

CONSERVATION AGREEMENT

Virgin spinedace

Lepidomeda mollispinis mollispinis

This Conservation Agreement for the Virgin spinedace *Lepidomeda mollispinis mollispinis* has been developed in order to expedite conservation measures needed for the continued existence and recovery of the species. These measures will be taken in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended (ESA). The agreement focuses on two objectives. The first is to reduce and eliminate significant threats. The second is to enhance and/or stabilize specific reaches of occupied and unoccupied historic habitat. These objectives will be reached through implementation of the Conservation Strategy for the species (Attachment A). Full implementation of this agreement and the associated strategy will reduce threats to the Virgin spinedace that warrant its listing as a sensitive species by State and Federal agencies, and as threatened or endangered under the ESA.

The Virgin spinedace is a small minnow endemic to the Virgin River Basin in Utah, Arizona, and Nevada. Shoreline-land ownership within the flood plains of Virgin spinedace habitat is approximately 38% federal, 3% state, 5% Paiute Tribe managed and 54% private. Past and present human activities such as water development projects, agriculture, mining, urbanization and the introduction of non-indigenous fishes have altered the Virgin River ecosystem. There has been a 37-40% reduction (approximately 84 km/52 mi) in Virgin spinedace historic range (approximately 226 km/140 mi). Current populations are fragmented, and occur almost exclusively within Utah. Due to these reductions and perceived threats to the species, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) proposed listing the species as threatened, pursuant to the ESA, on May 18, 1994 (59 FR 25875).

I. OTHER SPECIES INVOLVED

The primary focus of this agreement is the conservation and enhancement of the Virgin spinedace and its habitat; however, other species occurring within or adjacent to Virgin spinedace habitat may also benefit. Three hundred and sixty-six species of fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals are known to co-exist in the same or adjacent habitat of the Virgin spinedace. Eighty-one of these species are listed as sensitive in either Utah, Arizona or Nevada and/or are listed under the ESA by FWS (Appendix A in Conservation Strategy). An additional eight sensitive plant species and seven sensitive invertebrate species also co-exist in the same or adjacent habitat of the Virgin spinedace. Using an ecosystem approach, the Virgin spinedace