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WATER REQUIREMENTS FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES IN NEW MEXICO RIO GRANDE SILVERY MINNOW

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ABSTRACT

The Rio Grande silvery minnow (silvery minnow) was federally listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act on July 20, 1994 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1994). The species is also listed by the State of New Mexico as an endangered species.

Historical populations of the silvery minnow were known to have occurred from Española, NM upstream from Cochiti Reservoir; in the downstream portions of the Chama and Jemez Rivers; throughout the Middle (NM) and Lower (TX) Rio Grande to the Gulf of Mexico; and in the Pecos River from Sumner Reservoir (NM) downstream to the confluence with the Rio Grande (TX) (Sublette et al. 1990, Bestgen and Platania 1991). The silvery minnow currently occurs in 170 miles (274 km) of the Rio Grande, from Cochiti Dam downstream to Elephant Butte Reservoir, comprising only five percent of its historic range.

The Federal listing of the silvery minnow, critical habitat designation, publication of the species' recovery plan, legal challenges to the critical habitat designation, the reproposal of critical habitat, legal challenges to the June 29, 2001 Biological Opinion, and the 2001/2002 drought have led to the silvery minnow being vilified or championed by a number of different groups and segments of the population of New Mexico. The species' biological needs cannot be disputed, however, one cannot view the species' needs in a vacuum. The species' needs are more properly examined in relation to the current natural conditions of its habitat (severe drought) and the needs of other species (including other aquatic and non-aquatic species and human considerations such as farming). The duty to conserve and ultimately recover imperilled species such as the silvery minnow is shared by all stakeholders, and this can only occur through collaborative efforts that involve and consider the many needs of the entire ecosystem.