

**NEWS RELEASE**

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
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**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TO ESTABLISH CRITICAL HABITAT  
FOR RAZORBACK SUCKER**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials have until January 27, 1993, to propose habitat critical for the survival of the endangered razorback sucker, Ralph Morgenweck, Regional Director, Lakewood, said today.

The date was set by the U.S. District Court of Colorado following civil actions filed against the Service by several environmental organizations.

There will be an opportunity for public comment when the proposed rule for critical habitat is released, Service officials said.

Under the Endangered Species Act, critical habitat refers to the physical and biological features essential to the conservation of a listed species. It requires federal agencies to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service when an activity may cause adverse modification to any designated habitat.

The razorback sucker, a fish that evolved more than 4 million years ago is brownish-green with a yellow to white-colored belly and an abrupt, bony keel-edged hump on its back just behind the head. It can grow to more than 13 pounds and a length exceeding

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three feet. Once widespread throughout most of the Colorado River Basin from Wyoming to Mexico, the razorback is now found only in the upper Green River in Utah, the lower Yampa River in Colorado and occasionally in the Colorado River near Grand Junction. Small populations also exist in the Dirty Devil, San Juan and Colorado River "arms" of Lake Powell.

The largest population of razorbacks is found in Lake Mohave on the Arizona/Nevada border where 60,000 old adults exist, said Fish and Wildlife Service biologists. Another major population is in the upper Green River where there are approximately 1,000 fish. The only wild razorbacks left are 20 or more years old, say scientists working with these and other rare fish. Few young-of-the-year razorbacks have been found in the wild since the 1960's.

"We've never seen a juvenile razorback (1-5 years old) in the 11 years that we've been collecting fish," said John Hamill, Colorado River Endangered Fish Coordinator.

"During the last two years, the Service, with the help of state and private groups, has compiled a large file of information necessary to designate critical habitat for the sucker," Regional Director Morgenweck said. "The economic impacts connected with defining this habitat are not yet known, but as more data becomes available, the Service will revise the razorback's critical habitat in accordance with the procedures of the Endangered Species Act."

Biologists explain that research on the razorback sucker and other endangered fish in the Colorado River is unusually time consuming because of the steep canyon walls that make access to specific areas in the river difficult and because of the limited number of fish available for study.

The Service added the razorback sucker to the federal list of endangered species in October 1991.