



The Natural Flow Regime

N. LeRoy Poff; J. David Allan; Mark B. Bain; James R. Karr; Karen L. Prestegard; Brian D. Richter; Richard E. Sparks; Julie C. Stromberg

BioScience, Vol. 47, No. 11. (Dec., 1997), pp. 769-784.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0006-3568%28199712%2947%3A11%3C769%3ATNFR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

BioScience is currently published by American Institute of Biological Sciences.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/aibs.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Natural Flow Regime

A paradigm for river conservation and restoration

N. LeRoy Poff, J. David Allan, Mark B. Bain, James R. Karr, Karen L. Prestegard,
Brian D. Richter, Richard E. Sparks, and Julie C. Stromberg

Humans have long been fascinated by the dynamism of free-flowing waters. Yet we have expended great effort to tame rivers for transportation, water supply, flood control, agriculture, and power generation. It is now recognized that harnessing of streams and rivers comes at great cost: Many rivers no longer support socially valued native species or sustain healthy ecosystems that provide important goods and services (Naiman et al. 1995, NRC 1992).

N. LeRoy Poff is an assistant professor in the Department of Biology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1878 and formerly senior scientist at Trout Unlimited, Arlington, VA 22209. J. David Allan is a professor at the School of Natural Resources & Environment, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1115. Mark B. Bain is a research scientist and associate professor at the New York Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit of the Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-3001. James R. Karr is a professor in the departments of Fisheries and Zoology, Box 357980, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-7980. Karen L. Prestegard is an associate professor in the Department of Geology, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Brian D. Richter is national hydrologist in the Biohydrology Program, The Nature Conservancy, Hayden, CO 81639. Richard E. Sparks is director of the River Research Laboratories at the Illinois Natural History Survey, Havana, IL 62644. Julie C. Stromberg is an associate professor in the Department of Plant Biology, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85281. © 1997 American Institute of Biological Sciences.

The ecological integrity of river ecosystems depends on their natural dynamic character

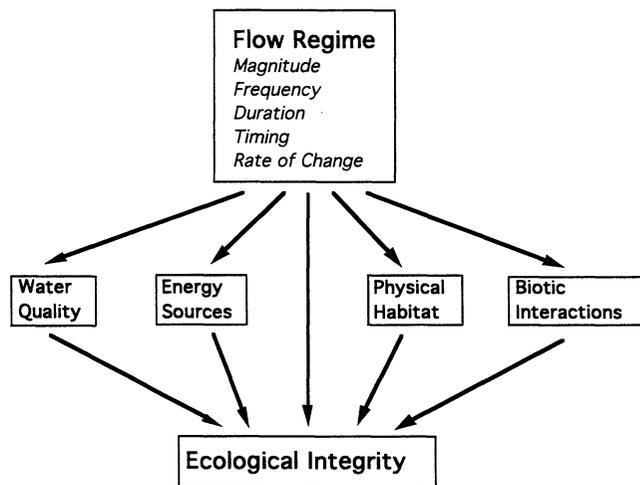
The extensive ecological degradation and loss of biological diversity resulting from river exploitation is eliciting widespread concern for conservation and restoration of healthy river ecosystems among scientists and the lay public alike (Allan and Flecker 1993, Hughes and Noss 1992, Karr et al. 1985, TNC 1996, Williams et al. 1996). Extirpation of species, closures of fisheries, groundwater depletion, declines in water quality and availability, and more frequent and intense flooding are increasingly recognized as consequences of current river management and development policies (Abramovitz 1996, Collier et al. 1996, Naiman et al. 1995). The broad social support in the United States for the Endangered Species Act, the recognition of the intrinsic value of noncommercial native species, and the proliferation of watershed councils and riverwatch teams are evidence of society's interest in maintaining the ecological integrity and self-sustaining productivity of free-flowing river systems.

Society's ability to maintain and restore the integrity of river ecosystems requires that conservation and management actions be firmly grounded in scientific understand-

ing. However, current management approaches often fail to recognize the fundamental scientific principle that the integrity of flowing water systems depends largely on their natural dynamic character; as a result, these methods frequently prevent successful river conservation or restoration. Streamflow quantity and timing are critical components of water supply, water quality, and the ecological integrity of river systems. Indeed, streamflow, which is strongly correlated with many critical physicochemical characteristics of rivers, such as water temperature, channel geomorphology, and habitat diversity, can be considered a "master variable" that limits the distribution and abundance of riverine species (Power et al. 1995, Resh et al. 1988) and regulates the ecological integrity of flowing water systems (Figure 1). Until recently, however, the importance of natural streamflow variability in maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems has been virtually ignored in a management context.

Historically, the "protection" of river ecosystems has been limited in scope, emphasizing water quality and only one aspect of water quantity: minimum flow. Water resources management has also suffered from the often incongruent perspectives and fragmented responsibility of agencies (for example, the US Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation are responsible for water supply and flood control, the US Environmental Protection Agency and state environmental agencies for water quality, and the US Fish &

Figure 1. Flow regime is of central importance in sustaining the ecological integrity of flowing water systems. The five components of the flow regime—magnitude, frequency, duration, timing, and rate of change—influence integrity both directly and indirectly, through their effects on other primary regulators of integrity. Modification of flow thus has cascading effects on the ecological integrity of rivers. After Karr 1991.



Wildlife Service for water-dependent species of sporting, commercial, or conservation value), making it difficult, if not impossible, to manage the entire river ecosystem (Karr 1991). However, environmental dynamism is now recognized as central to sustaining and conserving native species diversity and ecological integrity in rivers and other ecosystems (Holling and Meffe 1996, Hughes 1994, Pickett et al. 1992, Stanford et al. 1996), and coordinated actions are therefore necessary to protect and restore a river's natural flow variability.

