An Investigation into Unused Trophic Levels in Hatchery Ponds for the Production of Endangered Bonytail (*Gila elegans*)

Fiscal Year 2008 Final Report
Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program
Steering Committee Members

Federal Participant Group

Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Park Service
Bureau of Land Management
Western Area Power Administration

California Participant Group

California Department of Fish and Game
City of Needles
Coachella Valley Water District
Colorado River Board of California
Bard Water District
Imperial Irrigation District
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
Palo Verde Irrigation District
San Diego County Water Authority
Southern California Edison Company
Southern California Public Power Authority
The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

Arizona Participant Group

Arizona Department of Water Resources
Arizona Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.
Arizona Game and Fish Department
Arizona Power Authority
Central Arizona Water Conservation District
Cibola Valley Irrigation and Drainage District
City of Bullhead City
City of Lake Havasu City
City of Mesa
City of Somerton
City of Yuma
Electrical District No. 3, Pinal County, Arizona
Golden Shores Water Conservation District
Mohave County Water Authority
Mohave Valley Irrigation and Drainage District
Mohave Water Conservation District
North Gila Valley Irrigation and Drainage District
Town of Fredonia
Town of Thatcher
Town of Wickenburg
Salt River Project Agricultural Improvement and Power District
Unit “B” Irrigation and Drainage District
Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District
Yuma County Water Users’ Association
Yuma Irrigation District
Yuma Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District

Arizona Game and Fish Department

Native American Participant Group

Hualapai Tribe
Colorado River Indian Tribes
Chemehuevi Indian Tribe

Nevada Participant Group

Colorado River Commission of Nevada
Nevada Department of Wildlife
Southern Nevada Water Authority
Colorado River Commission Power Users
Basic Water Company

Native American Participant Group

Hualapai Tribe
Colorado River Indian Tribes
Chemehuevi Indian Tribe

Conservation Participant Group

Ducks Unlimited
Lower Colorado River RC&D Area, Inc.
The Nature Conservancy

Other Interested Parties Participant Group

QuadState County Government Coalition
Desert Wildlife Unlimited
Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

An Investigation into Unused Trophic Levels in Hatchery Ponds for the Production of Endangered Bonytail (*Gila elegans*)

Fiscal Year 2008 Final Report

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Multi-Species Conservation Program
Bureau of Reclamation
Lower Colorado Region
Boulder City, Nevada
http://www.lcrmscp.gov

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INTRODUCTION:
Dexter National Fish Hatchery and Technology Center (DNFH&TC) is located in the Pecos River Valley of southeastern New Mexico, 200 miles southeast of Albuquerque, 20 miles south of Roswell, and one mile east of Dexter on State Road 190. DNFH&TC is a US. Fish and Wildlife Service facility whose mission is to preserve broodstock and rear endangered fish species to meet recovery and implementation goals. Dexter has maintained a bonytail refuge population since 1981. This stock also serves as a genetic reserve population for captive breeding purposes. There are no other sources or spawning aggregations in any lake or stream and no other hatchery maintains BONY broodstock at this time. Given the age of the current broodstock, and the attrition rates over the past decade, Dexter built a new broodstock from 1999 to 2004. The new broodstock was first spawned in 2005 and currently contains 2,500 individuals. All production requests are met with offspring from this broodstock which is maintained in several ponds, due to its size. The DNFH&TC is actively propagating 7 other species of fish and maintaining refuge populations of an additional 9 species. During fiscal year 2008, 1.5 million fish were produced, cultured and stocked by the DNFH&TC; 245,000 of which were BONY, double the amount from the previous year’s stocking. These production commitments are anticipated to continue for the next 10 years. One of the limiting factors effecting BONY production is the lack of additional rearing space. This study begins to examine alternative rearing strategies for young of year BONY, including rearing young of year fingerlings with the parent fish and combining and rearing several cohorts together.

PURPOSE:
Under the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) Work Task C11, Bonytail Rearing Studies, the Bureau of Reclamation has been tasked to evaluate current and past attempts to rear BONY to 300mm in total length. This project will assist in identifying problem areas to be researched and evaluate cost-effective methods to reach and exceed the target stocking size.
OBJECTIVES:
Determine the effect that size variation amongst fish, cultured in the same pond may have on growth rate and survival of one year old BONY.

