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COLORADO RIVERKEEPER
Launches at Living Rivers

The international Waterkeeper Alliance of New York has selected Living Rivers to establish the first on-the-water advocacy and restoration program for the Colorado River watershed. With rafts, canoes and kayaks, Colorado Riverkeeper will be patrolling the watershed to better document the growing violations of federal environmental laws caused by dams, diversions and excessive water consumption, and use these findings to support litigation strategies.

Colorado Riverkeeper will also be mobilizing the basin's extensive commercial and private river running community to take part in advocacy programs to ensure enforcement of environmental laws and to return the natural ecological viability to the Colorado River watershed.

"We're delighted to have joined forces with Living Rivers to advance this rapidly growing model of river advocacy in the watershed that *National Geographic* described last month as one of the most troubled water sources in the world," said Robert Kennedy, Jr., president and founder of Waterkeeper Alliance. Since 1999 Waterkeeper Alliance has helped form a network of nearly 100 similar water advocacy programs in the US and abroad.

"Waterkeeper's arrival on the Colorado couldn't come at a better time considering the rapidly advancing decline of its unique desert river habitat," says John Weisheit, who will head up the Colorado Riverkeeper program for Living Rivers. "Their network's incredible track record of on-the-water advocacy and precedent-setting litigation on behalf of rivers and aquatic ecosystems across the country is something we fully plan to continue here on what has become the most developed river system in the country."

Colorado Riverkeeper's initial priority will be to complement the work Living Rivers is undertaking to document violations of the Endangered Species Act caused by the Colorado's system of more than 40 major dams. The Colorado River through Grand Canyon National Park will of course be a major priority. The river corridor's entire food web has been transformed, four of the eight native fish species are now extinct, and otters and muskrats can no longer survive.

"I first rafted the Grand Canyon nearly forty years ago, and am appalled that the US Bureau of Reclamation and other federal agencies have allowed the ecological integrity of this internationally acclaimed river corridor, and designated World Heritage Site, to be so severely devastated. Just like the return of the peregrine falcon and California condor to the Canyon's skies, it's now time to ensure the recovery of endangered species to the Canyon's river," adds Kennedy.

Colorado Riverkeeper launched its first patrols the week of October 7, with one traveling down the Colorado River through Grand Canyon and the other down the Green River through Canyonlands National Park and Cataract Canyon, finishing on Lake Powell reservoir. Overall, Living Rivers' Colorado Riverkeeper program will be establishing a network of patrols spanning over 1,000 miles, including sections of the Green, San Juan and Yampa Rivers, as well as the Colorado mainstem. To participate in the Colorado Riverkeeper program, including traveling on one of the patrols, contact John Weisheit at Living Rivers.

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HABITAT SECURITY
Back in Action for Native Fish

Living Rivers' Habitat Security Force was called into action again this month, challenging the Bureau of Reclamation's (BuRec's) misguided proposals for improving habitat conditions for native fish in Grand Canyon National Park and on the San Juan River below Navajo Dam. At meetings in Farmington, New Mexico and Flagstaff and Phoenix, Arizona, Living Rivers expressed concern that BuRec is continuing to demonstrate a lack of any serious interest in recovering endangered native fish in the Colorado River watershed.

Habitat Security's humpback chub pleads its case to Bureau of Reclamation personnel

As the only advocates for native fish amongst the 50 participants in the Farmington meeting, Living Rivers made it clear that nothing short of decommissioning Navajo Dam could yield any significant recovery. "This is nothing but make-believe," Living Rivers executive director Owen Lammers told the crowd. "The necessary distance in natural flowing river miles for native razorback suckers and Colorado pikeminnows no longer physically exists because of Navajo Dam upstream and Glen Canyon Dam downstream." The river current flushes any young native fish into Lake Powell, where they are consumed by non-native fish before having a chance to mature. Native fish either need the opportunity to spawn back in their native habitat above Navajo Dam, or Lake Powell must be drained for successful recovery to occur.

