

**MWD**

METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

February 23, 1993

To: Board of Directors (Water Problems Committee--Information)*From:* General Manager*Subject:* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Proposal to Designate Critical Habitat for Four Endangered Species of Fish in the Colorado River BasinReport

The Federal Government has listed four fish species native to the mainstream Colorado River as endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. These fishes are the razorback sucker, Colorado squawfish, humpback chub, and bonytail chub. According to the federal findings, historically, these four species occurred throughout the Colorado River system from Wyoming to Mexico, but they are currently threatened with extinction due to the regulation of Colorado River flows, the introduction of nonnative fish, and the construction of dams and other facilities that have resulted in habitat loss. The listing obligates federal agencies, including the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, to insure that the actions they take, approve, or fund do not threaten the listed species. They must also consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) prior to taking, approving, or funding an action which could harm the listed species.

The Service, under court order, subsequently published a proposed rule for designating critical habitat for the endangered fish species in the Federal Register on January 29, 1993. Comments on this proposed rule will be accepted by the Service until March 30, 1993. Critical habitat is (i) the specific areas within the geographical area occupied by the species at the time it is listed, in which are found those physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the species and which may require special management considerations or protection and (ii) specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by a species at the time it is listed which the Secretary of the Interior determines are essential for the conservation of the species. The Service is proposing to designate a total of 2,094 miles of critical habitat along the Colorado River and other rivers in the Colorado River Basin for the

four Colorado River endangered fishes, including portions of Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California. In some cases, the critical habitat areas overlap (see attached map).

Conservation of the species will require the identification and management of water resources and habitat areas that are considered important, such as spawning areas and nursery grounds. By designating critical habitat, populations of these species could be reestablished in areas within their former range, thus encouraging maintenance of the current genetic pool.

The designation of critical habitat consists of three steps. The first is to make a biologically-based determination of potential critical habitat areas. The second step is to determine the impacts of the designation. The third step will be to decide which proposed areas, if any, should be excluded from critical habitat designation based upon economic or other relevant impacts and to determine the costs and benefits associated with the final designation. The Service is in the process of preparing additional documentation to accompany the proposed rule. This includes the biological support document, economic analysis, and a complete evaluation of the effects of the critical habitat designation.

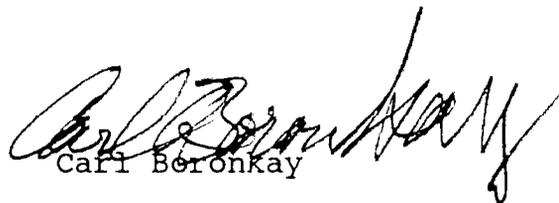
Since the review and evaluation phase of this process is not complete, it is not known at this time what effect the proposed rule for critical habitat may have on the operation of the Colorado River system reservoirs, power plants, and diversion facilities. Staff will closely monitor the Service's process, coordinate with the Colorado River Board of California, and submit comments as appropriate.

Board Committee Assignment

This letter is referred for information to the Water Problems Committee because of its authority to study and advise on the sources of importing water required by Metropolitan pursuant to Administrative Code Section 2481(a).

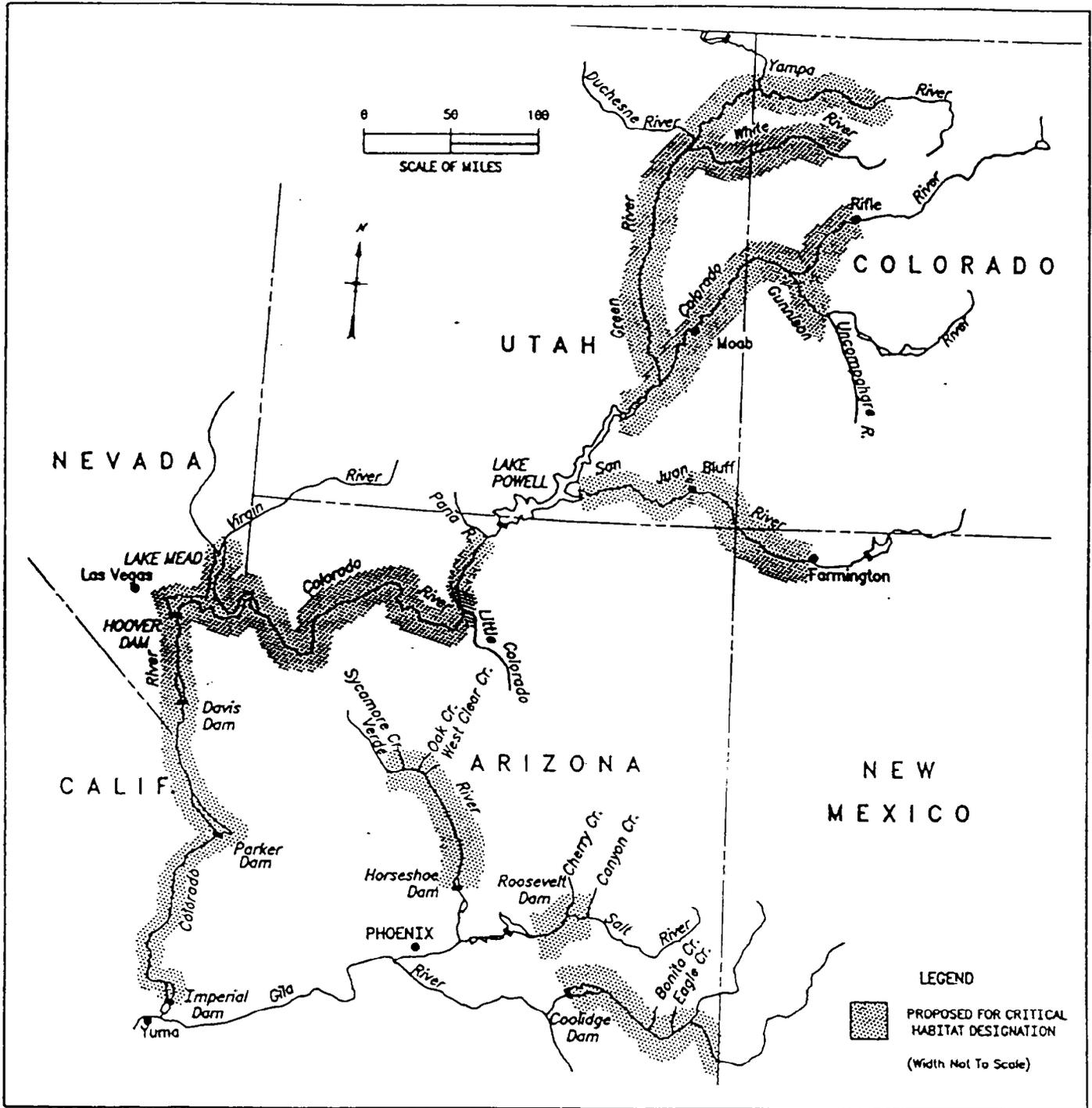
Recommendation

For information only.


Carl Beronkay

HMR:gn

Attachment



Proposed critical habitat for the razorback sucker, bonytail chub, Colorado squawfish and humpback chub.