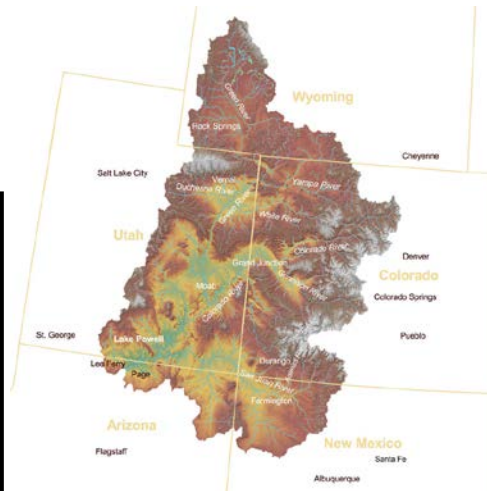


The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program



Bonytail Reintroduction Summary For Colorado Legislators as per HB00-1314 Prepared by Colorado Parks & Wildlife, 12/09/2011

Status and distribution:

Bonytail (*Gila elegans*) were once common in portions of the upper and lower Colorado River basins. Now the bonytail is the rarest of the endangered fish species in the Colorado River basin. Upstream of Lake Powell, this species is nearly extinct. Bonytail has been listed as endangered under Colorado law since 1976, and was given full protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1980. From 1990-2000, only a few bonytail were captured in the Yampa River in Dinosaur National Monument, in the Green River at Desolation and Gray canyons and on the Colorado River at the Colorado/Utah border and in Cataract Canyon. In the lower basin, bonytail exist in Lake Mohave and Lake Havasu. Use of hatchery fish will be necessary to establish new populations because of the rarity of these fish in the wild. Time to achieve recovery of the bonytail cannot be accurately estimated until self-sustaining populations are established through augmentation and habitat enhancement. Bonytail can grow to 22 inches and have been known to live nearly 50 years.

Recovery strategies:

Bonytail are being raised at the Mumma Native Aquatic Species Research Facility (NASRF) in Alamosa, Colorado and the Wahweap Hatchery in Utah. Populations are being reintroduced through stocking in the Colorado, Green and Yampa rivers.

Recovery goals:

Downlisting can occur if, among other stipulations, self-sustaining populations are maintained over a five-year period in the Green River and upper Colorado River sub-basins such that the trend in abundance of adult fish (age 4+; ≥ 250 mm total length) for each of the two populations does not decline significantly, recruitment of age-3 naturally-produced fish equals or exceeds annual adult mortality for each of the two populations, and the estimates for each of the two populations exceeds 4,400 adults. There are additional requirements for the lower Colorado River basin.

Bonytail stocking targets in Colorado:

Middle Green–Yampa Rivers (Dinosaur National Monument):

2,665 fish per year for six years composed of Age 2+ fish, 200mm in length

Colorado River (Palisade to Loma):

2,665 fish per year for six years composed of Age 2+ fish, 200mm in length

2008 Stocking:

A total of 4,900 bonytail (mean length=10 in.) have been stocked into the Yampa River in Dinosaur National Monument from Mumma NASRF as of September 30, 2008. An additional 4,181 young-of-year bonytail were placed in Butch Craig Pond (near Grand Junction, Colorado) for experimental purposes as a grow-out resource. A total of 3,244 bonytail were stocked in the Colorado River reach from ponds located at Trinidad State Junior College in November 2008.

2009 Stocking:

The CDOW stocked 2,576 bonytail (10”) into the Colorado River in the Grand Valley of Colorado on November 5, 2009. The fish were reared, PIT tagged, flow-conditioned, and transported to the stocking locations by the CDOW’s Mumma Native Aquatic Species Facility personnel. Fish were released into two stretches of river using two different methodologies. Approximately 1,576 bonytail were stocked by truck into a backwater habitat in Debeque Canyon almost 4.0 river miles upstream of the Government Highline Dam and Fish Ladder.

Approximately 1,000 bonytail were stocked by rafts into backwater and slackwater habitats; 500 fish were distributed within a 7-mile reach from Palisade River Bend Park to Corn Lake, and 500 fish were distributed within an 11-mile reach from Corn Lake to Blue Heron boat launch.

2010 Stocking:

The 2010 stocking of Bony tail Chubs occurred in two places, the first happened on June 17th into the Butch Craig Pond near Grand Junction, Colorado. Bonytail were stocked on September 23rd at 9.85 inches in length totaling 1,017 fish, the Butch Craig Pond is used for experimental purposes as a grow out resource. The other water stocked was the Green river stretch in Dinosaur National Monument off the boat ramp. The fish were 10.57 inches in length totaling 2,813 fish, the river fish were Pitt tagged and reared, flow conditioned and transported to the stocking locations by the CDOW's Mumma Native Aquatic Species Facility personnel.

2011 Stocking:

A total of 8,239 bonytail were stocked in 2011. The fish were reared, PIT tagged and flow-conditioned at Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Mumma Native Aquatic Species Facility, and transported to the stocking locations by facility personnel. Butch Craig Pond near Grand Junction was stocked with 1,237 bonytail (mean length=11.5 inches) on June 24. The Colorado River 4.0 river miles upstream of the Government Highline Dam and Fish Ladder was stocked on August 2, September 9 and October 18 with a total of 3,569 bonytail over the three dates (mean lengths 9.8 to 11.5 inches). On October 18, 600 bonytail were also stocked by raft into the Colorado River downstream of the Corn Lake boat ramp. 2,833 bonytail (mean length 9.8 inches) were stocked into the Green River from the Dinosaur National Monument boat ramp on November 3, 2011.

Water Management:

On January 21, 1988, a Cooperative Agreement was signed by the Secretary of the Interior and the Governors of Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. The Agreement was renewed in 2009 and extended through September 30, 2023. The purpose of the agreement is to jointly recover and manage the endangered fish species of the Upper Colorado River Basin and provide for new water development to proceed in the Basin. The Agreement includes stocking of native fishes as a major element of the recovery implementation program. Through 2011, the Upper Colorado River Basin recovery program provides ESA compliance for over 1,100 water projects in Colorado depleting more than 2.1 million acre-feet per year. No lawsuits have been filed on ESA compliance for any of these water projects.