonnative fish management is one of many recovery actions that enables use and development of water from the Upper Colorado River Basin to proceed in compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Since 1988, recovery actions implemented by the Recovery Program have provided ESA compliance for 1,675 water projects depleting approximately 2.3 million acre-feet of water in the Upper Basin. Implementation of nonnative fish management actions is important because it is one of the measures the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service uses to determine if progress toward recovery of the endangered fish is sufficient to allow the Recovery Program to continue to provide ESA compliance for water and power development.

Researchers will also conduct other studies related to endangered fish recovery this year. These include gathering data to complete estimates on the abundance of Colorado pikeminnow; monitoring floodplain habitat and sediment; and researching the life history of razorback suckers by studying the movement of larvae. In addition, hatchery-raised bonytails and razorback suckers will be stocked in sections of the Green, Gunnison and Colorado rivers to help reestablish populations.

All Recovery Program management actions are developed and implemented according to recovery goals that provide objective, measurable criteria for downlisting to “threatened” and delisting (removal from Endangered Species Act protection). Results of all actions are used to track progress toward achieving these goals, to assess the effectiveness of management actions and to adjust recovery efforts through adaptive management.

For more information, contact the Recovery Program at 303-969-7322, ext. 227, or visit the Recovery Program’s website at ColoradoRiverRecovery.fws.gov.

The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program is a cooperative partnership of local, state and federal agencies, water developers, power customers and environmental groups established in 1988 to recover the endangered fishes while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts.