to reestablish populations in the Upper Basin; stocking goals were met or exceeded the past three years (Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program 2010). Since 1996, over 380,000 tagged bonytail subadults have been stocked in the Green and upper Colorado River subbasins.

To date, stocked bonytail do not appear to be surviving as well as stocked razorback sucker. Researchers continue to experiment with pre-release conditioning and exploring alternative release sites to improve their survival. Since 2009, an increasing number of bonytail have been detected at several locations throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin where stationary tag-reading antennas are used. During high spring flows in 2011, more than 1,100 bonytail (16.6% of the 6,804 stocked in early April of that year) were detected by antenna arrays in the breach of the Stirrup floodplain on the Green River. The Price Stubb antenna array on the Colorado River detected 138 bonytail between October 2011 and September 2013. The fish detected in fall 2011 had been stocked above Price-Stubb in Debeque Canyon, but in spring 2012, some of those fish were moving upstream through the fish passage.

BASIN-WIDE STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION

The bonytail was designated as an endangered species under a final rule published April 23, 1980 (45 FR 27710–27713). Reasons for decline of the species were identified as the physical and chemical alteration of their habitat and introduction of exotic fishes. The 1990 Bonytail Chub Recovery Plan further stated that the decline of the bonytail is attributed to stream alteration caused by construction of dams, flow depletion from irrigation and other uses, hybridization with other *Gila*, and the introduction of nonnative fish species. Hence, the primary threats to bonytail populations are streamflow regulation and habitat modification (including cold-water dam releases, habitat loss, and blockage of migration corridors); competition with and predation by nonnative fish species; hybridization; and pesticides and pollutants (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002a). No new threats have emerged since the 2002 recovery goals were published. The Service's status review of bonytail in 2012 (USFWS 2012a) reported that 72 percent of the recovery factor criteria (USFWS 2002d) have been addressed to varying degrees.

No known wild, self-sustaining populations of bonytail exist in the Upper Basin. Since listing, bonytail were stocked in the Upper Basin to augment populations, but recruitment and natural reproduction have not been documented. Recent recaptures of bonytail in the Green River a year after stocking provide promising results that individuals are surviving.

DESIGNATED CRITICAL HABITAT FOR LISTED COLORADO RIVER FISHES

HABITAT DESCRIPTION

In the Upper Colorado River Basin, portions of the White, Yampa, Gunnison, Green, Colorado, and San Juan Rivers and their 100-year floodplain are designated as critical habitat for one or more of the federally listed species described above. Critical habitat is defined as specific geographic areas, whether occupied by a listed species or not, that are essential for its conservation and that are formally designated by rule. In the State of Utah, immediately downstream of Wyoming, many of these critical habitat reaches overlap. Critical habitat for the humpback chub and bonytail are primarily canyon-bound reaches, while critical habitat for the

Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker include long stretches of river required for migration corridors and larval fish drift.

Concurrently with designating critical habitat, the Service identified primary constituent elements (PCEs) of the habitat. PCEs are physical or biological features essential to the conservation of a species for which its designated or proposed critical habitat is based on, such as: space for individual and population growth, and for normal behavior; food, water, air, light, minerals, or other nutritional or physiological requirements; cover or shelter; sites for breeding, reproduction, rearing of offspring, germination, or seed dispersal; and habitats that are protected from disturbance or are representative of the species historic geographic and ecological distribution.

The Service has identified water, physical habitat, and the biological environment as the primary constituent elements of critical habitat for listed Colorado River fish species (59 FR 13374). Water includes a quantity of water of sufficient quality delivered to a specific location in accordance with a hydrologic regime required for the particular life stage for each species. The physical habitat includes areas of the Colorado River system that are inhabited or potentially habitable for use in spawning and feeding, as a nursery, or serve as corridors between these areas. In addition, oxbows, backwaters, and other areas in the 100-year floodplain, when inundated, provide access to spawning, nursery, feeding, and rearing habitats. Food supply, predation, and competition are important elements of the biological environment.

HABITAT USAGE

The four listed fish species are adapted to a hydrologic cycle characterized by large spring peaks of snowmelt runoff and low, relatively stable base flows (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002b). High spring flows maintain channel and habitat diversity, flush sediments from spawning areas, rejuvenate food production, form gravel and cobble deposits used for spawning, and rejuvenate backwater nursery habitats (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002b).

Throughout most of the year, juvenile, subadult, and adult Colorado pikeminnow use relatively deep, low-velocity eddies, pools, and runs that occur in near-shore areas of main river channels (multiple references in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002b). Adults require pools, deep runs, and eddy habitats maintained by high spring flows. In spring, however, adults use floodplain habitats, flooded tributary mouths, flooded side canyons, and eddies that are available only during high flows (multiple references in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002b). Newly hatched larval fish drift downstream to backwaters in sandy, alluvial regions, where they remain through most of their first year of life (multiple references in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002b). Because of their mobility and environmental tolerances, adult Colorado pikeminnow are more widely distributed than other life stages.

Similar to Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker use a variety of habitats throughout their life cycle. Outside of the spawning season, adult razorback suckers occupy a variety of shoreline and main channel habitats including slow runs, shallow to deep pools, backwaters, eddies, and other relatively slow velocity areas associated with sand substrates (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002d). In spring and winter adult razorback sucker require deeper, low-velocity habitat, but are known to occupy shallow sandbars in summer (McAda and Wydoski 1980 in Zelasko et

al. 2009). Reproductive activities are believed to take place in off-channel habitats and tributaries because razorback sucker aggregations were reported in these areas. Off-channel habitats are much warmer than the mainstem river and razorback suckers presumably move to these areas for spawning and other activities, such as, feeding, resting, or sexual maturation.

Off channel and floodplain habitat is also important to young razorback sucker. After hatching, razorback sucker larvae drift downstream to low-velocity floodplain or backwater nursery habitat. The absence of seasonally flooded riverine habitats is believed to be a limiting factor in the successful recruitment of razorback suckers in their native environment. Starvation of larval razorback suckers due to low zooplankton densities in the main channel and loss of floodplain habitats which provide adequate zooplankton densities for larvae food is one of the most important factors limiting recruitment.

Unlike Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker, humpback chub show high site fidelity for canyon-bound reaches of mainstem rivers. Past captures of adults were associated with large boulders and steep cliffs. Reproductive habitat is not defined because although humpback chub are believed to broadcast eggs over mid-channel cobble and gravel bars, spawning in the wild has not been observed for this species. It is believed that upon emergence from spawning gravels, humpback chub larvae remain in the vicinity of bottom surfaces near spawning areas. As larval fish mature, backwaters, eddies, and runs were reported as common capture locations for young-of-year humpback chub.

While bonytail are closely related to humpback chub, their habitat usage may be slightly different. Bonytail are observed in pools and eddies in mainstem rivers, but recent information collected by the Recovery Program suggests that floodplain habitats may be more important to the survival and recovery of the bonytail than originally thought. Although spawning events in river habitat has not been documented, bonytail probably spawn in rivers over rocky substrates because spawning is observed in reservoirs over rocky shoals and shorelines. Recent hypotheses surmise that flooded bottomlands may provide important bonytail nursery habitat.

ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE

Regulations implementing the ESA (50 CFR 402.02) define the environmental baseline as the past and present impacts of all Federal, State, or private actions and other human activities in the action area, the anticipated impacts of all proposed State or Federal projects in the action area that have already undergone formal or early section 7 consultation, and the impact of State or private actions which are contemporaneous with the consultation process..

STATUS OF THE SPECIES IN THE ACTION AREA

While the Project occurs in Wyoming, depletions associated with the Project from Little Snake River, a tributary to the Green and Colorado Rivers, adversely affect all four endangered fish species within the Upper Colorado River Basin Recovery Unit. The use of water from the Upper Colorado River Basin affects the habitat quantity and quality downstream of the Project location, for many miles.

Within this Recovery Unit, specific recovery criteria are established for the Green River sub-basin for all four species, including population demographics. Self-sustaining and stable populations of these species in the Green River sub basin are required for full species recovery (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d). The entire length of the Green River and its 100 year floodplain are designated as critical habitat for at least one species between the Yampa River confluence and the Colorado River confluence (Federal Register: 59 FR 13374).

The largest, most productive and most robust population of Colorado pikeminnow occurs in the mainstem Green River (combining the lower Green River, Desolation/Gray Canyon, and middle Green River populations). Higher abundance of Colorado pikeminnow juveniles and recruits in the 2006 to 2008 sampling period is attributed to a relatively strong year class of age-0 Colorado pikeminnow produced in the lower Green River in 2000 (Bestgen et al. 2010). Length frequency histograms, especially in the Desolation-Gray Canyon and lower Green River reaches, indicate that abundance of Colorado pikeminnow recruits was much higher in period 2006 to 2008 than from 2000 to 2003 (Bestgen et al. 2010). The importance of Green River populations is also evident because increased abundance of adult Colorado pikeminnow in the White River and middle Green River through 2008 almost certainly derived from upstream movement (high transition rates) of large numbers of juvenile and recruit-sized Colorado pikeminnow that originated in downstream reaches of the Green River in 2006 and 2007 (Bestgen et al. 2010). Colorado pikeminnow spawn in two principal sites: Gray Canyon in the lower Green River, and the lower Yampa River (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002b).

The action area includes the largest concentration of razorback suckers in the Upper Colorado River Basin, found in low-gradient flat-water reaches of the middle Green River between and including the lower few miles of the Duchesne River and the Yampa River. Known spawning sites for razorback sucker are located in the lower Yampa River and in the Green River near Escalante Ranch, but other, less-used sites are probable, such as Desolation Canyon (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002d). Both Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker are migratory spawners, whose young emerge as larval fish from spawning locations and drift downstream. Because Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker spawning locations occur downstream of the Project, all life stages are present within the action area.

Humpback chub occur in Westwater Canyon, Desolation/Gray Canyons and Cataract Canyon, but not in other river reaches in the action area. Preliminary population estimates in 2002 approximate 2,000 to 5,000 humpback chub in Westwater Canyon, 1,500 in Desolation/Gray Canyons, and 500 in Cataract Canyon (USFWS 2002c).

Bonytail are so rare that it is currently not possible to conduct population estimates. However, the action area includes the middle Green River, which is part of the current stocking program area (along with the Yampa River in Dinosaur National Monument).

STATUS OF CRITICAL HABITAT IN THE ACTION AREA

The action area includes critical habitat units, which are identified as essential for the species' recovery (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d). While historical water depletions do not occur within all critical habitat units, historical changes in Green River and

Colorado River water volume have nonetheless affected critical habitat by changing the amount of water flowing into these designated habitat units. The action area includes critical habitat units on the mainstem Green River and Colorado River below the Green River confluence.

As previously described, all four of the listed Colorado River fish require the same Primary Constituent Elements (PCEs) essential for their survival. Water, physical habitat, and the biological environment are the PCEs of critical habitat. This includes a quantity of water of sufficient quality that is delivered to a specific location in accordance with a hydrologic regime that is required for the particular life stage for each species. The physical habitat includes areas of the Colorado River system that are inhabited or potentially habitable for use in spawning and feeding, as a nursery, or serve as corridors between these areas. In addition, oxbows, backwaters, and other areas in the 100-year floodplain, when inundated, provide access to spawning, nursery, feeding, and rearing habitats. Food supply, predation, and competition are important elements of the biological environment.

Historically, the Green River produced high spring turbid flows that maintained critical habitat by inundating floodplains, maintaining side channels, flushing fine sediment, and creating backwaters (Muth et al. 2000). However, with the completion of Flaming Gorge Dam in 1962, the mainstem Green River became highly regulated. The dam and reservoir physically altered the Green River and surrounding terrain and modified the pattern of flows downstream (Muth et al. 2000). Most notably, the construction of the dam created a fish passage barrier and transformed miles of riverine habitat into lacustrine habitat. These two changes isolated fish populations and decreased the amount of native habitat.

Operation of the dam also results in effects to native fish communities. Historically, water releases from Flaming Gorge Dam did not mimic natural flow patterns and introduced colder water into the river from the deep pool behind the dam (Muth et al. 2000). Alteration of the natural flow regime affects stream vegetation communities and channel morphology, which modify native fish habitat (Muth et al. 2000). Natural flow regimes may act as cues for important life history events, like spawning. Life history events are similarly affected by water temperature, with colder temperatures disrupting the temporal spawning regime of native fish.

Additionally, Flaming Gorge Dam created new water resource impacts, such as irrigation potential, municipal use, and recreational fisheries of introduced non-native species. Water storage provided by the dam allowed local communities to increase water usage for agriculture and municipal purposes. Increased water depletion from the Green River decreases native fish habitat and limits the amount of backwater nursery habitat for juvenile fish. Also, increased water supply for agriculture and municipal purposes increases the likelihood of degraded water quality from agricultural runoff (pesticides, fertilizers, etc.) and wastewater inputs.

All four federally listed species evolved in desert river hydrology, relying on high spring flows and stable base flows for habitat conditions essential to their survival (see Status of the Species and Critical Habitat). In addition to main channel migration corridors, Colorado pikeminnow, bonytail and razorback sucker rely on floodplain and backwater habitats for various stages of their life history. High spring flows also act as spawning queues. In contrast, humpback chub rely more on canyon-bound reaches with swift currents and white water.

Currently, two primary reaches of Colorado pikeminnow nursery habitat are present in the Green River system. The lower reach occurs from near Green River, Utah, downstream to the Colorado River confluence. The upper reach occurs from near Jensen, Utah, downstream to the Duchesne River confluence. Larvae from Desolation Canyon colonize flooded backwater areas in the lower Green River area. These backwaters are especially important during the Colorado pikeminnow's critical first year of life. The Project is located upstream of both nursery habitat reaches and floodplain habitat.

Bottomlands, low-lying wetlands, and oxbow channels flooded and ephemerally connected to the main channel by high spring flows appear to be important habitats for all life stages of razorback sucker. These areas provide warm water temperatures, low-velocity flows, and increased food availability.

Humpback chub occur in Desolation/Gray Canyons, and within the action area. Adults require eddies and sheltered shoreline habitats maintained by high spring flows. These high spring flows maintain channel and habitat diversity, flush sediments from spawning areas, rejuvenate food production, and form gravel and cobble deposits used for spawning. Flow recommendations were developed that specifically consider flow-habitat relationships in habitats occupied by humpback chub in the upper basin, and were designed to enhance habitat complexity and to restore and maintain ecological processes.

PRIMARY CONSTITUENT ELEMENT – WATER - The quality and quantity of water in the action area of the Green River has decreased from water projects, most notably Flaming Gorge Dam and the Central Utah Project. A number of tributaries to the Green River appear on the State of Utah's 303(d) list of impaired streams for various reasons (Utah Division of Water Quality 2004). Tributaries and sections of the Price, San Rafael, and Duchesne Rivers are listed for elevated salinity, TDS, and chlorides, as are portions of Ashley and Pariette Draw Creeks. Brush, Pariette Draw, and Lower Ashley Creeks are listed for elevated selenium. Willow and Indian Canyon Creeks are listed for elevated total dissolved solids. Ninemile Creek is listed for elevated temperature. Lake Fork Creek is listed for elevated sediments. Lastly, Pariette Draw Creek is listed for elevated boron. These elevated pollutants pose a risk to this PCE. As these tributares reach the main stem, these pollutants are introduced to the Green River as well. Currently the Green River acts as a dilution for these pollutants, as is evident by the Green River not appearing on the State of Utah's impaired water list. However, these pollutants still occur in the river and as new water depletions occur, these pollutants will be found in higher concentrations.

Large water diversion projects, large-scale agricultural water use, and climate change have all altered the water quantity in the Green River over the past 150 years. Most notably, Flaming Gorge Dam has altered the magnitude and timing of flows in endangered fish habitat. Peak spring flows in the Green River at Jensen, Utah, have decreased 13 to 35 percent and base flows have increased 10 to 140 percent due to regulation by Flaming Gorge Dam (Muth et al. 2000). However, since 2006 changes were made in the operation of Flaming Gorge Dam that provide flow and meet temperature requirements for native fish. The next major step in providing adequate habitat for the endangered fish is determining how to protect flows to consistently meet demands and endangered fish flow recommendations (see Flow Protection in the Green River,

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management are northern pike, smallmouth bass, walleye, and burbot (*Lota lota*). These nonnative fish species pose significant threats to the endangered fishes because of their high or increasing abundance and range expansion, their habitat and resource requirements overlap with those of the endangered fish species, and their predatory impact;

- Participating in the Flaming Gorge Technical Workgroup, which manages releases from Flaming Gorge Dam to benefit endangered fish species while meeting other legal purposes of the dam. This technical team establishes base flow and spring peak release criteria from Flaming Gorge that meet the Flow Recommendations (Muth et al. 2000); and
- Stocking of bonytail and razorback sucker into the middle and lower Green River.

FLOW PROTECTION IN THE GREEN RIVER - Recovery cannot be accomplished without securing, protecting, and managing sufficient habitat to support self-sustaining populations of the endangered fishes. Identification and protection of instream flows are key elements in this process. The first step in this process, identifying instream flows needed for recovery, was completed for the action area with the publication of the Flow Recommendations (Muth et al. 2000). However, there is no legal protection of flows in the Utah portion of the Green River. The process for meeting this recovery goal is ongoing, as described below.

Several approaches may be taken under Utah water law to protect instream flows, including: 1) acquiring existing water rights and filing change applications to provide for instream flow purposes; 2) withdrawing unappropriated waters by governor's proclamation; 3) approving presently filed and future applications subject to minimum flow levels; and 4) with proper compensation, preparing and executing contracts and subordinating diversions associated with approved and perfected rights.

Although Utah water law may not fully provide for all aspects of instream-flow protection, the State believes they can provide an adequate level of protection. Utah examined available flow protection approaches in the 1990's and determined that their primary strategy will be to condition the approval of presently filed and new applications, making them subject to predetermined streamflow levels. To accomplish this, the State Engineer adds a condition of approval to post-1994 water right applications above Jensen filed after the policy is adopted. The condition states that whenever the flow of the Green River (or other streams) drops below the predetermined streamflow level, then diversions associated with water rights approved after the condition is imposed are prohibited. Based on past legal challenges to the State's authority to impose conditions associated with new approvals, it was determined that this is within the authority of the State Engineer.

This approach does not specifically recognize an instream-flow right; however, it does protect the flows from being diverted and used by subsequently approved water rights. This approach was adopted as policy by the State Engineer. The policy requires that presently filed and new applications to be approved are subject to the summer and fall flow recommendations. As flow recommendations are finalized and accepted, Utah will review options for protecting the recommended flows. In 2009, Utah determined that the aforementioned "subordination" method of flow protection may not be feasible below Jensen. The Recovery Program's Water Acquisition Committee formed a task force to develop other options for protecting fish flows on the Green River. In 2010, modeling began (and is ongoing) to determine the volume of water

that would be needed to protect fish flow targets under current demands and projected future demands. Preliminary results of modeling indicate that under current and future demands the lowest flow years may not meet the flow recommendation targets in Reach 3 without additional protected volumes of water. The volume of water needed and flow protection are planned to be determined by 2017.

PARTICIPATION IN THE FLAMING GORGE TECHNICAL WORKGROUP - The Flaming Gorge Technical Working Group (FGTWG) was established pursuant to the Operation of Flaming Gorge Dam Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) as recommended in the Flow and Temperature Recommendations for Endangered Fishes in the Green River Downstream of Flaming Gorge Dam (Flow Recommendations) (Muth et al. 2000). Members of the FGTWG include biologists and hydrologists from the Recovery Program, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Western Area Power Administration. The Record of Decision on the FEIS clarified the purpose of the FGTWG as limited to proposing specific flow and temperature targets for each year's operations based on current year hydrologic conditions and the conditions of the endangered fish. The FGTWG was also charged with integrating, to the extent possible, any flow requests from the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) into the flow proposal so that Recovery Program research could also be facilitated. This process concurrently serves the informal consultation and coordination requirements of the ESA for the action agencies as committed to in the ROD.

Flaming Gorge operations greatly impact the hydrologic conditions found in the action area. The BOR sets Flaming Gorge releases to support target flows at the Jensen gauge (Reach 2 from the FEIS), which in turn substantially affect the flows at the Green River, Utah gauge (Reach 3). Recommended base flows in Reach 3 are measured immediately downstream of the Project; therefore adequate base flows in Reach 3 would support all Project features (water use, boat passage, fish passage, etc). However, BOR and the Service recognize that between Flaming Gorge and Green River, Utah, there are many stream miles, inputs and withdrawals, and disparate weather patterns. T herefore, BOR does not manage Flaming Gorge to attempt to meet Reach 3 targets; instead they assume that managing for Reach 2 targets should adequately meet Reach 3 targets. While meeting Reach 2 targets may not always cause Reach 3 targets to be met, water supplied for Reach 2 does support higher base flows in Reach 3. As long as hydrology and climatic patterns supply adequate runoff, continued cooperation between the FGTWG members to release adequate base flows for Reach 2 will support conditions at the Project area.

ENDANGERD FISH STOCKING - Each year tens of thousands of bonytail and razorback sucker are stocked into the main stem Green River. Two primary stocking locations are in the middle Green River near Ouray National Wildlife Refuge and in the lower Green River at Green River State Park. Stocking these fish in the main stem river is designed to supplement the population and eventually create a self-sustaining population.

EFFECTS OF THE ACTION

EFFECTS TO ENDANGERED SPECIES

The Project will adversely affect Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, bonytail, and humpback chub by reducing the amount of water in the river system upon which they depend by up to 650 acre-feet per year. The effects to all four species primarily result from the effects of the action upon their habitats. In general, the proposed action will adversely affect the four listed fish by reducing the amount of water available to them, increasing the likelihood of water quality issues, increasing their vulnerability to predation, and reducing their breeding opportunities by shrinking the amount of breeding and nursery habitat within their range.

Removing 650 acre-feet per year from the Colorado River Basin will alter the natural hydrological regime that creates and maintains important fish habitats, such as spawning habitats, and reduces the frequency and duration of availability of these habitats of the four endangered fish. The reduction of available habitats will directly affect individuals of all four species by decreasing reproductive potential and foraging and sheltering opportunities. Many of the habitats required for breeding become diminished when flows are reduced. As a result, individual fish within the action area may not find suitable breeding locations or will deposit eggs in less than optimal habitats more prone to failure or predation. In addition, reduction in flow rates lessens the ability of the river to inundate bottomland, a source of nutrient supply for fish productivity. Water depletions also exacerbate competition and predation by nonnative fishes by altering flow and temperature regimes toward conditions that favor non-natives.

The proposed depletions affect the water quality in the action area by increasing concentrations of heavy metals, selenium, salts, pesticides, and other contaminants. Increases in water depletions will cause associated reductions in assimilative capacity and dilution potential for any contaminants that enter the river. The Project depletions will cause a proportionate decrease in dilution, resulting in an increase in heavy metal, selenium, salts, pesticides, and other contaminant concentrations in the Colorado River system. An increase in contaminant concentrations in the river can result in an increase in the bioaccumulation of these contaminants in the food chain which could adversely affect the endangered fishes. Selenium is of particular concern due to its effects on fish reproduction and its tendency to concentrate in low velocity areas that are important habitats for Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

The proposed Project will affect the physical condition of habitat for the four listed fish by resulting in a reduction of water. This reduction will contribute to the cumulative reduction in high spring flows, which are essential for creating and maintaining complex channel geomorphology and suitable spawning substrates, creating and providing access to off-channel habitats, and possibly stimulating Colorado pikeminnow spawning migrations. Adequate summer and winter flows are important for providing a sufficient quantity of preferred habitats at a duration and frequency necessary to support all life stages of viable populations of all endangered fishes. To the extent that the proposed Project will reduce flows, the ability of the river to provide these functions will be reduced. This reduction of water affects habitat availability and habitat quality.

To the extent that it will reduce flows and contribute to further habitat alteration, the proposed project may contribute to an increase in nonnative fish populations. The modification of flow regimes, water temperatures, sediment levels, and other habitat conditions caused by water depletions has contributed to the establishment of nonnative fishes. Endangered fishes within the action area will experience increased competition and predation as a result.

EFFECTS TO CRITICAL HABITAT

All four of the listed Colorado River fish require the same primary constituent elements (PCEs) essential for their survival. Therefore, we are combining our analysis of all four species into one section. Because the amount of designated critical habitat varies for each of the four species, the amount of critical habitat will vary; however, the effects will be the same for all critical habitats within the action area.

Water, physical habitat, and the biological environment are the PCEs of critical habitat. This includes a quantity of water of sufficient quality that is delivered to a specific location in accordance with a hydrologic regime that is required for the particular life stage for each species. The physical habitat includes areas of the Colorado River system that are inhabited or potentially habitable for use in spawning and feeding, as a nursery, or serve as corridors between these areas. In addition, oxbows, backwaters, and other areas in the 100-year floodplain, when inundated, provide access to spawning, nursery, feeding, and rearing habitats. Food supply, predation, and competition are important elements of the biological environment.

Primary Constituent Element – Water

he subject action would deplete up to 650 acre-feet per year from the Colorado River Basin. Removing water from the river system changes the natural hydrological regime that creates and maintains important fish habitats, such as spawning habitats, and reduces the frequency and duration of availability of these habitats of the four endangered fish. In addition, reduction in flow rates lessens the ability of the river to inundate bottomland, a source of nutrient supply for fish productivity and important nursery habitat for razorback sucker. Water depletions change flow and temperature regimes toward conditions that favor nonnative fish, thus adding to pressures of competition and predation by these nonnative fishes as discussed above.

Changes in water quantity would affect water quality, which is a PCE of critical habitat. Contaminants enter the Colorado River from various point and non-point sources, resulting in increased concentrations of heavy metals, selenium, salts, pesticides, and other contaminants. Increases in water depletions will cause associated reductions in assimilative capacity and dilution potential for any contaminants that enter critical habitat in the Colorado River. The subject depletions will cause a proportionate decrease in dilution, which in turn would cause a proportionate increase in heavy metal, selenium, salts, pesticides, and other contaminant concentrations in the Upper Colorado River Basin, affecting water quality.

Primary Constituent Element - Physical Habitat

The subject action will affect the physical condition of habitat for the four listed fish by resulting in a reduction of water. This reduction will contribute to the cumulative reduction in high spring flows, which are essential for creating and maintaining complex channel geomorphology and

suitable spawning substrates, creating and providing access to off-channel habitats, and possibly stimulating Colorado pikeminnow spawning migrations. Adequate summer and winter flows are important for providing a sufficient quantity of preferred habitats for a duration and at a frequency necessary to support all life stages of viable populations of all endangered fishes. To the extent that the subject action will reduce flows, the ability of the river to provide these functions will be reduced. This reduction of water affects habitat availability and habitat quality.

Primary Constituent Element - Biological Environment

To the extent that it will reduce flows and contribute to further habitat alteration, the Project may contribute to an increase in nonnative fish populations. The modification of flow regimes, water temperatures, sediment levels, and other habitat conditions caused by water depletions has contributed to the establishment of nonnative fishes. Endangered fishes within the action area would experience increased competition and predation as a result.

CUMMULATIVE EFFECTS

Cumulative effects include the effects of future State, local, or private actions that are reasonably certain to occur in the action area considered in this biological opinion. Future Federal actions that are unrelated to the proposed action are not considered in this section because they require separate consultation pursuant to section 7 of the ESA. In Wyoming, most water depletions within the Colorado River Basin include a Federal nexus and will be addressed in future section 7 consultations.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing the current status of the Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, bonytail, and razorback sucker, the environmental baseline for the action area, the effects of the proposed action, and the cumulative effects, it is the Service's biological opinion that the Project, as described in this biological opinion, is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of endangered fish and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat.

INCIDENTAL TAKE STATEMENT

Section 9 of the ESA and Federal regulation pursuant to section 4(d) of the ESA prohibit the take of endangered and threatened species, respectively, without special exemption. Take is defined as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct. Harm is further defined by the USFWS to include significant habitat modification or degradation that results in death or injury of listed species by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding, or sheltering. Harass means an intentional or negligent act or omission which creates the likelihood of injury to wildlife by annoying it to such an extent as to significantly disrupt normal behavior patterns which include, but are not limited to, breeding, feeding, or sheltering. Incidental take is defined as take that is incidental to, and not the purpose of, carrying out of an otherwise lawful activity. Under the terms of section 7(b)(4) and section 7(o)(2), taking that is incidental to and not intended as part of the agency action is not considered to be prohibited taking under the ESA

provided that such taking is in compliance with the terms and conditions of this Incidental Take Statement.

Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, bonytail, and razorback sucker are harmed from the reduction of water in their habitats resulting from the subject action in the following manner: (1) individuals using habitats diminished by the proposed water depletions could be more susceptible to predation and competition from non-native fish, and (2) habitat conditions may be rendered unsuitable for breeding because reduced flows would impact habitat formulation and maintenance as described in the biological opinion.

Estimating the number of individuals of these species that would be taken as a result of water depletions is difficult to quantify for the following reasons: (1) determining whether an individual forwent breeding as a result of water depletions versus natural causes would be extremely difficult to determine; (2) finding a dead or injured listed fish would be difficult, due to the large size of the action area and because carcasses are subject to scavenging; (3) natural fluctuations in river flows and species abundance may mask depletion effects, and (4) effects that reduce fecundity are difficult to quantify. However, we believe the level of take of these species can be monitored by tracking the level of water reduction and adherence to the Recovery Program. Specifically, if the Recovery Program (and relevant RIPRAP measures) is not implemented, or if the current anticipated level of water depletion is exceeded, we fully expect the level of incidental take to increase as well. Therefore, we exempt all take in the form of harm that would occur from the removal of 650 acre-feet of water per year. Water depletions above the amount addressed in this biological opinion would exceed the anticipated level of incidental take and are not exempt from the prohibitions of section 9 of the Act.

The implementation of the Recovery Program is intended to minimize impacts of water depletions; therefore, support of Recovery Program activities by the BLM as described in the proposed action exempts the BLM and project proponent from the prohibitions of section 9 of the ESA. The BLM is responsible for reporting to the Service if the amount of average annual depletion is exceeded.

REASONABLE AND PRUDENT MEASURES

In addition to the conservation measures identified earlier in this document, we believe the following reasonable and prudent measures are necessary and appropriate to minimize the impacts of incidental take of Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, bonytail, and razorback sucker.

1. The BLM and Project proponents must implement a monitoring and reporting program to ensure that the annual depletion does not exceed 650 acre-feet and that the cumulative depletion for the Project does not exceed 9,750 acre-feet (i.e., 650 acre-feet for 15 years of development).

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

In order to be exempt from the prohibitions of section 9 of the ESA, the BLM and Project proponent must comply with the following terms and conditions, which implement the

reasonable and prudent measures described above and outline required reporting/monitoring requirements. These terms and conditions are nondiscretionary.

In order to implement a monitoring and reporting program:

1. The BLM and Project proponent will identify those wells pulling water from the Wasatch Formation within that portion of the Washakie Structural Basin that loses groundwater to the southeast toward the Little Snake River, a tributary of the Colorado River.
2. The Project proponent will regularly (e.g., quarterly) provide a written report of water withdrawn from the wells identified above.
3. The BLM will track annual and cumulative depletions and will work with the Project proponent to identify alternate water sources if depletions approach the amounts identified above in the reasonable and prudent measures.

REINITIATION NOTICE

This concludes formal consultation on the action outlined in the request. As provided in 50 CFR 402.16, reinitiation of formal consultation is required where discretionary Federal agency involvement or control over the action has been retained (or is authorized by law) and if: (1) the amount or extent of incidental take is exceeded, (2) new information reveals effects of the agency action that may affect listed species or critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not considered in this opinion, (3) the action is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an effect to the listed species or critical habitat not considered in this opinion, or (4) a new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the action.

We appreciate your efforts to ensure the conservation of endangered, threatened, and candidate species and migratory birds. If you have questions regarding this letter or your responsibilities under the Act, please contact Nathan Darnall of my office at the letterhead address or phone (307) 772-2374, extension 246.

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