

Project gives fish way to go up a creek

The Arkansas darter and flathead chub will be protected under plan.

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COURTESY PHOTO/COLORADO SPRINGS UTILITIES -- A fish passage, such as the one shown above, will be constructed at a Colorado Springs Utilities diversion on Fountain Creek to evaluate the performance of two threatened species.

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THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

A \$282,000 project will help create a fish passage on Fountain Creek at a Colorado Springs Utilities diversion that will improve habitat for two threatened fish species.

The project at Colorado Springs' Clear Spring Ranch, located near Pikes Peak International Raceway, will benefit the Arkansas darter and flathead chub, which are listed as threatened or of concern under the Endangered Species Act.

The fish passages are strategically placed rocks that provide the fish shelter as they make their way upstream, said Carol Baker, Fountain Creek watershed planning manager for Colorado Springs Utilities.

"The project will identify for the first time fish performance curves for the Arkansas darter and flathead chub and will establish fish passage design criteria for plains fish species," Baker said.

The fish passages will also demonstrate how similar projects should be constructed on Fountain Creek and elsewhere in the state, Baker said. "Little is known about the biology of these fishes, including their swimming and jumping performance," said Gregory Gerlich, aquatic section manager for the state Division of Wildlife. "This information is critical to the design of a fish passage."

Pat Edelmann of the Pueblo office of the U.S. Geological Survey agreed, saying the timing of flows and size of barriers have to be considered in evaluating fish habitat.

“To reduce the level of uncertainty, individual species have to be evaluated for swimming performance and jumping ability,” Edelman said.

The project also ties in with ongoing studies of 16 species of fish in Fountain Creek by Colorado State University-Fort Collins, said professor Christopher Myrick, who is leading the project.

“In my view, the construction of a fish passage at Clear Springs Ranch diversion dam on Fountain Creek had the highest potential benefit to a state listed species of any future project we identified within the Fountain Creek watershed,” said Champe Green, senior ecologist with the Army Corps of Engineers.

The project also is part of the list of conditions Colorado Springs agreed to for a 1041 land-use permit with Pueblo County for the Southern Delivery System.

SDS is a \$1 billion-plus project that includes a pipeline through Pueblo County and would fill future water needs for Colorado Springs, Fountain, Security and Pueblo West.

Other improvements will also be made at Clear Springs Ranch, including channel realignment, wetlands preservation and trails as part of the commitments. The area is a demonstration project in the Fountain Creek Corridor Master Plan, a joint effort of Colorado Springs and the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District.

Colorado Springs will pay \$118,500 of the total cost, with \$70,000 coming from a grant approved last month by the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

Other sponsors are CSU-Fort Collins, \$40,000; Lower Ark, \$10,000; USGS, \$17,000; Corps of Engineers, \$12,300; Colorado DOW, \$14,500.

The Fountain Creek Foundation will provide assistance in planning the project as well.

The project itself is expected to be completed in 2010.