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A Pre-Holiday Stocking for Fossil Creek: Threatened Loach Minnow and Spikedace Return

PHOENIX, *Ariz.*— Fossil Creek in central Arizona got an early Christmas present this year with the stocking of native loach minnow and spikedace. The Arizona Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Center for Biological Diversity participated in the first of several stockings last Friday.

Since the return of flows to the river subsequent to the decommissioning of the Childs and Irving power plants by the Arizona Public Service Company in 2005, Fossil Creek has been making a dramatic recovery. The additional water has increased the amount of pools and backwaters preferred by some native fish species, making this one of the most important places in Arizona for the recovery of native fish.

A fish barrier was constructed, and nonnative fish were removed from the creek just prior to the return of flows. Once the exotics were out, the natives — including roundtail chub, headwater chub, desert sucker, Sonora sucker, speckled dace and longfin dace — were put back. Plans were drawn up to reintroduce several other desert native fish species that are on the brink of extinction.

The first reintroduction was the loach minnow and spikedace. Other native fish, including razorback sucker, Gila topminnow, desert pupfish, and longfin dace, are also on the list for stocking. All of these fish species receive special protections under the Endangered Species Act except for the longfin dace, which, while not listed, has suffered sharp population declines in the creek.

“Fossil Creek is truly one of the most spectacular natural places in Arizona and extremely important for protecting and recovering native fish populations that are spiraling toward extinction. This place offers them hope,” said Michelle Harrington, rivers conservation manager for the Center for Biological Diversity. “It is particularly important now that visitors to the creek respect it as a nursery and place of recovery.”

The Center and other conservation groups recently requested that the U.S. Forest Service step up its level of management and enforcement in the area to address the pressures of visitation and recreation.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a nonprofit conservation organization with more than 35,000 members dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

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