Frequently Asked Questions

What is NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a federal law that requires federal agencies to seek public input into federal decisions and to consider impacts to the human and natural environment. Because AGFD receives federal funding from the FWS to in part fund the Arizona statewide stocking program, both FWS and AGFD must adhere to NEPA.

What is the Purpose of the Environmental Assessment?

The AGFD Sport Fish Stocking Program is subject to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as well as other applicable environmental laws and regulations because it receives federal funding. NEPA requires that federally funded or permitted activities be analyzed for their potential effects to the human environment. The agency is required to complete an environmental assessment process to allow it to continue receiving those federal funds. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is the lead federal agency responsible for NEPA compliance; the AGFD is the cooperating agency.

What is the background and how did we get to the point we're at today?

Each year, the Arizona Game and Fish Department stocks more than 3 million fish in Arizona's lakes, rivers and streams for anglers to catch – mostly rainbow, Apache, or other trout, but some warmwater species such as largemouth bass and channel catfish as well.

Arizona's natural fish fauna historically consisted of 36 species of fish, only a few of which were historically sought for sport fishing, which continues to be true today.

Since the early 1900s, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and other agencies have supplemented recreational angling opportunities by stocking state waters with sport fish which are predominantly non-native species.

Although most of the trout species caught in Arizona likely come from fish hatcheries, most of the warmwater species in the state – especially those in the larger impoundments such as Roosevelt Lake – come from natural reproduction.

Fish stockings have evolved over the past 100 years or so to meet growing needs of anglers in Arizona. Now the Arizona Game and Fish Department considers a wide range of factors when determining where and when to stock fish, including biology, angler use, partnership commitments and needs, native fish impacts and social demands.

Of our 36 native fish species in Arizona, 19 are listed as federally threatened or endangered and eight of those species no longer exist in the wild. Stocking of sport fish can have an impact on native aquatic species.

The Department's mission is to conserve, enhance, and restore Arizona's diverse wildlife resources and habitats through aggressive protection and management programs, and to provide wildlife resources and safe watercraft and off-highway vehicle recreation for the enjoyment, appreciation, and use by present and future generations.

To achieve our agency mission, we must balance recreation, in this case stocking of sport fish, with the conservation of native aquatic species.

What do the potential outcomes of each "Action" (i.e., Alternative) mean to anglers?

- *Proposed Action:* This alternative, if chosen, would stock the highest number of sites and is the most similar of the alternatives to the current AGFD stocking program. The proposed action would stock 167 waters with one or more of 18 different species.

- *Reduced Stocking Alternative:* This alternative, if chosen, would stock a reduced number of sites. Many currently heavily used fishing locations would not be stocked. The reduced stocking alternative would stock 101 waters with one or more of 17 different species. This alternative would eliminate 66 stocking sites, including:

La Paz County Park Lagoon
Hulsey Lake
Nelson Reservoir
Lyman Reservoir
C.C. Craigin (Blue Ridge Reservoir)
Knoll Lake
Clear Creek Reservoir
Mud Tank
Kinnikinick Lake
Coconino Lake
Morton Pond
Ashurst Lake
Marshall Lake
Mormon Lodge Pond
Upper Lake Mary
Lower Lake Mary
Luna Lake
Big Lake
Black River East Fork
Black River West Fork
Workman Creek
Tonto Creek
Christopher Creek
Haigler Creek
Canyon Lake
Saguaro Lake
Tempe Town Lake
Lower Salt River
Parker Canyon Lake
Patagonia Lake
Pena Blanca Lake
Rose Canyon Lake
Granite Basin Lake
Dead Horse Lake
Middle Verde River
Oak Creek
Wet Beaver Creek
West Clear Creek
East Verde River
Green Valley Lake
Bass Tank
Blue Tank
Alvord Lake
Chaparral Lake
Cortez Lake
Desert Breeze Lake
Desert West Lake
Encanto Lake
Evelyn Hallman Pond
Kiwanis Lake
Papago Ponds
Rio Vista Pond
Riverview Lake
Steele Indian School Pond
Crossroads Park
McQueen Park
Bonsall Park
Granada Park
Roadrunner Park
Eldorado Park
Indian School Park
Vista del Camino Park
Tempe Papago Park
Water Treatment
Discovery District Park
Selleh Park

- *No Action Alternative:* This alternative, if chosen, would not provide federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funding to stock any sites in Arizona. The Arizona Game and Fish stocking program would, in effect, cease.

What do the potential outcomes of each "Action" (i.e., Alternative) mean to native species conservation?

- *Proposed Action:* Stocking under this alternative would have the most potential for negative impacts to native species, but these impacts would be mitigated and offset by a robust conservation and mitigation program to improve the baseline conditions of many native species.

- *Reduced Stocking Alternative:* Stocking under this alternative would have reduced potential impacts to native species and impacts would still be mitigated and offset. However, there would be a reduced conservation and mitigation program which would have reduced benefits to the baseline conditions of native species.

- *No Action Alternative:* There would be no stocking and no impacts from stocking to native species under this alternative. There would also be no native species conservation or mitigation. Many native species populations would continue to be threatened by existing populations of non-native species found throughout Arizona while also continuing to be threatened by ongoing land uses, development, climate change, water use, water development projects and many others.

Why is there a native species conservation program associated with this program?

Anglers have been and continue to be leaders in conservation—they enjoy seeing and experiencing native fish and wildlife species as much as anyone else. The mission of AGFD includes conservation of native species, and offsetting impacts is the responsible thing to do.

The conservation and mitigation actions associated with the Proposed Action will offset impacts and provide an improved baseline or status of many native species which will ensure the ability to continue to have sport fishing opportunities into the future. If native species continue to decline, sport fishing opportunities will become more limited because the need for conservation will compete with the need for recreation, and more restrictive federal control will be mandated by NEPA and ESA regulation.

What is the economic value of sport fishing to Arizona ?

Approximately 422,000 anglers fish over four million days producing $1.3 billion in benefit to the state's economy annually. About one-third of this is supported by the fish stocking program. Sport fishing contributes to local economies and the tourism industry.

What are the other benefits of fishing?

Fishing is a large part of the outdoor heritage of Arizona. It is part of the camping, boating and outdoor recreation tradition that helps people reconnect with nature, contributes to a sense of community between family and friends, and offers other psychological benefits. Participation in outdoor activities such as fishing helps foster an engaged citizenry that will care about and advocate for our outdoor places and natural resources, contributing to an outdoor legacy can be passed on to future generations. The fish stocking program helps do that, as there is insufficient native sport fish opportunity in Arizona to meet angling demand.