

Change to Conservation Measure for the Razorback Sucker
Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program
Program Decision Document 11-002

Steering Committee Motion

The Steering Committee approves Reclamation's recommended changes to conservation measure RASU3 to:

RASU3 –Razorback sucker augmentation program. The LCR MSCP will provide a level of funding to support implementation of a stocking/augmentation program for the razorback sucker providing for the stocking of up to 660,000 subadult razorback suckers (at least 300mm in length) into the designated critical habitat for the species in Reaches 3, and in Reaches 4 and 5 of the LCR. The figure of 660,000 fish is not a target number for the LCR but represents an assumption (see RASU1) used to define the extent of funding that would be available, with the understanding that the adaptive management process (see 5.12.2.2) would guide the actual stocking program. The elements of the augmentation program divide the conservation efforts into the three reaches with numbers for fish per year per reach:

3.1 Implement an experimental augmentation, at a site(s) to be selected in cooperation with USFWS and state game and fish agencies, of 12,000 subadult razorback suckers each year for ten years (120,000 total augmentation,) and conduct intensive follow-up monitoring. When razorback sucker production capacity allows, razorback sucker production will be ramped up, with a target production of 120,000 300-mm subadult fish over a 10-year period (i.e. about 12,000 subadult fish per year). Of the 120,000 subadult fish, 6,000 300-mm fish will be stocked annually above Parker Dam and 6,000 300-mm fish below Parker Dam to facilitate maintenance of current juvenile and adult abundance. The augmentation program will also support maintenance and protection of the genetic diversity of existing populations in Lake Mohave (conservation measure RASU 4).

Current Conservation Measure

5.7.6.2 Conservation Measures (LCR MSCP 2004)

RASU3 –Razorback sucker augmentation program. The LCR MSCP will provide a level of funding to support implementation of a stocking/augmentation program for the razorback sucker providing for the stocking of up to 660,000 subadult razorback suckers (at least 300mm in length) into the designated critical habitat for the species in Reaches 3, and in Reaches 4 and 5 of the LCR. The figure of 660,000 fish is not a target number for the LCR but represents an assumption (see RASU1) used to define the extent of funding that would be available, with the understanding that the adaptive management process (see 5.12.2.2) would guide the actual stocking program. The elements of the augmentation program divide the conservation efforts into the three reaches with numbers for fish per year per reach:

3.1 Implement an experimental augmentation, at a site(s) to be selected in cooperation with USFWS and state game and fish agencies, of 24,000 subadult razorback suckers each year for five years (120,000 total augmentation,) and conduct intensive follow-up monitoring. When razorback sucker production capacity allows, razorback sucker production will be ramped up, with a target production of 120,000 300-mm subadult fish over a 5-year period (i.e. about 24,000 subadult fish per year). Of the 120,000 subadult fish, 6,000 300-mm fish will be stocked annually above Parker Dam and 6,000 300-mm fish below Parker Dam to facilitate maintenance of current juvenile and adult abundance. The augmentation program will also support maintenance and protection of the genetic diversity of existing populations in Lake Mohave (conservation measure RASU 4).

Justification

Approximately 2.5 million razorback suckers have been stocked into the LCR between Parker and Imperial Dams since 1983, including 80,000 since 2000. Subsequent monitoring conducted between January 2006 and April 2008 contacted 2281 fish (Schooley et al., 2008). After analysis of these data, a recommendation to suspend stocking of razorback suckers within the main stem LCR below Palo Verde Diversion Dam has been proposed to US Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game. Studies will be conducted to further define past stocking success and to evaluate limited stocking within several backwaters that are occasionally connected to the main stem during times of high flow.

Production capabilities have been limited due to several issues not anticipated during LCR MSCP planning, including quagga mussel infestation of the LCR and the detection of largemouth bass virus at several National Fish Hatcheries. Studies are underway to determine management actions to alleviate these conditions.

Once survival studies have been concluded and production issues have been resolved, the experimental stocking call for in Conservation Measure RASU 3.3 will be initiated. Reclamation fish biologists have recommended that the time period for experimental augmentation be increased from 5 years to 10 years to allow identified research to be completed. Total fish stocked will remain unchanged.

Literature Cited

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program. 2004. Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program: Volume II. Habitat Conservation Plan. Final. December 2004.

Schooley, J.D., B. R. Kesner, J. R. Campbell, J. M. Barkstedt, and P. C. Marsh. 2008. Survival of razorback sucker in the lower Colorado River, Final Report, January 2006 – April 2008. Arizona State University. 55 pp.