

Tiny Oregon minnow is first fish taken off endangered list

February 17 2015, byJeff Barnard



This undated photo provided by Freshwaters Illustrated via the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows an Oregon chub, right, swimming with baby salmon in the McKenzie River in Oregon. The tiny fish found only in Oregon has become the first fish in the country removed from Endangered Species Act protection because it no longer faces extinction. It was put on the endangered species list 22 years ago. (AP Photo/Freshwaters Illustrated via the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Jeremy Monroe)

A tiny minnow that lives only in backwaters in Oregon's Willamette Valley is the first fish to be formally removed from Endangered Species

Act protection because it is no longer in danger of extinction, officials said Tuesday.

The recovery of the Oregon chub was formally announced by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Deputy Regional Director Richard Hannan.

"With every species that is lost - be it a large, charismatic mammal or a little-known, 3-inch-long minnow - we leave our children and their children beyond a more impoverished planet, and deprive them of the benefits from healthy ecosystems with vibrant biological diversity," Hannan said in prepared remark at the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge outside Corvallis.

The refuge is one of 80 locations around the state harboring some of the 140,000 known Oregon chub. Hannan stood in for Director Dan Ashe, who could not leave Washington, D.C., due to a snowstorm.

The action came 22 years after the 3-inch-long fish was first listed as an endangered species, and five years after it was upgraded to threatened.

Paul Henson, state director for Fish and Wildlife, said the Oregon chub demonstrates that a lot of species can be brought back from the brink of extinction, if key needs are met, such as a safe place to live, even in an urban landscape.



This April 2008 photo shows an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist with a handful of Oregon Chub from a pond near Dexter, Ore. The tiny fish found only in Oregon has become the first fish in the country removed from Endangered Species Act protection because it no longer faces extinction. It was put on the endangered species list 22 years ago. (AP Photo/The Register-Guard, Chris Pietsch)

"This doesn't mean that all of a sudden it's hands off, and we never need to do anything for them," Henson said. "But we can at least put them back in the group of species that need attention, but don't need to go into the emergency room" of the Endangered Species Act.

The Oregon chub had practically disappeared from the Willamette Valley as the swampy backwaters and beaver ponds it depends on were drained to control flooding and create farms and cities over the past 150 years.

Those that survived became easy prey for non-native predators, such as bass and bullfrogs.

Restoring the chub has focused on working with private, tribal and public landowners to protect and restore ponds and backwaters the fish needs to thrive; transplanting fish to expand its range and population; protecting them from predators; and altering dam releases to resemble natural river flows.

"The story of the Oregon chub is a perfect example of how well this law works when listing's followed up with funding and on-the-ground action," Tierra Curry, senior scientist for Center for Biological Diversity, said in a statement, adding that recovery is not expected for the Florida panther until 2085.

Saving the chub faced fewer major obstacles than higher-profile species, such as salmon, which have been harmed by major economic forces, including logging, hydroelectric dams, and urban development.

John Auer, a financial adviser, said he was initially concerned when Oregon chub were found in a beaver pond on a 900-acre farm outside Monmouth that has been in his family since the end of World War II.

But it soon became clear that it was far enough from farming operations that it would not affect them. He added that he signed a safe harbor agreement with Fish and Wildlife, essentially requiring him not to poison the fish or fill in the pond.

The agency proposed the delisting a year ago after establishing 80 different populations around the Willamette Valley.

Formal notice the Oregon chub will be removal from Endangered Species protection is to appear in the Federal Register on Wednesday.

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