MX MISSILE SYSTEM Americ Currents

AN URGENT LETTER FROM THE DESERT FISHES COUNCIL

Desert Fishes Council
P.O. Box 276
Death Valley, California 92382
December 18, 1979

"Dedicated to the Preservation of America's Desert Fishes"

Dear NANFA Members:

All of you who attended the annual syMposium in Death Valley last month will recall the concerns voiced by those involved with the fishes of Nevada and Utah with regards to the MX Missile System. More information has recently come to our attention that makes us realize that aquatic and terrestrial systems throughout much of central and southern Nevada and the west central portion of Utah are in grave peril.

As a brief review, the MX System is a Department of Defense project that when completed will cost in excess of $33 billion. It has been called the largest public works project ever attempted by mankind. The system will include 200 "racetrack loops" each 20 to 30 miles long and featuring 23 missile launch sites spaced every 7,000 feet. In addition to the loops, construction will include 5,000 to 8,000 miles of highways, an undetermined length of railroad to connect and service all loops and communities to accommodate a 10,000- to 15,000-person work force and their families at three different sites. These communities will include the schools, warehouses, churches and businesses typical of most western towns. These facilities will be primarily located on the floors of 30 to 40 valleys through mid-Nevada and mid-western Utah and use groundwater systems as their primary construction and municipal water sources. At the termination of the system's 20-year life expectancy, the entire project and all associated facilities will be completely abandoned.

Until recently no one has fully realized the project's magnitude. However, it was finally driven home when newspapers published maps showing where the Air Force is planning to construct racetracks and the number of affected native fish was tallied. A list of those fish in their respective valleys is included in this letter; notice that it includes many of Nevada's endemic fish! Additional fish, more distantly removed from the project area, will be secondarily influenced by the creation of nuclear waste disposal sites and the removal of vast quantities of groundwater. A list of those species is also included. A large number of rare and endemic plant species will be similarly impacted in this region.

Construction and groundwater removal are not the only threats facing these aquatic habitats. The abrupt increase in human population projected for this area indicates that the aquatic systems may be additionally impacted and abused by ORVers and other recreationists. Clearly, these habitats are, in extreme jeopardy..

Congress has not completely authorized funding for this project at this time; however, test facility construction at Vandenberg AFB has been authorized and is proceeding. Even though Congress has not finally approved the project, the Air Force is proceeding with their plans to begin construction on the major MX project in early 1982.

This short time frame is of paramount concern to those people interested in the primary and secondary impacts the project will have on the area's biological resources because there is so little time allotted for appropriate biological data to be collected. Furthermore, the Air Force is seriously considering asking Congress to exempt MX from all environmental laws. As you can imagine, these actions (or lack of) would be environmentally catastrophic.

Therefore, the desert aquatic systems need your help to:

1. Write and ask Congress and the President how such an environmentally unsound defense alternative could have been chosen and;

2. Demand Congress to ignore the Air Force petition to exempt MX from the environmental laws.

Sit down immediately and write your Congressman and the President! The Air Force is moving all too quickly for us to delay. The Great Basin Desert and its aquatic and terrestrial habitats need your help like never before.

Sincerely,

(signed)
Peter G. Sanchez
Chairman

Fish Directly Influenced by MX

NEVADA

Big Smoky Valley
- *Rhinichthys osculus lariversi*, Big Smoky Valley speckled dace
- *Gila bicolor* ssp., Two undescribed subspecies

Grass Valley
- *Rhinichthys osculus reliquus*, Grass Valley speckled dace - possibly extinct

Diamond Valley
- *Gila bicolor obesus*, Lahontan tui chub (aberrant form)
- *Rhinichthys osculus robustus*, Lahontan speckled dace (aberrant form)

Monitor Valley
- *Rhinichthys osculus robustus*, Monitor Valley speckled dace (aberrant form)

Newark Valley
- *Gila bicolor newarkensis*, Newark Valley and tui chub

Fish Creek Springs
- *Gila bicolor euchila*, Fish Creek Springs tui chub

Clover Valley
- *Rhinichthys osculus oligoporus*, Clover Valley speckled dace

Independence Valley
- *Rhinichthys osculus lethoporus*, Independence Valley speckled dace
- *Gila bicolor isolata*, Independence Valley tui chub

Railroad Valley
- *Crenichthys nevadae* ssp., Locke's Ranch springfish
- *Crenichthys nevadae* ssp. Duckwater springfish
- *Gila bicolor* ssp., Eight undescribed subspecies

Steptoe, Goshute, Butte, and Ruby Valleys
- *Relictus solitarus*, Relict dace

White River Valley
- *Crenichthys baileyi* ssp., Preston springfish
- Rhinichthys *osculus velifer*, White River speckled dace
- *Pantosteus intermedius*, White River Mountainsucker
- *Lepidomeda albivallis*, White River spinedace

Pahranagut Valley
- *Gila robusta* jordani, Pahranagut rountail chub
- *Lepidomeda altivelis*, Pahranagut spinedace - possibly extinct
- *Crenichthys baileyi* ssp. Southern springfish

Muddy Valley
- *Moapa coriacea*, Moapa dace
- *Gila robusta* ssp.

Reese River Valley
- *Salmo clarki henshawi*, Lahontan cutthroat trout

Meadow Valley Wash
- *Lepidomeda mollispenis pratensis*, Big Spring spinedace

Spring Valley
- *Empetrichthys latos latos*, Pahrump killifish (refuge population)
- *Relictus solitarus*, Relict dace (refuge population)

UTAH

Throughout Mid-west Portion
- *:otichthys phylegethontis*, Least chub

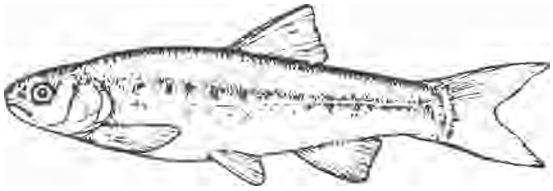
Species Secondarily Influenced by MX

Death Valley System
Cyprinodon diabolis, Devils Hole pupfish
Cyprinodon nevadensis pectoralia, Warm Springs pupfish
Cyprinodon nevadensis mionectes, Ash Meadows pupfish
Rhinichthys osculus nevadensis, Amargosa speckled dace
Cyprinodon nevadensis amargosae, Amargosa River pupfish
Cyprinodon nevadensis nevadensis, Saratoga Springs pupfish

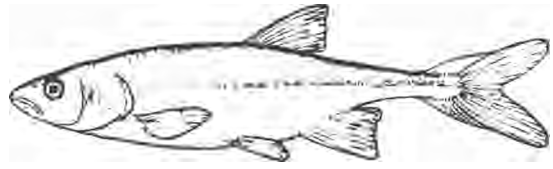
Black Rock Desert
Eremichthys acros, desert dace

Summit Lake Area
Salmo clarki henshawi, Lahontan cutthroat trout

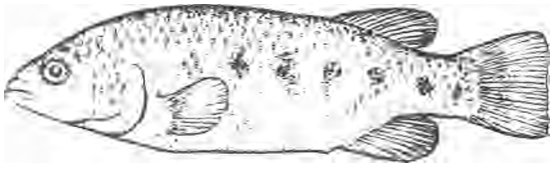
MIDDLE COLORADO SPINEDACE,
Lepidomeda mollispinis Miller and Hubbs.



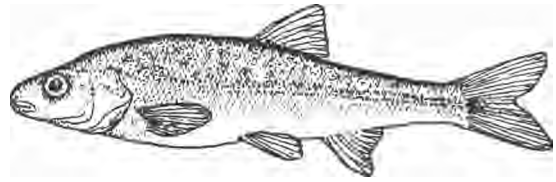
ROUNDTAIL CHUB,
***Gila robusta* Baird and Girard**



RAILROAD VALLEY KILLIFISH,
Crenichthys nevadae Hubbs. Single row of spots on sides. Railroad Valley, Nevada.



