

Lower Rio Grande River – Aquatic Species & Habitat

Edward J. Enriquez

Warmwater Fisheries Biologist

New Mexico Department of Game & Fish

The Lower Rio Grande



Historic Fish Assemblage (LRG)

American Eel*
Blue Catfish
Bluegill
Blue Sucker*
Fathead Minnow
Flathead Catfish
Flathead Chub
Gizzard Shad
Longnose Dace
Longnose Gar*
Red Shiner
Rio Grande Silvery Minnow*
River Carpsucker
Shovelnose Sturgeon*
Smallmouth Buffalo
Western Mosquitofish



Modern Fish Assemblage (LRG)

Extirpated Fish Species (no longer found in the Lower Rio Grande River)

American Eel
Blue Sucker
Longnose Gar
Rio Grande Silvery Minnow
Shovelnose Sturgeon

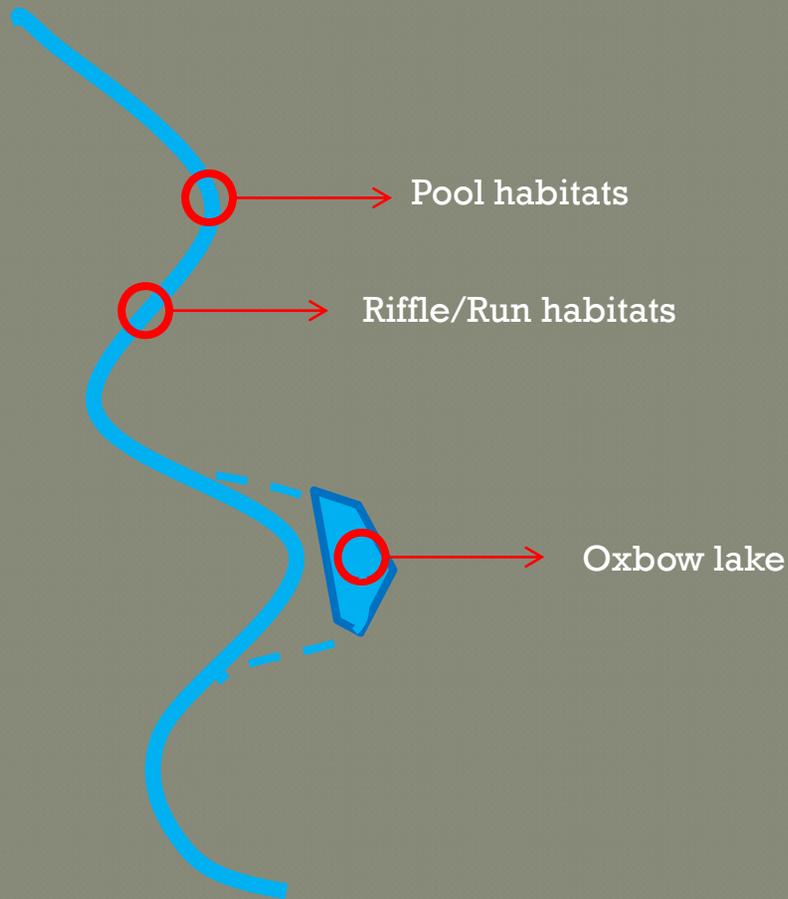


Extant Fish Species

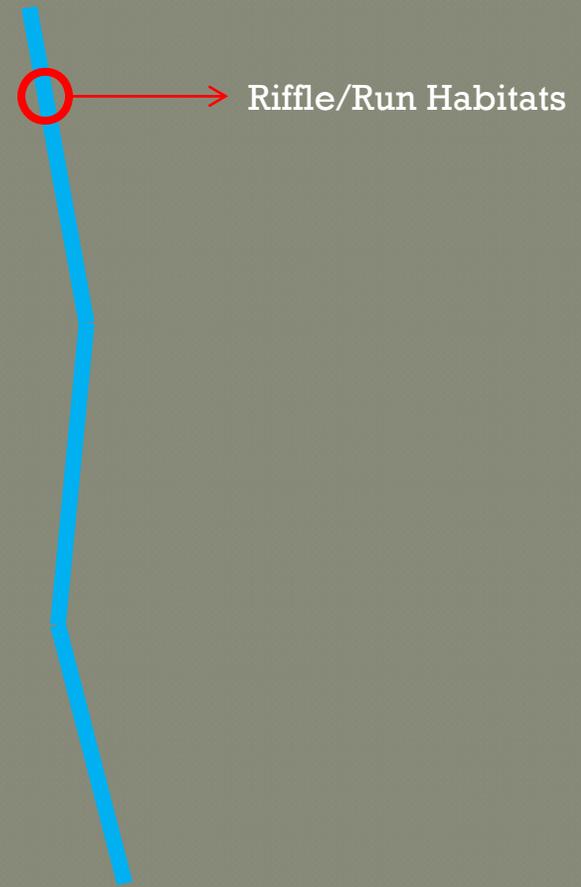
Largemouth Bass*
Black Bullhead Catfish*
Blue Catfish
Bluegill
Channel Catfish*
Common Carp*
Flathead Minnow
Flathead Catfish
Flathead Chub
Freshwater Drum
Green Sunfish*
Gizzard Shad
Longear Sunfish*
Longnose Dace
Mosquito Fish
Red Shiner
River Carpsucker
Smallmouth Buffalo
Walleye*
Western Mosquitofish
White Bass*
Yellow Bullhead Catfish*

