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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Programs

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Although it varies from geographic to geographic area, roughly 70 percent of all wildlife are associated with riparian areas at some stage of their life cycle. They use these areas for food, security, shade, and water. Since all fish rely on aquatic habitats, there is a large preponderance of fish and wildlife that are associated with these green vegetated areas along rivers, streams, and lakes. Livestock are drawn to these areas for many of the same reasons as wildlife. People are also drawn to these areas for the recreational opportunities they provide.

Obviously as more and more people choose to live along the lakes, rivers, and streams, more conflicts arise between wildlife and people. I think that the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow probably best exemplifies the conflicts here in New Mexico. It is important to realize that New Mexico isn't unique. Whether it's Bull Trout in Montana, or Steelhead in

Idaho, or Silver Salmon in Oregon, or Lahontan Cutthroat in Nevada, all across the west there are controversial issues surrounding threatened or endangered aquatic species. A large percentage of native fish and aquatic species are either listed as threatened or endangered, or are on some type of state special status list right now because of the increasing demands placed on limited water resources.

The Endangered Species Act was created in 1973 to protect endangered species. From what I have read, people were killing each other over water at least 150 years before the creation of the Endangered Species Act. I think people sometimes lose their perspective when controversy occurs between wildlife and water on how controversial water issues have been and will continue to be without endangered species. Endangered species

conflicts are often the first sign of a limited resource being pushed to its limits.

Obviously it depends on climatic conditions, but even if there wasn't an Endangered Species Act and there wasn't a Rio Grande Silvery Minnow, it is likely that in New Mexico in three to five years we would be facing a lot of these same water conservation problems, but instead of wildlife vs. people, it would be people vs. people.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is an agency of about 7,500 employees nationwide and the mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

We do this through a system of fish and wildlife refuges; there are 520 nationwide and seven of those are in New Mexico. We have 130 national fish hatcheries, fish technology centers, and fishery resource offices of which there are four in New Mexico. There are 78 ecological services field offices in the United States with one in New Mexico.

Congress passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973. The Act was amended and re-authorized in 1978, in 1982, and again in 1988. Congress stated that the purpose of the Act was to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend, would be conserved.

Congress gave all federal agencies the responsibility to use their authority to carry out programs for the conservation of threatened and endangered species. Congress gave additional responsibilities to the Fish and Wildlife Service and to the National Marine Fisheries Service and, of course, here in New Mexico we only have the Fish and Wildlife Service. Those additional responsibilities include determining which species should be listed, delisted, or their status changed in some way. Also our responsibility is to designate areas of land termed critical habitat that are essential to the conservation of the species. And those of you who live in New Mexico have probably heard a lot in just the last week or so about critical habitat for the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow. The Service has been directed to re-look at that issue here in New Mexico. We are taking steps in that direction right now.

We are also responsible for the development of recovery plans for species that are listed as threatened or endangered, and a lot of our critical habitat

designations are based in part on those recovery plans. Our recovery plans are usually put together by a team of scientists and people who are knowledgeable about whatever the species in question.

We are required to consult with all federal agencies regarding the efforts of their actions on threatened and endangered species. And, of course, we are also mandated to enforce the prohibitions the Act put in place for endangered species. The Fish and Wildlife Service enforces the provisions of the Endangered Species Act through species listings and protection of habitats and insuring that the amount of harm that may come to individuals in a population is not so great that it will prevent the species from recovering to levels where the species can be delisted.

The Service makes every effort to do this with minimal impact on other federal agencies and private land owners while insuring the public's continued use of rivers like the Rio Grande and Pecos. It is really in everyone's best interest to conserve endangered species and wildlife in general but also to conserve water. And whether there is an Endangered Species Act or not, people living in arid regions have to learn to be more efficient in the conservation of water as more and more people move into the area and more and more demands are put on a very finite resource.

Thank you.