

Canyon's recovery must rest on science

The Republic's Jan. 19 editorial "Fish fight: Saving chub must be more than just killing trout" is a good introduction to the plight of our state's most valuable natural wonder, the Grand Canyon.

However, continuing to allow the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (AMP) to control the Grand Canyon's fate, as *The Republic* recommends, will only speed the death spiral of the canyon's native ecosystems.

From its inception, the AMP has opposed implementing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommendations to mimic the Colorado River's natural flow regime, thereby propping up the Grand Canyon ecosystem.

Lisa Force

My Turn



Some consideration is being given to stocking the Canyon with hatchery fish. This is not recovery. This is a zoo.

Ninety-five percent of the vital sediment and nutrients that would be deposited by a free-flowing river system are trapped behind Glen Canyon Dam. Without sediment deposition, species go extinct and beaches for mammals, native vegetation and human recreation erode away. Four native fish species have disappeared, along with river otters, muskrats and every single native insect species that formed the base of the food chain. Yet the

AMP has proposed no viable plan for moving the necessary amounts of this sediment into the Grand Canyon.

Instead, AMP has undertaken a handful of experiments to try to build beaches by moving around the meager sediment that deposits downstream of the dam. The result of AMP's efforts to date is a precipitous 80 percent decline in the humpback chub population — the principle endangered fish species AMP is supposed to be recovering.

Because of these declines the AMP is considering stocking the Grand Canyon with hatchery fish. This is not recovery. This is a zoo.

Recovery implies self-reproducing native populations, not manufactured fish which cannot reproduce and which must be constantly restocked as they die off in their unnatural and inhospitable habitat.

Had the AMP been dominated by science, as was presumably intended, it might have been a worthy process, capable even of achieving its objective. The AMP boasts stellar scientists producing good ideas for restoring the canyon. Scientists, however, have taken a back seat to AMP politics, restricting recommendations to those that are politically acceptable, else risk having AMP's funding cut.

Dominated as it is by state water engineers, industrial irrigators and hydroelectric merchants, the AMP has been unwilling to support the changes in Glen Canyon Dam operations necessary to reverse Grand Canyon's ecological decline. The AMP players truly concerned with environmental restoration are politically outmuscled by those who wish to continue abusing the Colorado River system for water and energy profits.

While society has an array of technologies to meet water and energy needs, we have only one Grand Canyon. If this natural wonder is going to be protected, the AMP must be replaced with an advisory panel based on pure science. Its first task must be to produce an environmental impact statement considering a full range of alternatives for Glen Canyon Dam operations, including those that will be truly effective in recovering Grand Canyon's native habitats. Only through such unbiased programs, driven by scientists rather than politicians, will Grand Canyon's ecosystem have any hope of salvation.

The AMP participants convene here in Phoenix this week. At the January 2002 AMP meeting, environmental group Living Rivers exercised its right to become involved in this taxpayer-funded process by presenting a document requesting some specific definitive actions on behalf of the collapsing Grand Canyon ecosystems. A full year later, AMP leaders still have not replied.

Arizonans, this is our canyon, our tax dollars and our opportunity to demand results. Attend the AMP meeting this year and insist on real protection for the Grand Canyon.

Lisa Force is program director for Living Rivers. More information on the AMP meeting is available at www.livingrivers.org.