

**Testimony of
Jimmy Hague, Senior Water Policy Advisor for The Nature Conservancy
Regarding H.R. 4465 “Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Extension Act of 2017”**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives**

December 6, 2017

Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing about two important fish recovery programs in the Upper Colorado River Basin. My name is Jimmy Hague, Senior Water Policy Advisor at The Nature Conservancy. I am here today to express the strong support of The Nature Conservancy for H.R. 4465, the Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Extension Act of 2017.

In addition to this testimony, I am submitting to the committee a letter from Taylor Hawes, director of The Nature Conservancy’s Colorado River Program, requesting your support for H.R. 4465.

The Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to the world’s toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. Working in all 50 states and 72 countries, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners, including farmers, ranchers, and other landowners. In the Colorado River Basin, this means working collaboratively to sustain healthy river ecosystems and the people that depend on them.

The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program (the “Programs”) are highly successful collaborative conservation partnerships involving the States of New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming, as well as Indian tribes, federal agencies, and water, power, and environmental interests. These Programs are recovering four species of endangered Colorado River fish so that they can each be removed from the federal endangered species list while still allowing water use and development in our growing Western communities. The Nature Conservancy is a proud partner in both Programs.

The Nature Conservancy (the Conservancy) is a long-standing member of the Upper Colorado River Program’s Management Committee and Biology Committee and the San Juan River Program’s Coordination Committee and Biology Committee. (The Conservancy shares

representation of environmental interests with Western Resource Advocates in the Upper Colorado River Program.) We have contributed more than \$1.5 million in capital funds for habitat restoration, joining the States of New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming, four Indian tribes, federal agencies, and water and power interests in sharing the costs of recovery and compliance.

The Programs are successful because all 19 member organizations are fully committed to recovering the federally listed, warm-water, native fish species that depend on the Colorado River system: the Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, razorback sucker, and bonytail. The members demonstrate our commitment by sharing the costs of the Programs, and by engaging fully in the collaborative process, including consensus-based problem-solving. The Programs are characterized by a culture of respect, science-based decision making, and earnest collaboration toward shared objectives. The Conservancy has supported the recovery Programs for more than 30 years by providing technical (biological, ecological, and hydrological) and legal expertise, field project support (for example, design and implementation of three phases of habitat restoration along the San Juan River), and private fundraising to match public funds.

We are participants in the Programs because they support the recovery of endangered, native fish in the Upper Colorado River Basin through improved management of federal dams, river and floodplain habitat restoration, active native fish stocking, and the control of non-native fish species. The Programs have recovery goals that provide objective, measurable criteria for downlisting and delisting the species, including numeric population goals and a set of specific recovery activities. These goals allow the Programs to monitor progress towards achieving recovery, to assess the effectiveness of management actions, and to adjust recovery efforts through adaptive management.

The collaborative Programs for endangered fish recovery enable water development and management to take place in the Upper Basin in compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), interstate compacts, and state water laws. The Programs also provide ESA compliance for continued operation of federal water and power projects in the Upper Basin. Since 1988, the two Programs have provided ESA Section 7 compliance without litigation for over 2,500 federal, tribal, state, and privately managed water projects across the Upper Colorado River basin depleting more than 3.7 million acre-feet of water per year—including those projects that supply water to our growing Western cities.

It is critical to both species recovery and water development that the authority to use Colorado River Storage Project hydropower revenues for annual base funding be extended through 2023. Without the passage of H.R. 4465, annual base funding for the Recovery Programs—which is also cost-shared pursuant to ongoing agreements by states, tribes, and water users—would be cut by almost 40 percent starting next year.

These funds provide for instream flow identification, evaluation, and protection; habitat restoration and maintenance; management of non-native fish impacts; endangered fish

propagation and stocking; research, monitoring, and data management; public information and involvement; program management; and operation and maintenance of millions of dollars of capital projects, including fish screens, fish passages, and reservoir improvements.

The current level of annual base funding is approximately \$8.2 million. The substantial reduction of this revenue that would occur without extended authorization would halt important recovery actions for both Programs. Such a cut would put at risk the substantial progress we have made over three decades of collaboration to restore healthy populations of these native fish species. It would also create uncertainty with respect to ESA compliance for the millions of agricultural, industrial, and municipal water users who rely on steady supplies from the Colorado River and its tributaries.

Because extending the Programs' authorization to use these hydropower revenues is critical to recovery of the four endangered species, the Nature Conservancy strongly urges your support for H.R. 4465.

Thank you, Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Attachment: Letter from Taylor Hawes, Colorado River Program Director at The Nature Conservancy, in support of H.R. 4465, the Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Extension Act of 2017, dated December 4, 2017.