

Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans

H. R. 4465 “Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Extension Act of 2017”

Testimony of
Andrew J. Colosimo
Colorado Springs Utilities

December 6, 2017

Thank you Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the House Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans for the opportunity to testify in support of H. R. 4465 the “Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Extension Act of 2017”. I would also like to thank Representative Curtis for introducing this important piece of legislation.

My name is Andrew Colosimo, the Government Affairs Manager for Colorado Springs Utilities. As a community-owned, four service municipal utility, our focus is providing safe, reliable, competitively-priced electric, natural gas, water and wastewater services to our citizen owners and customers.

The Colorado Springs Utilities water system serves over 470,000 people across a 200-square mile service area. The water system includes 25 reservoirs, 38 storage tanks, 6 water treatment facilities and over 2,000 miles of water mains. Source water is diverted from over 100 miles outside the City.

Colorado Springs is not located on a major river, it must rely on water delivered from distant watersheds. Currently, between 60 and 70 percent of the Utilities’ water supply originates from the first use and subsequent reuse of water obtained from Colorado River headwaters through four transbasin diversions. These supplies are transported into the Arkansas River Basin and delivered to storage and treatment facilities via four raw water pipeline systems.

We, along with other Colorado Front Range water providers including Denver and Aurora, serve about 80 percent of Colorado’s population and economy. About 72 percent of this supply comes from the Colorado River Basin. As a result, Front Range water providers have a large stake in the future of the Colorado River. Our water diversions from the Colorado River Basin link us to the Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Recovery Program.

Colorado Springs Utilities is also linked to this program because we are a preference power customer of the Reclamation’s federal Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP) by virtue of our firm electric service contract with the Western Area Power Administration. Approximately ten percent of our power comes from this cost-based and reliable source of energy. The remainder

of our power comes from local generation including coal, natural gas, local hydropower generation and renewable energy sources. Colorado Springs Utilities delivers federal hydropower allocations to many of our local military installations including Peterson Air Force Base, the Air Force Academy, Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station and Fort Carson. Ensuring electric reliability and resiliency for our military customers is of utmost importance to Colorado Springs Utilities.

The Recovery Programs are a proven federal/non-federal collaborative program that provide Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance for over 2,320 water projects that withdraw about 3.7 million acre feet annually, including those belonging to Colorado Springs. The goals of the programs are to recover four endangered fish species – the humpback chub, razorback sucker, bonytail chub and the Colorado pikeminnow – while continuing operations and development of water projects in the Upper Colorado River and San Juan River basins, and operation of the Flaming Gorge Dam and Aspinall Unit facilities of the CRSP.

The programs operate in accordance with state water laws, tribal laws, and interstate compacts. There has been no taking of water from any water user or Reclamation contractor. The programs allow the Federal government to fulfill its Indian trust responsibilities in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. It is also important to note that no lawsuits have been filed on ESA compliance for any water project under the programs.

Colorado water users have been involved in protecting endangered fish on the Colorado River since 1983 when the Colorado Water Congress established the Special Project on Endangered Species. The initial objective was to develop administrative solutions to potential conflicts between water development/management activities and protection of endangered species in the Colorado River basins.

These initial efforts led to the Recovery Programs that were established through Cooperative Agreements among the Upper Basin States of Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Wyoming and federal agencies in 1988 for an initial 15-year period to recover four species of endangered fish in the Colorado and San Juan River Basins. In August 2009, the Cooperative Agreements were extended through 2023. The Colorado Water Congress continues to support this program today.

We appreciate the support that Congress has provided to this program since 2000 when legislation (P.L 106-392) was passed which authorized a \$100 million capital improvement program. The legislation required “matching funds” for the capital program so that, in the event State funding for the program ceased, so too would power revenue funding. CRSP power revenues funded \$17 million of the Program capital features.

The 2000 law also authorized the use of CRSP power revenue for “base funding” of activities including operation and maintenance of capital features, and recovery actions other than capital projects, including monitoring and research, and program management.

Since passage of P.L.106-392, CRSP power revenues have provided over \$67 million to the Upper Colorado Recovery Implementation Program and \$32 million to the San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program. The CRSP power customers through the participation of the Colorado River Energy Distributors Association (CREDA) also continue to support this program.

Water and power interests recognize that the Recovery Programs are an excellent model of federal/non-federal collaboration. Continuation of annual base funding from CRSP hydroelectric power revenues at currently authorized levels is essential for the programs to provide continuing ESA compliance and to assist in recovering the endangered fish species in the two basins.

Water and power customers strongly support this legislation and encourage timely passage of HR 4465 that will extend authorities and obligations contained in Public Law 106-392. We are grateful for the past support of the Subcommittee which has allowed these nationally-recognized endangered species recovery programs to accomplish their important objectives.

Continuing the Recovery Programs through fiscal year 2023 will allow our community along with many others the certainty needed to provide dependable water supply to our citizen owners. We are encouraged by some positive progress toward down and de-listing species and look forward to continuing to work with the federal government, the states and other partner agencies on Program objectives.