

COMPARISON OF SCUBA STRIP SURVEYS ASSESSING THE ABUNDANCE AND DISTRIBUTION OF RAZORBACK SUCKERS IN THE COLORADO RIVER BELOW HOOVER DAM: 1983 VERSUS 2003

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Razorback suckers (*Xyrauchen texanus*) were originally found throughout the Colorado River system but populations were isolated in the 20th century by the construction of high dams. The population in Lake Mohave, AZ-NV appeared to be the most abundant throughout the river as late as the 1980's. While abundance surveys have been conducted in the reservoir proper for decades, little work has focused on the riverine habitats of Black Canyon below Hoover Dam due to difficulties of conducting surveys. Strip counts conducted by paired divers using scuba gear were conducted in the spring of 1983 and again in 2003 to assess changes in the abundance and general distribution of razorback suckers in the Colorado River from 0.3 to 24.6 km below Hoover Dam. In both surveys razorback suckers observed were restricted to the more upstream (i.e., less impounded) river reaches. However, the 2003 strip surveys clearly showed fewer adult razorback suckers than in the 1983 strip surveys, they were also less widely distributed, and were associated with warm geothermal springs. These observations suggest that numbers of razorback suckers are declining in riverine portions of the reservoir, which concurs with surveys in the reservoir indicating that the overall population is in decline.