

Two Endangered Species at the Pond

By Dave Van Manen and Paul Foutz

The Pond in Pueblo Mountain Park is one of the park's special places. Crayfish, water striders, dragonflies, and many other species all call it home. Avian visitors like the occasional great blue heron, American dipper and kingfisher can sometimes be spied there as well. And now, thanks to a collaborative effort between MPEC and Colorado Parks and Wildlife, southern redbelly dace, a state endangered minnow, also call the Pond home.

Paul Foutz, a biologist with CPW who specializes in native aquatic species, and his team worked closely with MPEC to establish a population of southern redbelly dace in the Pond. Paul considers this effort

“a great cooperative project between MPEC and CPW to assist with the recovery of the state endangered southern redbelly dace, *Chrosomus erythrogaster*. The southern redbelly dace is only native to the Arkansas River Basin in Colorado (it was primarily found historically in tributary streams to the Arkansas River in an area from about Florence to Pueblo). Currently only a few natural populations of southern redbelly dace occur in the wild in Colorado. These populations are supplemented by several refuge populations throughout the basin that have been created from what was thought to be the ‘last’ remaining wild population in 1987. Since that time, new wild populations have been discovered through CPW survey work. Individuals from a recently discovered wild population were brought into the Native Aquatic Restoration Center in Alamosa in 2014. That facility, which specializes in propagating threatened and endangered native aquatic species, cultured the fish for the Pueblo Mountain Park refuge site on South Creek.”

After a couple of years of planning, discussions, and assessing the pond's suitability as appropriate habitat for the dace through gathering information on the pond's ecology, the decision was made last summer to move forward with the project. A day in mid-September was chosen as the release date. This worked well for MPEC, as we had the future of another endangered species in mind in choosing the date. We wanted to be sure that the date chosen would have a class of Earth Studies students in the park to observe and participate in the release.

Sadly, children spending time in Nature



has become another endangered species. And not just in Colorado – children in the outdoors is a federal endangered species, if not global. MPEC has been working hard over the last couple of

decades through programs like Earth Studies to address the “Nature deficit disorder” that has contributed to creating this endangered species. We knew the fish release would be a great opportunity for these 5th graders to have a great outdoor experience. As anticipated, they got to participate in this effort to make our little part of the Earth a healthier place for southern redbelly dace, and for humans too!

The long-term success of establishing a population of the endangered minnow in the Pond remains to be seen and will require ongoing monitoring. But it was crystal clear that having our Earth Studies students be a part of this exciting day was a huge success. They were engaged in the process, asked lots of questions of the CPW biologists, and were fully hands-on in releasing the fish!

The release of southern redbelly dace and our students' participation in the release have now been added to the long list of why the Pond in Pueblo Mountain Park is a special place.

