



## **Native fish project, 25 years in making, comes to fruition**



In mid-May, the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) will stock Gila topminnow into Arnett Creek, near Superior, with the expectation that the species will establish a population. The addition of Gila topminnow will be the final step in a project that has been in the works for more than two decades.

Back in 1992, AZGFD, Tonto National Forest (TNF), and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified an opportunity to re-establish a native fish community in Arnett Creek.

After environmental planning, a fish barrier was built to deter re-entry of non-native fishes, the stream was chemically treated to remove nonnative fishes, and in the late-1990s a few native fish were stocked. Those fish did not establish populations, and a subsequent drought greatly reduced the amount of perennial water habitat in the system.

The partners re-evaluated the stream in 2007 and determined that the small amount of habitat was most suitable for longfin dace and endangered Gila

topminnow. The plan was to stock longfin dace first, and if they established a population, to move forward with Gila topminnow. Longfin dace were stocked in 2007, and they have established a population. So the partners continued to plan for introducing Gila topminnow.

Finally, all of the environmental planning has been completed, and Gila topminnow will be stocked.

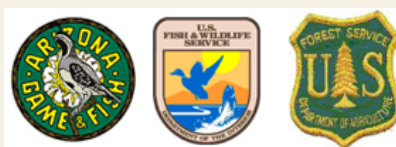
“Hopefully they will establish populations, because establishing new populations is necessary to recover the species so that it will no longer need protection under the Endangered Species Act,” said Tony Robinson, AZGFD’s Gila River Basin Native Fishes Lead.

Historically, topminnow were the most abundant fish species in the Gila River basin from western New Mexico to southern and western Arizona. Over time, habitat loss and degradation brought the topminnow to the brink of extinction. Habitat improvement and reintroductions, such as at Arnett Creek, are contributing to substantial, recent advances in the species’ recovery.

AZGFD will be collecting the topminnow from a pond near Amado owned by one of its partners in topminnow conservation under the Safe Harbor Agreement for Topminnows and Pupfish.

Native fish are just one part of the Arnett Creek story. During the last year of planning, Tonto National Forest has also partnered with AZGFD and other local groups to help protect and restore Arnett Creek.

Arnett Canyon is used by horseback riders and hikers. There were many trails in the riparian area, so TNF and its partners improved the main trail and fenced the riparian area to focus people and riders onto the main trail. TNF and AZGFD also worked collaboratively on repairing fencing and installing drinkers for the local rancher’s livestock.



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