MOAPA DACE, *Moapa coriacea* **Hubbs and Miller.**



All illustrations from *How to Know the Freshwater Fishes* by Samuel Eddy and James C. Underhill, 3rd edition, 1978. This is the "bible" of native fish watchers. The editor of AMERICAN CURRENTS recommends that all members have a copy at hand. Order directly from the publisher: Wm. C. Brown Co., Publishers, 2460 Kepber Blvd., Dubuque, Iowa 52001. Prices with postage: cloth $10.95; paper $8.95 (includes postage). Don't forget to mention NANFA when you write.

THE DESERT FISHES COUNCIL

BY E. P. PISTER

The Desert Fishes Council, established in 1970 and dedicated to the preservation of America's desert fishes, was the outgrowth of deep concern over the serious threat to native fishes of the Death Valley region, California-Nevada. Of primary interest then were the pupfishes of the genus *Cyprinodon*, especially the unique Devils Hole pupfish *(C. diabolis)*, an endangered species. Annual symposia to discuss these problems have been held in Southwestern states each year since 1969. The basic purpose of the Council is to provide for the exchange and transmittal of information on the status, protection, and management of the desert fishes and their habitats.

Since the early symposia, interests of the group have expanded far beyond the Death Valley area to include all of the American deserts of the Southwestern states and Mexico, including the Colorado River basin and its former (Pleistocene) tributaries. By dividing these arid regions into 12 areas, each with a responsible coordinator, the Council is performing with increasing effectiveness in determining which fishes are endangered or threatened, establishing "recovery teams" for those that are most critically threatened, and implementing the recommendations for restoration of these desert fishes and their habitats. Membership in the Council currently exceeds 300 persons and comprises a nationwide and international representation of federal, state, and university scientists and resource specialists, members of conservation organizations, and individuals concerned with long-term environmental values.

Much of the work of the Desert Fishes Council during the first three years of its existence is summarized in a paper by its first Chairman and current Secretary, E. P. Pister--"Desert Fishes and Their Habitats," published in the Transactions of the American Fisheries Society in 1974 (103: 531-40). The organization is pleased with the progress made to date, and with the widened public realization of the value of native desert fishes and their habitats, but it is fully cognizant of the need for constant vigilance and for persistent pursuit towards the achievement of its goals.

During the period of November 15-17, 1979, the Council met for its Eleventh Annual Symposium at National Park Service headquarters, Furnace Creek, Death Valley National Monument. In attendance were nearly 200 individuals representing 24 universities located in Mexico, New Mexico, California, Arizona, Oregon, Texas, Nevada, Michigan, Oklahoma, Utah, and Colorado; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Utah, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, California, Oregon, and Washington, D.C.; the U.S. Forest Service in California and Arizona; the state fish and game agencies in Nevada, California, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah; the Bureau of Land Management in California, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Colorado; the Water and Power Resources Service in California, Nevada, and Colorado; the National Park Service; six environmental consulting firms; two California regional water quality control boards; and ten different public utilities, museums, and private conservation and research groups. At the symposium 28 technical and research papers were presented; reports were given on native ichthyofaunal research and management programs being conducted by the various agencies; reports were presented by the 12 Great Basin area coordinators and recovery teams operating therein; the current status of the Endangered Species Act was explained by Dr. Jim Williams of the Washington Office of Endangered Species, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and field trips were made to desert fish habitats in Nevada's Ash Meadows and Railroad Valley. Major concern was expressed concerning the potential devastating effect of the proposed MX Missile Defense System upon aquatic ecosystems within much of the Great Basin, and this concern was emphasized in one of 13 resolutions passed at the Council's business meeting.

Increasing involvement of Mexican biologists in the affairs of the Council, and the plight of Mexico's desert fishes caused the Council to issue future symposium proceedings with Spanish abstracts of the various technical presentations. It was decided at Death Valley that the 1980 symposium would be held during November at the University of Neuvo Leon in Monterrey. The meeting was enormously valuable from the standpoints of species management *per se* and interagency (and international) communication and coordination.

E. P. Pister
Desert Fishes Council
407 West Line Street
Bishop, CA 93.514

Phil Pister is Secretary of the *Desert Fishes* Council and a *biologist with the California Fish* and *Game Department. If you would* like to join the *Council please write to the above address. --Editor*