

# Nearly extinct June Sucker now making a comeback at Utah Lake

Ten years ago, the total population of the June Sucker fish (found only in Utah Lake) was fewer than 1,000. “Extinction of the species was a looming possibility,” says preservationist Michael Mills. Today, with the help of the [June Sucker Recovery Program](#) by way of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, that number is approaching a quarter of a million. Not enough to go unprotected just yet. But that’s the goal. “We are working towards getting the June sucker off the endangered species list and that will probably be the ultimate definition of success,” says Mills.

The decision to take the species off the list resides with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the primary administrators of the Endangered Species Act. But while the additional stock of June Suckers are impressive, there’s still a problem. “Even though we have June sucker spawning in Utah Lake tributaries and producing millions of larval suckers, few of those naturally spawned suckers survive to become adults,” explains Mills. “When we reach the point of getting naturally produced and recruited adults, we will have overcome one of the big obstacles preventing recovery of the species.”

Where do all the new adults currently come from then? Incubators at the Red Butte Reservoir and the Springville fish hatchery. Once the suckers reach adulthood, they’re released into the Lake. “Thanks largely to a successful hatchery and refuge program that has produced over 200,000 June sucker to stock into Utah Lake since 2004, extinction of the species has been averted. Combined with projects that have put water back into the Provo River, restored the delta area at Hobbie Creek, and [carp removal program](#), we are reaching a point where we are seeing success in a variety of areas.”

In addition to recovery of the June sucker, Mills and his team have a second goal of ensuring the continued use and development of area water projects, including the federal Central Utah Project. “In order to deliver the full amount of water to residents of the Wasatch Front, significant progress towards recovery of the June sucker must be made.” Otherwise, the federal government could penalize the Wasatch Front’s share of water access if it doesn’t comply with the Endangered Species Act in protecting the June sucker, says Mills.

“In a way, as the recovery program is successful each year the Wasatch Front continues to receive its full water supply (from the Central Utah Project),” says Mills. “Since the inception of the program, the delivery of water has not been impacted.”

But the \$54 million dollar project is a lot more than just saving the sucker and securing access to water rights. It benefits the entire community, says Mills. “Our actions to improve the Utah Lake ecosystem extend far beyond the June sucker,” he says, noting the Hobbie Creek restoration and carp removal programs as recent successes that help boost public recreational use in addition to preservation.

“The Endangered Species Act is more than saving individual species,” concludes Mills. “It is about restoring the ecosystems on which those species depend. As we work toward a better Utah Lake, we will see benefits to all the residents of Utah Valley.”