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Number of Imperiled Freshwater and Diadromous Fishes Grows Dramatically

Bethesda, Md. – Nearly 40% of North American freshwater fish species are imperiled, according to a new status report from the American Fisheries Society (AFS). The first update to the AFS imperiled freshwater species list in nearly 20 years now includes 700 taxa (species, subspecies, and populations), a 92% increase over the 364 listed in 1989. While some of the increase is due to the addition of populations and newly recognized species or subspecies, overall the list reflects a substantial decline in the status of many fish taxa across the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The report, written by the AFS Endangered Species Committee and published in the August 2008 issue of *Fisheries*, also includes diadromous fish that move between fresh and salt water.

“For years, most of our member scientists have noted fish population declines in their region or area of expertise,” said AFS President Bill Franzin. “However, seeing the numbers totaled up for the entire continent shows the enormous scale of this problem, which will require immediate national and international efforts to address.”

Of the species on the 1989 AFS list, only 8 have been removed from the 2008 list due to improved status while 89% are in the same or worse condition. The committee classified each of the 700 fishes on the current list as either vulnerable (230), threatened (190), or endangered (280). In addition, 61 fishes are presumed extinct.

Major causes for including species on this list included habitat degradation (affecting 92% of fishes on the list) and restricted range (72%) for fishes found in small area or even a single waterbody. Other common listing factors were overexploitation, disease/parasitism, and problems arising from the introduction of nonnative species. Three regions with particularly high numbers of imperiled taxa include the southeastern United States, the mid-Pacific coast, and the lower Rio Grande and basins in Mexico that do not drain to the sea. Species on the list come from a wide range of fish families, especially western salmon and trout (more than 60% are considered at risk); minnows, suckers, and catfishes throughout the continent; darters in the southeastern United States; and pupfish, livebearers, and goodeids, a large, native fish family, in Mexico and the southwestern United States.

“This new report indicates that scientifically-based conservation efforts like the National Fish Habitat Action Plan are urgently needed to preserve our rich freshwater species diversity,” said AFS Executive Director Gus Rassam. “In light of habitat loss, climate change, and invasive species and disease, protection of fish and other aquatic species

requires the immediate focused attention of the public, researchers, and government to prevent further losses.”

Conservation Status of Imperiled North American Freshwater and Diadromous Fishes, by Howard L. Jelks, Stephen J. Walsh, Noel M. Burkhead, Salvador Contreras-Balderas, Edmundo Díaz-Pardo, Dean A. Hendrickson, John Lyons, Nicholas E. Mandrak, Frank McCormick, Joseph S. Nelson, Steven P. Platania, Brady A. Porter, Claude B. Renaud, Juan Jacobo Schmitter-Soto, Eric B. Taylor, and Melvin L. Warren, Jr. *Fisheries* 33(8):372-407. The original printed article is available online at www.fisheries.org/afs/docs/fisheries/fisheries_3308.pdf or see the interactive web site hosted by the U.S. Geological Survey at <http://fisc.er.usgs.gov/afs>.

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The American Fisheries Society, founded 1870, is the world’s oldest and largest fisheries science society, with more than 9,000 members worldwide. Its mission is to improve the conservation and sustainability of fishery resources and aquatic ecosystems by advancing fisheries and aquatic science and promoting the development of fisheries professionals.

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