METHODS:
On April 4th, 2008 four 0.10 acre rubber lined ponds (8D, 9D, 10D and 11D) were prepared to receive 500 one year old BONY fingerlings each. This stocking density translates to 5,000 fish per surface acre. Standard fish culture methods were used which included the addition of super-phosphate and alfalfa pellets for phyto and zooplankton production, and filled with water two weeks prior to the addition of fish. BONY from the previous year’s study were measured and separated into two size groups. Fish greater than 99mm total length were placed in one group and wire tagged on the left dorsal area, while fish less than 99mm were placed in a second group and left untagged in order to distinguish between the study groups. A total of five hundred one year old BONY were stocked in all four ponds using different ratios of each of the two groups, Table 1. Two ponds received 500 fish per pond that were less than 99mm (mean total length of 83mm). One of the remaining two ponds was stocked with 300 BONY from the group that was less than 99mm and 200 from the group that was greater than 99mm (mean total length of 106mm). The final pond was stocked with 400 bonytail from the group that was less than 99mm and 100 fish from the group that was greater than 99mm.

Table 1. Ponds used and fish stocking rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pond #</th>
<th>Total fish stocked per pond</th>
<th># of fish &lt; 99mm in length</th>
<th># of fish &gt; 99mm in length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8D</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9D</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10D</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11D</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All four ponds were maintained using standard fish rearing protocols and the fish were fed a formulated Razorback diet at a rate of 2% of the total fish body weight per pond. On November 13th, 2008 the fish were harvested from the ponds and brought indoor for
enumeration, identification, and sorting. The fish were counted to determine survival, measured for growth and scanned to determine if they were wire tagged. Length and weight data were collected and total biomass and survival determined.

RESULTS:
A total of 1,906 BONY were harvested from the four study ponds in November of 2008 for a combined survival of 95%. Survival for wire tagged fish was 92% compared to 97% survival for non-wire tagged in the ponds with two size groupings of BONY as shown in Table 2. Survival from the ponds with only one size group was 96% and 97% respectively. Average length increase was 160mm for ponds with one size class of fish (70-90mm) and an average increase of 152mm in ponds with mixed size classes of fish (70-90mm, and 100-120mm) Table 3. Daily growth rates were calculated in millimeters per /day and was comparable amongst all ponds, tagged and untagged fish. Average growth per/day for fish in ponds 8, 10 and 11D averaged .72mm and .62mm in pond 9D. Average weight gain was comparable amongst all ponds and between treatments and calculated at .52 grams per/day.

Table 2. Percent survival for tagged and untagged bonytail stocked into Dexter ponds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pond</th>
<th>Tagged</th>
<th>Untagged</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8D</td>
<td>None tagged</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9D (two size groups)</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10D</td>
<td>None tagged</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11D (two size groups)</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Average increase in total length and condition factors between ponds of tagged and untagged BONY fingerlings stocked with two different size groups compared to ponds with one size group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pond</th>
<th>Tagged</th>
<th>Untagged</th>
<th>Average length increase</th>
<th>Condition factor (k)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8D</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>161mm</td>
<td>161mm</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9D (two size groups)</td>
<td>148mm</td>
<td>142mm</td>
<td>146mm</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10D</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>160mm</td>
<td>160mm</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11D (two size groups)</td>
<td>160mm</td>
<td>152mm</td>
<td>157mm</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION:
This is the final year of a three year study to investigate methods of rearing BONY to 300mm in total length. This year’s study differed from last years in that no adult BONY were used in the study and two different sizes of BONY were cultured together to try and determine if size variation amongst fish, effects growth rate and survival of one year old BONY. The increase in production commitments at the Dexter NFH&TC limited the amount of pond space available for this year’s research, thus limiting this project to four ponds with no replication of treatments. No significant differences in growth and survival between treatments (single size fish versus two sizes) were observed. Ponds that were stocked with only one size group of fish (less size variation), resulted in fish that were slightly larger in average total length, while ponds that had greater size variation (two size groups of fish) were slightly smaller. The pond that had the highest variation in size (pond 11D) had the lowest survival of 94%, however without replicating this treatment it cannot be determined if it was a result of the higher level of size variation or other factors. Nonetheless an argument can be made that grading fish which is a common practice in fish culture facilities, assists in increasing uniformity and growth of BONY.

BUDGET

Expenditure Breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Salaries</td>
<td>15,665.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>5,740.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish Feed</td>
<td>1,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish Culture Equipment &amp; Supplies</td>
<td>2,847.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% overhead</td>
<td>5,303.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$30,555.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>