Reduced optimal habitat

Natural river flow



Channelized river flow



River Channelization



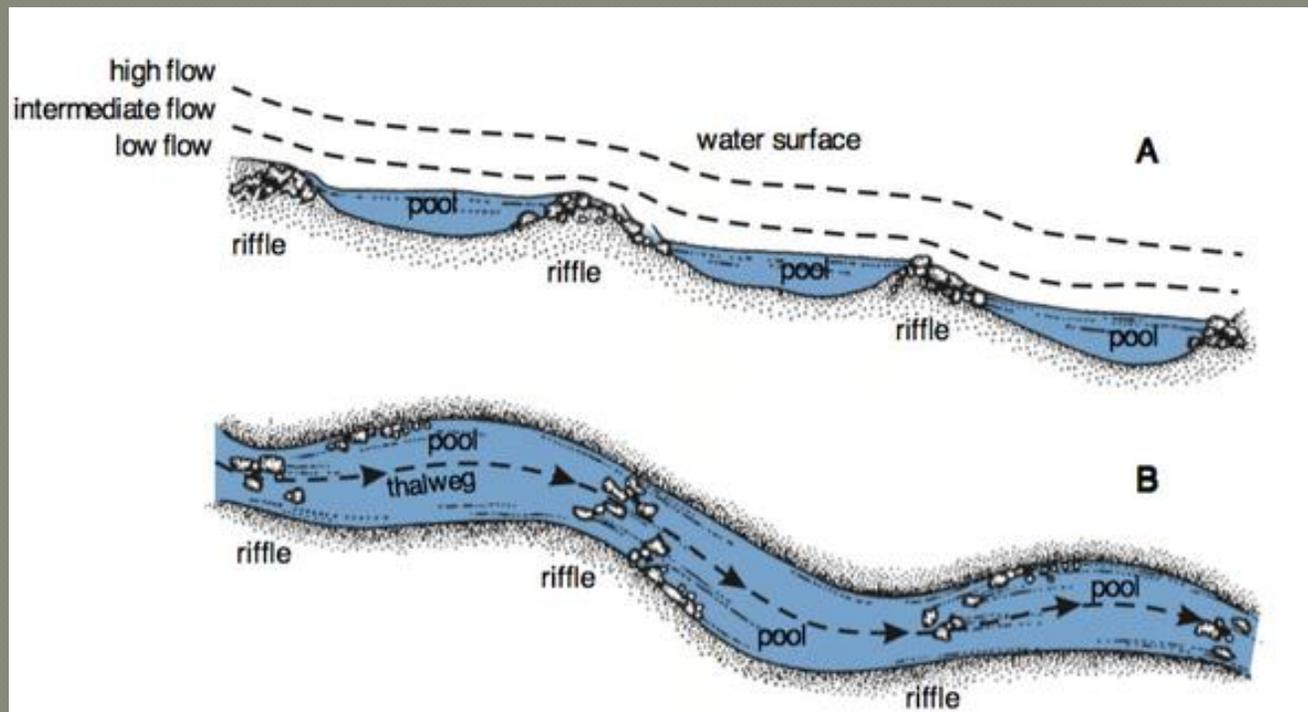
Winter Drying



Complex Habitat

Variation in habitat characteristics mitigates dry periods.

Pools can provide refuge habitat during droughts to the resident fish population. When flows are restored the fish can then move about the river freely again.



Fish still persist

In areas of the Rio Grande that retain water all year long (south of Hatch, NM to Caballo Dam) fish persist all year long.



Sportfishing Opportunities



However...

Most of the fish that now persist in the Lower Rio Grande are not native to the Rio Grande River.

Additionally, most are habitat generalists, rather than the habitat specialist that once existed in the river.

Habitat generalist:
Largemouth Bass



Habitat specialist:
Shovelnose Sturgeon



Habitat restoration

Repatriation of extirpated species would be difficult without habitat restoration
The river in its current state can no longer support the historic native fish community

Adding habitat structures (boulder piles, artificial riffle habitats, creating deep pools) would increase the complex habitat and increase fish survival and numbers.



Questions/Comments?

