

Native fish returns to Victor Valley

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APPLE VALLEY — A small, endangered fish that has disappeared from the Mojave River seven decades ago will return to the Victor Valley area this fall in a refuge to be constructed at the Lewis Center.

The day when the Mohave tui chub, which disappeared because of predators and hybridization, might return to the actual river remains unknown.

The new refuge is the product of several years of work by students and a teacher at the Lewis Center. Employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the state Department of Fish and Game praised the center for bringing the project to fruition.

Mohave tui chub are humble looking fish, but they can grow to a foot long and live up to 36 years, said Steve Parmenter, a senior fishery biologist with the California Department of Fish and Game.

A recovery plan written in accordance with the Endangered Species Act calls for six refuges to be created before the Mohave tui chub can be downlisted from endangered to threatened, said Judy Hohman, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife office in Ventura.

“That will get us closer to our goal of downlisting the chub,” she said.

The three existing refuges are at China Lake, Camp Cady and Lake Tuendae in the Mojave National Preserve.

The fish cannot be removed from the endangered species list until it is returned to the river, a proposition that is unlikely to happen anytime soon because of the many non-native predators still in the waters of the Mojave River, said Parmenter.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is contributing \$25,000 from its budget to the Lewis Center refuge, Hohman said.

Students and teachers at the Lewis Center will be contributing elbow grease and working to get the community involved, said Matthew Huffine, the middle and high school science coordinator at the Lewis Center.

“Efforts like these only really take off when the community gets involved,” said Huffine, who needs help with fencing, grading and signage.

The Lewis Center has a small pond where the fish will be released this fall, until the larger pond can be built.

Students at the Lewis Center will be involved with experiments related to Mohave tui chub recovery and water quality. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service generally does not manage land, so finding areas 'for refuges can be difficult, Hohman said.

“We continue to look for more sites where we could put this fish,” Hohman said. “We would like to downlist it and eventually take it off the list.”

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