

# COLORADO PIKEMINNOW

*Ptychocheilus lucius* (Threatened Colorado, Endangered Federally)



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**T**HE COLORADO PIKEMINNOW (formerly squawfish) is the largest North American minnow. These fish have been known to reach 6 feet in length and 80 pounds in weight, and they historically occurred in great numbers throughout the 1,700 miles of the Colorado River system from Green River, Wyo., to the Gulf of California, Mexico. In Colorado, pikeminnow are currently found in the Green, Yampa, White, Colorado, Gunnison, San Juan and Dolores rivers and attain lengths of about 36 inches. Adult fish may be greenish-gray to bronze colored on their backs and silver to white along their sides and bottoms. During spawning, their fins can take on an orange hue.

Colorado pikeminnow thrive in swift flowing muddy rivers with quiet, warm backwaters. The construction and operation of large dams contributed to their decline by lowering water temperatures, preventing spawning far downstream, and blocking migration up and downstream. Water diversions have further reduced their habitat. The introduction of non-native bait minnows and stocking of predatory game fish species, such as

northern pike, largemouth bass, sunfishes and catfishes, are suspected to have contributed to their decline. Passage around instream barriers is being restored in the Colorado and Gunnison rivers to reconnect Colorado pikeminnow with isolated upstream habitat. Recovery actions are underway in the Yampa, Colorado and Gunnison rivers to investigate the effectiveness of removal of non-native fish species on Colorado pikeminnow and other Colorado River endangered and native fishes. Restoration stocking to re-establish a population of Colorado pikeminnow in the San Juan River is ongoing.

Colorado participates in the federal recovery program in cooperation with the states of Utah and Wyoming, the Bureau of Reclamation, Western Area Power Administration, National Park Service, Colorado River Energy Distributors Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and nongovernmental environmental and water development groups. Within this program, Implementation, Management and Biology Committees propose and conduct recovery actions and management of the pikeminnow and the other three federally listed Colorado River fishes.