



Rio Grande Silvery Minnow in the Big Bend Reach of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo



Photo: Jason Remshardt, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Photo: Ray Mathews, Texas Water Development Board

The Rio Grande silvery minnow re-establishment project is an excellent example of agencies and stakeholders working together toward a common conservation goal. The Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program in New Mexico through the Bureau of Reclamation contributes funding for our work to recover the silvery minnow in Big Bend. Cooperators in Texas and Mexico include Big Bend National Park, U.S. Geological Survey, International Boundary and Water Commission, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Water Development Board, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Farm Bureau, University of Texas–Pan American, El Carmen Land and Conservation Co., CEMEX, and Cuenca los Ojos Foundation, World Wildlife Fund, Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas, Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas, and Instituto Nacional de Ecología.

The Fish and Wildlife Service and our conservation partners are celebrating significant milestones in working toward the recovery of the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow. Until recently, the silvery minnow had not been seen where the river forms the border between the U.S. and Mexico since 1960. Beginning in 2008, the Fish and Wildlife Service has captively propagated and released approximately 1.4 million silvery minnows into the fish's historic range in the Big Bend reach of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo.

The results of this on-going recovery project include measureable improvement of the status of the fish in the wild. Scientists continue to find silvery minnows during quarterly monitoring near release sites. In 2010, scientists detected successful silvery minnow breeding in the Big Bend, including presence of eggs, larval fish, and juvenile fish.

In June 2011, the Fish and Wildlife Service and multi-agency crews documented that silvery minnows have dispersed 15 miles upstream and almost 70 miles downstream from release sites. The next release of approximately 267,000 silvery minnows in Big Bend will occur on October 24, 2011. We are excited about the continued success of this recovery project and are grateful for the contributions of our numerous partners.



Photo: Mike Bender, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



The silvery minnow is a small fish that was once one of the most abundant and widespread of the native fishes in the Rio Grande/Río Bravo and Pecos River. Historically, it existed in these rivers from northern New Mexico to the Gulf of Mexico. More recently, until reintroductions began in Big Bend, the fish had been confined to about seven percent of its historic range. Throughout its historic range, the decline of the silvery minnow has been attributed to modification of the river's flow regime, stream channelization, decreasing water quality and interactions with non-native species.

Photo: Mark Lockwood, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

During its various life stages, the silvery minnow uses relatively shallow, low velocity habitats with sandy and silty substrates, historically inhabiting a meandering river that included a diversity of aquatic habitats including side channels, oxbows, and backwaters.



Photo: Ray Mathews, Texas Water Development Board



Photo: Mike Bender, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Federal and state agencies and non-governmental organizations have come together from both sides of the border to improve the health and resiliency of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo ecosystem. In planning and implementing river rehabilitation projects to benefit riverside communities and native fish and wildlife, conservation partners know that to recover the Rio Grande silvery minnow, its home must become a healthier place to be with clean water and diverse habitat.

Utilizing assistance from the Commission for Environmental Cooperation and other conservation partners, the Big Bend Conservation Cooperative and the Big Bend-Río Bravo Initiative, led by

Department of the Interior and Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, will continue to advance conservation of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo, the silvery minnow, and other native fish and wildlife.

**For more information,
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October 14, 2011



Photo by Aimee Roberson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service