

Upper Missouri River Basin, Montana

Project Summary: Reclamation is working with the Corps of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to better understand life history needs of pallid sturgeon isolated in the Missouri River above Fort Peck Reservoir. This population comprises recovery priority area #1 and is considered a “heritage” population because of its relative genetic purity and large body size. In addition, hydrologic models are being evaluated to determine a “best-fit” for analyzing alternative operational scenarios for the six Reclamation projects in the upper Missouri River Basin for releases that best emulate a pre-dam hydrograph. The Bureau of Land Management is interested in cottonwood regeneration in the wild and scenic reach of the upper Missouri River and is also engaged in this effort.

Strategic Value: Reclamation committed to conduct these studies as a prelude to initiating formal consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for the continued operation of the six Reclamation projects in the upper Missouri River Basin. Looking at the six projects together instead of each one individually will likely distribute potential operational impacts more widely and minimize adverse impacts at any one project. Following consultation, each of the six projects will be in compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

Benefits: The project is intended to improve flows for pallid sturgeon by trying to emulate a natural hydrograph when meteorological conditions permit. The City of Great Falls is located on the Missouri River below three of these projects and the ability to release high flows will likely be limited to those that result in minimal or no flooding in the city. Emulating the natural hydrograph would benefit not only pallid sturgeon, but would also improve conditions for other native aquatic species, cottonwoods, migratory birds, and recreation.

Missouri River from its confluence with the Marias River to the headwaters of Ft. Peck Reservoir.

