Corps and minnow meet again

Accounting of events and photos by Champe Green, Senior Ecologist, Albuquerque District

It's 5:15 a.m. as three Corps employees rub their eyes and gulp coffee to clear away the fog of sleep while they head down to the Isleta Reach of the Rio Grande, Sunday, August 12.

Justin Reale and Philip Alarcon from Logistics Management, and Champe Green from Environmental Studies knew the night before that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) and New Mexico Fishery Resources Office had requested assistance from the Corps to rescue and salvage a number of Rio Grande Silvery Minnow from isolated and drying pools in the channel bed of the now broken Rio Grande.

Justin Reale and Phillip Alarcon from Logistics Management seine an isolated pool containing Rio Grande Silvery Minnow during a river recession along the Rio Grande.

In tow, behind their Corps' Tahoe, is a shiny new all terrain Polaris Ranger UTV on its maiden trip to the mud and sands of the renowned river. The machine, purchased by Albuquerque District's Operations Division would assist them in meeting the Corps' responsibility in the collaborative minnow rescue and salvage effort.

Under the 2003 USFWS Biological Opinion (BO) on the Effects of Actions of Water and River Maintenance Operations by the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), and the Corps on the Middle Rio Grande, New Mexico, the BO's term and condition specifies that the Corps and USBR will assist in seining isolated pools during river recession.

As the Corps team meets up with the USFWS team, a swarm of UTVs quickly head up river to the first drying pools they encounter. Just as the sun slowly rises above the Monzano Mountains, four by 10 foot seine nets are unrolled and dragged over the soft bottom of the pools with minnow being quickly extracted from the net and placed in an oxygenated and cooled fish tank for transport.

A typical seine haul of the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow

Before the long day is over, countless dozens of seine hauls would produce 213 adult and young endangered fish, rescued and relocated to reaches that do not dry. Over the course of the next five days, other District employees, Erica Quinn from Planning Branch, and Clint Moore from Hydrology and Hydraulics would join the effort. By week's end, nearly 1,600 endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow would be rescued and salvaged from the drying pools.

The rescue and salvage efforts continue until the irrigation season ends in the fall, or sooner if monsoonal rains make the river whole again. Overall, the District's efforts this year to collaboratively support the rescue and salvage of the federally endangered Rio Grande Silvery Minnow from the drying reaches of the Rio Grande were a success.

Thanks to other District employees who helped with this year's salvage effort: Ben Bowline from Construction Contracts, Lorenzo Santana from Hydrology and Hydraulics, Don Gallegos from Reservoir Control, Sarah Gallegos from URGWOM, and Mathias Mayerhofer from Cost Engineering.