



BENT'S OLD FORT

Fish

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RESOURCE BRIEF

Importance

Habitats for fish in the American Southwest include springs, seeps, perennial and ephemeral streams, rivers, playa lakes, and reservoirs. Freshwater fish are the most imperiled of the vertebrate groups in the U.S., and in the southwest the causes of imperilment include the construction of dams, loss and degradation of habitat, pollution, over-exploitation, and introduction of non-indigenous species. Most Great Plains fish species are generalists that use habitats and consume food in proportion to what is available. They are also well-adapted to dealing with flood and drought conditions.

Status and Trends

Potential fish habitat at BEOL includes the Arkansas River and several wetlands and ponds. Few inventories had been taken of vertebrate species, including fish, at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site (BEOL) prior to 2001. The Colorado Natural Heritage Program sampled for fish in the Arch Wetland and Day Pond in 2001, and the Bureau of Reclamation sampled in the Arch Wetland and Arkansas River (within the park) in 2005. In 2001, Plains killifish (*Fundulus zebrinus*), mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*), and green sunfish (*Lepomis cyanellus*) were captured at both Day Pond and the Arch Wetland, and the common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) was observed at Day Pond. At the Arch Wetland in 2005, the Plains killifish and mosquitofish were captured, as was the brook stickleback (*Culaea inconstans*). Nine fish species were recorded in the



PHOTO: JIM CUMMINS

Bluegill

Arkansas River in 2005: the mosquitofish, sand shiner (*Notropis stramineus*), red shiner (*Notropis lutrensis*), bullhead catfish (*Ameiurus* sp.), channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*), fathead minnow (*Pimephales promelas*), bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*), suckermouth minnow (*Phenacobius mirabilis*), and flathead chub (*Hybopsis gracilis*). The flathead chub is a state species of concern in Colorado.

Discussion

A total of 13 fish species have been detected at BEOL. The flathead chub is the only species of conservation concern recorded within the park to date. The Arkansas darter (*Etheostoma cragini*), a state-threatened and federal-candidate species, has not been found in the areas sampled at BEOL. Mosquitofish and bluegill are exotic species, but are not presently a threat to native species due to the health of the native populations. It is likely that additional species are present at BEOL, and did not get captured during sampling.



PHOTO: JOHN WOODLING

Flathead chub



Plains killifish

DRAWING BY: JOE TOMELLERI