The majority of other remarks made at the hearing concerned impacts of any operational changes on the non-native recreational trout fishery below the dam. "The razorback sucker has lived here for thousands of years; it will figure out how to survive, but we need to protect the trout," one commercial fishing guide stated.

BuRec's Glen Canyon Dam public meetings in Phoenix and Flagstaff the following two days were huge blemishes for citizen participation. With barely one week's notice, and no advance copies of its environmental assessment available for the public to review, less than a dozen people not directly involved with BuRec's activities attended the combined meetings. "These meetings represented the first opportunity in years for the public to learn about and comment on BuRec's plans for Glen Canyon Dam and Grand Canyon, and they succeeded in doing everything possible to keep the public out," adds Lammers.

At issue were new flow recommendations from Glen Canyon Dam to help conserve sediment and disrupt non-native fish reproduction, so as to benefit recovery of the sole remaining population of humpback chub in Grand Canyon. BuRec is also planning to remove up to 20,000 non-native trout near the humpback chub rearing areas to reduce predation. With humpback chub populations down to just 2,000 fish, Living Rivers pointed out that such efforts are too little too late, and more aggressive measures need to be reviewed.

Somewhat surprisingly Randy Peterson, director for BuRec's Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program, was publicly combative toward Living Rivers representatives, stating, "Your rhetoric is not helpful...your views irrelevant," and "you should check your [dam decommissioning] baggage at the door." BuRec is clearly becoming increasingly frustrated with the growing public concern for its lack of progress, and its resistance toward doing the bare minimum as required by the Fish and Wildlife Service (see reverse side).

There is still time for the public to weigh in with written comment on both these issues until November 1, 2002. Contact Living Rivers or visit our website for details.

TEMPERATURE RISING

Modification Proposed for Glen Canyon Dam

In an attempt to finally honor the 1994 recommendations of the Fish and Wildlife Service concerning the endangered native fish in Grand Canyon, the Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec) is considering constructing a mechanism to increase the water temperature released from Glen Canyon Dam.

The purpose of this modification is to warm the water sufficiently to stimulate the reproduction processes of these desert fish in Grand Canyon National Park. The proposed temperature control device (TCD) would provide a mechanism to draw water from near the surface of the reservoir where the water is consequently warmer. When the TCD was first proposed in 1999, concerns were raised by the scientific community about how non-native fish (for example, striped bass) from Lake Mead or Lake Powell reservoirs could affect newly hatched endangered fish.

Another concern is that the warmer water will alter the food base. Glen Canyon Dam has changed the river's natural warm-water food base into an exotic, cold-water food base. It will take time for the ecosystem to respond to the warmer water, which could cause subsequent food shortages for the endangered fish.

There are a total of eight vertical intake tubes that feed water to the generators at Glen Canyon Dam. It has been proposed that five of the eight tubes be retrofitted to include a total of three intakes on each tube, the main intake 230 feet down, another near the top of the reservoir, and the third in between. The total cost is estimated at 60 million dollars. Environmental review is moving forward with a final decision to be made around October of 2003.

"We are confident that this experiment will work and I support this endeavor wholeheartedly," says Wayne Cook, executive director of the Upper Colorado River Commission. "The only way we will know that success can be achieved is to build the infrastructure and to see how the ecosystem responds. If it works, then the money was well spent."

Concerned citizens who have been monitoring the efforts to save Grand Canyon's endangered fish are not convinced that such an adaptive mitigation plan will work satisfactorily. Says David Haskell, former science director of Grand Canyon National Park, "The water temperature leaving the dam is 30 degrees below optimal for successful reproduction of endangered humpback chub. It is highly unlikely that the TCD, as envisioned by BuRec, will be able to raise the water temperature enough to benefit the survival of the chub. The time needed to design, build and test this device will take several years–years the humpback chub may not have."

Glen Canyon Dam intake towers to be modified

DAM FLOWS FAIL

To Help Grand Canyon Native Fish

In 1994 the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) recommended that Glen Canyon Dam be operated in a manner more consistent with the Colorado River's natural flow regime in order to protect native fish in Grand Canyon. The Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec) ignored these recommendations and implemented an operating regime that would provide greater benefits for hydroelectric power production. Now, in a new report released on September 30, 2002, FWS in association with Northern Arizona University again recommends the critical need for dam operators to heed FWS' 1994 recommendations.

