



COLORADO

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

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TO: Colorado Water Conservation Board Members

FROM: Kara Scheel, Endangered Species Recovery Program Manager
Interstate, Federal, and Water Information Section

DATE: January 26-27, 2026

AGENDA ITEM: 14. 2026 Species Conservation Trust Fund Eligibility List Approval

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends, contingent upon available revenues, that the Board:

- (1) Concur with the Department of Natural Resources Executive Director's proposed recommendations to the General Assembly to approve an expenditure of up to \$5 million from the Species Conservation Trust Fund for fiscal year 2026-2027, including up to \$2.5 million for the Colorado Water Conservation Board priorities outlined herein; and
- (2) Forward a statement of concurrence to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Introduction:

The Species Conservation Trust Fund (SCTF) was created in 1998, pursuant to [H.B.98-1006](#) (codified in section 24-33-111, C.R.S. [2016]). The Colorado General Assembly set forth that the fund would be used to preserve or improve the natural environment for species that have been listed as threatened or endangered under state or federal law, or are candidate species or are likely to become candidate species.

The Species Conservation Trust Fund is supported by infusions of revenue from the Severance Tax Operational Fund (Operational Fund). The SCTF is authorized to receive revenue via an annual appropriation of up to \$5 million, approved each year by the General Assembly through the Long Bill. Based on the September 2025 revenue forecasts from Legislative Council Staff and the Governor's Office of State Planning and Budgeting, the Department anticipates that there will be sufficient severance tax revenue to support the SCTF at the \$5 million level through the forecast period (FY 2027-28).



Each year, the Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) prepares a species conservation eligibility list (SCEL) after consultation with the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) and its Director, and the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Commission and its Director. The SCEL identifies programs (and associated costs) that are eligible for funding from the SCTF. Once finalized with the Board and the Commission, the SCEL is sent to the Colorado General Assembly for review and modifications as appropriate prior to the passage of the annual SCTF bill.

Statutory Requirements of the Species Conservation Trust Fund:

The Species Conservation Trust Fund Act requires that funding be distributed for the following purposes:

- (1) Cooperative agreements, recovery programs, and other programs that are designed to meet obligations arising under the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 and that provide regulatory certainty.
- (2) Studies and programs established or approved by CPW and the Executive Director of the DNR regarding:
 - (a) Species placed on the state endangered or threatened list;
 - (b) Candidate species, in order to assist in the recovery or protection of the species to avoid listing of the species; and
 - (c) Scientific research relating to listing or delisting any species.

Fiscal Year 2025-26 Outlook:

The FY 2025-26 Long Bill (S.B. 25-206) included an appropriation of \$5 million from the Operational Fund to the SCTF effective July 1, 2025. The revenue from this appropriation is now available in the SCTF and requires legislative authorization during the 2026 session for Commission- and Board-approved priorities and projects that will begin in FY 2026-27.

The Governor's FY2026-27 budget request suggests sweeping revenues from the Severance Tax Operational Fund. The proposal will sweep \$4.1 million of revenue from the Severance Tax Operational Fund to the General Fund in FY 2025-26 and an additional sweep of \$2.5 million of revenue in FY 2026-27. This proposal does not impact the annual budget or efforts funded by the SCTF in FY 2025-26 or FY 2026-27.

Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Recommended Projects:

CWCB staff recommends the following projects for fiscal year 2026-27.

Project/Program	Request
1. Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program	\$2,380,000



2. Rio Grande Native Fish Protection and Habitat Improvements	\$60,000
3. Selenium Management, Research, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Control	\$60,000
Total CWCB SCTF Request:	\$2,500,000

1. *Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program: Up to \$2,380,000*

The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program (Recovery Programs) were established under cooperative agreements, signed by the Governor of Colorado, as multi-agency partnerships in 1988 and 1992, respectively. The goal of the Recovery Programs is to recover the threatened and endangered Colorado pikeminnow, bonytail, razorback sucker, and humpback chub. The Recovery Programs provide Endangered Species Act compliance for more than 1,500 water projects in Colorado.

Funding for improvement projects will ensure the continued success of these programs. Projects include studies related to water management in the 15 Mile Reach, leases of water to augment flows, upgrades and repairs to diversion structures to allow for continued passage of fish, non-native species removal activities, habitat restoration, canal salvage operations, and other conservation measures as defined in the Programs' respective recovery action plans.

2. *Rio Grande Native Fish Protection and Habitat Improvements: Up to \$60,000*

The Rio Grande Chub, Rio Grande Sucker, and Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout are three Imperiled species in the Rio Grande basin. All three species underwent recent federal listing petitions and Species Status Assessments, and although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued "not warranted" findings, these species remain vulnerable across their native range. This reinforces the need to accelerate on-the-ground efforts that improve population resiliency, restore connected habitat, and reduce threats from non-native species. Funding for improvement projects in the species' native range will enhance aquatic habitats and prevent non-native species from migrating. Project will include the design for a fish barrier to prevent non-native species from migrating upstream into protected species habitat.

3. *Selenium Management, Research, Monitoring, Evaluation and Control: Up to \$60,000*

Selenium is a naturally occurring element that can cause deleterious effects to fish reproduction. Increased selenium concentrations can occur when weathering and irrigation mobilize selenium through the soil and into waterways. Selenium levels were historically high in the Gunnison and Colorado River Basins, rivers that are designated



critical habitat for the threatened and endangered Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, bonytail, and razorback sucker.

The Gunnison Basin Selenium Management Program is a required conservation measure identified in the Programmatic Biological Opinion (issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, December 2009) as part of the Aspinall Unit National Environmental Policy Act evaluation (issued December 2010). At the time of the evaluation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that high selenium levels in the Uncompahgre and Gunnison Rivers are limiting the recovery of the Colorado River endangered fish species and that the Selenium Management Program is necessary for the continued existence of the species. The Program has successfully improved fish habitat by reducing selenium loading from irrigation runoff in the Gunnison Basin. Due to this program's efforts, the mainstem of the Gunnison River was removed from the State's list of impaired waters (303D) in 2021. This funding will support on-going well monitoring that supports research efforts previously funded by the SCTF in years prior.

