

White River Roundtail Chub Transfer

Once an abundant native fish in canyon-bound sections of large desert rivers and an important food source for early settlers, Roundtail Chub are endemic to the Colorado River basin, meaning that they do not naturally occur anywhere else in the world. Unfortunately, habitat loss from large dams and water diversions, as well as direct predation and competition from introduced nonnative fishes have been key factors in this species' decline throughout much of their native range. As a result, Roundtail Chub are currently listed as a Sensitive Species in Utah and neighboring states. Following the establishment of a conservation agreement and management plan for Roundtail Chub in 2006, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) has worked on numerous conservation measures with the goal of precluding federal listing of this species under the Endangered Species Act.

Despite UDWR's recent efforts to conserve existing populations, Roundtail Chub recruitment has not improved. Therefore, we have determined that a crucial step in conserving this species is to bring them into captivity to create what will be the very first off-site brood stock. There are many special considerations when working with a listed species, but we have secured an excellent location working with a landowner north of Vernal where we can transfer wild roundtails into a private pond where they will be free from the pressures of nonnative fish and hopefully reproduce more successfully. In future years, UDWR plans to repopulate historic areas throughout northeastern Utah from these offspring. Specifically, wild Roundtail Chub will be transferred from the White River, located in northeastern Utah, beginning in the fall of 2019 so they are ready to spawn in the spring of 2020.

To accomplish this, UDWR crews from Vernal, UT as well as several volunteers from other agencies, set out on a remote section of the White River where roundtails have been considered abundant in the past. From October 20-23, 2019 crews raft-electrofished nearly a 50-mile whitewater section of the White River from the Colorado/Utah state line to the Enron takeout in order to collect adult individuals to transfer to their new home located near Dutch Jon, UT. This method employs an appropriate amount of electrical current in the water to stun fish so they can easily be captured with handheld nets. Altogether, four large (12-16 inch range), healthy adults were collected and safely transported downriver over the course of this four day trip in a 400 quart fish tank with a sufficient oxygen supply. We were met at the takeout by another crew with a similar transport unit ready to drive to the new location approximately two hours away from the White River. All four individuals successfully endured the transport and happily swam away in their new home just before sunset on October 23rd!

Following this successful transfer, the first of its kind in Utah, we will sample the captive population in the summer and fall of 2020 to determine reproductive success and future stocking capabilities to bolster wild populations into the foreseeable future. Moreover, we will continue to add additional wild Roundtail Chub to this private pond during future projects to increase our captive breeding population and begin a multi-year regional stocking plan from there.

For any questions please contact:

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