Titled *Monitoring and Research: The Aquatic Food Base in the Colorado River, Arizona During 1991-2001* the 225-page report stated, "We recommend a decade of the Seasonally Adjusted Steady Flow alternative, with spring beach building flows as climate permits....We feel these flows in combination with alien fish suppression and thermal modification of GCD (Glen Canyon Dam) could make Grand Canyon a sanctuary for native fishes of the Colorado River basin."

BuRec claimed that its preferred operating plan, known as Modified Low Fluctuating Flows, would potentially generate a major increase in the Canyon's aquatic food base, but according to the report, this has not happened and, in fact, the food base is very unstable. "The food base responds negatively to peaking hydropower flows and therefore, this same response applies to native fish and their habitat."

With native humpback chub populations down 75 percent during the study period, it's quite clear that BuRec's efforts are failing. But despite this science-based validation of FWS's 1994 recommendations, no immediate actions by BuRec are being contemplated, just more experiments.

PIPELINE PROPOSED

To Divert Water from Grand Canyon

In early October, Arizona Senator John Kyl attempted, unsuccessfully, to secure Congressional authorization for the construction of a major pumping plant and pipeline from the Colorado River in Grand Canyon National Park. The water would principally be used to slurry coal from the Black Mesa coal mine on the Navajo and Hopi reservations to the Mojave Generating Station coal-fired powerplant near Laughlin, Nevada. Coal is presently being slurried from the mine with groundwater from the two reservations. This, however, is significantly depleting the drinking water resources for the Hopi tribe, which desires an alternative water source or mechanism to be used to transport the coal. While Kyl did not succeed during this session of Congress, the concept remains alive and well, as the Bureau of Reclamation told *Living Rivers Currents* that it was preparing a feasibility study for such a pipeline.

The proposed site of extraction, Jackass Canyon, lies eight miles below Lee's Ferry, where Grand Canyon river runners begin their expeditions. The facility would pump nearly 3,000 gallons per minute from the river, up 1,000 feet, and then eighty miles across the Navajo Reservation to the Black Mesa coal mine.

California condors can often be found perched on both sides of the Colorado River at its confluence with Jackass Canyon. Over the past decade public and private efforts have aggressively worked to maintain a successful reintroduction program for this endangered species. Jackass Canyon also contains one of the few sets of dinosaur tracks known to exist in Grand Canyon National Park. Despite these potential impacts, Senator Kyl's proposed legislation would have exempted this project from environmental review as required by the National Environmental Protection Act.

DESALTING PLANT

Future Still Uncertain

Since it was built in 1977, the Yuma Desalting Plant (YDP) has loomed as the primary threat to the Cienega de Santa Clara, a 14,000-acre wetland in the Colordo River delta that survives on agricultural runoff from the US. Now the Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec) is preparing a report to Congress, nearly two years overdue, regarding the fate of the desalting plant and, with it, the fate of the cienega.

The YDP has never been used due to high operating costs. Were it to be fired up, it would use and divert all the water that currently feeds the cienega. Presently, the costs are still too high to justify operation, even with the intense demand for water in the basin. BuRec itself estimates that desalting water at the YDP would cost an estimated $318 to $463 per acre foot. By comparison, subsidized farmers in the area pay as little as $3.50 per acre foot and most municipalities pay less than $70 per acre foot.

The first draft of BuRec's report recommends that the cienega's water be offset at this time with such options as: "leasing water from willing sellers, investing in advanced irrigation techniques to reduce use, or obtaining non-systems supplies from groundwater and other sources." Although fiscal concerns are the paramount reason for the recommendation, Living Rivers and other advocates have made the cienega enough of an issue that its survival is noted as a benefit to keeping the YDP mothballed. Living Rivers is also pointing out that decommissioning the plant altogether could save taxpayers an additional $5 million annually. BuRec is planning to incorporate this input into the next draft of its report.

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