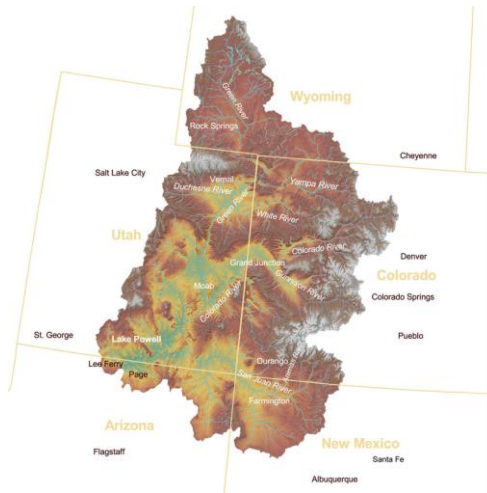


# The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program



## **2016 Bonytail Reintroduction Summary For Colorado Legislators as per HB00-1314 Prepared by Colorado Parks & Wildlife, 1/7/2017**

### Status and distribution:

Bonytail (*Gila elegans*) were once common in many warm-water 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 in the wild. Survival of stocked bonytail has been disappointing overall, however in 2016 young bonytail were collected in the wild. This is the first evidence that, despite relatively low survival, stocked fish are beginning to reproduce in the system.

Bonytail has been listed as endangered under Colorado law since 1976, and listed as federally endangered under the Endangered Species Act since 1980. From 1980-2000, 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, an unknown but small number of bonytail are believed to persist in Lake Mohave. The wild-spawned bonytail caught in 2016 were in Utah.

Stocking of hatchery-reared fish is necessary to establish new populations because of the extreme rarity of bonytail 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.

## Water development and endangered fish recovery:

On January 21, 1988, a Cooperative Agreement was signed by the Secretary of the Interior and the Governors of Colorado, Utah and Wyoming, wherein the signatories agreed to implement the Recovery Program for the Upper Colorado Endangered Fishes, including bonytail. 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, while enabling water development to proceed in the Basin. The Agreement includes stocking of native fishes as a major element of the recovery implementation program. Through 2015, the Upper Colorado River Basin recovery program provides ESA compliance for 1,216 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.

## Recovery strategies:

Bonytail are being raised at the Colorado Parks & Wildlife's 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 river basins.

## 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+;  $\geq 250$  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.

## 2016 Stocking:

6,027 bonytail were stocked in Colorado in 2016. 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. The Colorado River was stocked with 2,711 bonytail (mean length=12.7 inches), on August 10, 2016. These fish were released into backwaters in Debeque Canyon. The Yampa River was stocked in Dinosaur National Monument on September 9, 2016 with 2,796 bonytail (mean length=12.8 inches). Salt Creek (a tributary to the Colorado River) was stocked with 520 bonytail (mean length=13.5 inches), on November 6, 2016.