In this article, we synthesize existing scientific knowledge to argue that the natural flow regime plays a critical role in sustaining native biodiversity and ecosystem integrity in rivers. Decades of observation of the effects of human alteration of natural flow regimes have resulted in a well-grounded scientific perspective on why altering hydrologic variability in rivers is ecologically harmful (e.g., Arthington et al. 1991, Castleberry et al. 1996, Hill et al. 1991, Johnson et al. 1976, Richter et al. 1997, Sparks 1995, Stanford et al. 1996, Toth 1995, Tyus 1990). Current pressing demands on water use and the continuing alteration of watersheds require scientists to help develop management protocols that can accommodate economic uses while protecting ecosystem functions. For humans to continue to rely on river ecosystems for sustainable food production, power production, waste assimilation, and flood control, a new, holistic, ecological per-

spective on water management is needed to guide society's interactions with rivers.

The natural flow regime

The natural flow of a river varies on time scales of hours, days, seasons, years, and longer. Many years of observation from a streamflow gauge are generally needed to describe the characteristic pattern of a river's flow quantity, timing, and variability—that is, its natural flow regime. Components of a natural flow regime can be characterized using various time series (e.g., Fourier and wavelet) and probability analyses of, for example, extremely high or low flows, or of the entire range of flows expressed as average daily discharge (Dunne and Leopold 1978). In watersheds lacking long-term streamflow data, analyses can be extended statistically from gauged streams in the same geographic area. The frequency of large-magnitude floods can be estimated by paleohydrologic studies of debris left by floods and by studies of historical damage to living trees (Hupp and Osterkamp 1985, Knox 1972). These historical techniques can be used to extend existing hydrologic records or to provide estimates of flood flows for ungauged sites.

River flow regimes show regional patterns that are determined largely by river size and by geographic variation in climate, geology, topography, and vegetative cover. For example, some streams in regions with little seasonality in precipitation ex-

hibit relatively stable hydrographs due to high groundwater inputs (Figure 2a), whereas other streams can fluctuate greatly at virtually any time of year (Figure 2b). In regions with seasonal precipitation, some streams are dominated by snowmelt, resulting in pronounced, predictable runoff patterns (Figure 2c), and others lack snow accumulation and exhibit more variable runoff patterns during the rainy season, with peaks occurring after each substantial storm event (Figure 2d).

Five critical components of the flow regime regulate ecological processes in river ecosystems: the magnitude, frequency, duration, timing, and rate of change of hydrologic conditions (Poff and Ward 1989, Richter et al. 1996, Walker et al. 1995). These components can be used to characterize the entire range of flows and specific hydrologic phenomena, such as floods or low flows, that are critical to the integrity of river ecosystems. Furthermore, by defining flow regimes in these terms, the ecological consequences of particular human activities that modify one or more components of the flow regime can be considered explicitly.

- The *magnitude* of discharge¹ at any given time interval is simply the amount of water moving past a fixed location per unit time. Magnitude can refer either to absolute or to relative discharge (e.g., the amount of water that inundates a floodplain). Maximum and minimum magnitudes of flow vary with climate and watershed size both within and among river systems.

- The *frequency* of occurrence refers to how often a flow above a given magnitude recurs over some specified time interval. Frequency of occurrence is inversely related to flow magnitude. For example, a 100-year flood is equaled or exceeded on average once every 100 years (i.e., a chance of 0.01 of occurring in any given year). The average (median)

¹Discharge (also known as streamflow, flow, or flow rate) is always expressed in dimensions of volume per time. However, a great variety of units are used to describe flow, depending on custom and purpose of characterization: Flows can be expressed in near-instantaneous terms (e.g., ft³/s and m³/s) or over long time intervals (e.g., acre-ft/yr).

flow is determined from a data series of discharges defined over a specific time interval, and it has a frequency of occurrence of 0.5 (a 50% probability).

- The *duration* is the period of time associated with a specific flow condition. Duration can be defined relative to a particular flow event (e.g., a floodplain may be inundated for a specific number of days by a ten-year flood), or it can be defined as a composite expressed over a specified time period (e.g., the number of days in a year when flow exceeds some value).

- The *timing*, or *predictability*, of flows of defined magnitude refers to the regularity with which they occur. This regularity can be defined formally or informally and with reference to different time scales (Poff 1996). For example, annual peak flows may occur with low seasonal predictability (Figure 2b) or with high seasonal predictability (Figure 2c).

- The *rate of change*, or *flashiness*, refers to how quickly flow changes from one magnitude to another. At the extremes, “flashy” streams have rapid rates of change (Figure 2b), whereas “stable” streams have slow rates of change (Figure 2a).

Hydrologic processes and the flow regime. All river flow derives ultimately from precipitation, but in any given time and place a river’s flow is derived from some combination of surface water, soil water, and groundwater. Climate, geology, topography, soils, and vegetation help to determine both the supply of water and the pathways by which precipitation reaches the channel. The water movement pathways depicted in Figure 3a illustrate why rivers in different settings have different flow regimes and why flow is variable in virtually all rivers. Collectively, overland and shallow subsurface flow pathways create hydrograph peaks, which are the river’s response to storm events. By contrast, deeper groundwater pathways are responsible for baseflow, the form of delivery during periods of little rainfall.

Variability in intensity, timing, and duration of precipitation (as rain or as snow) and in the effects of terrain, soil texture, and plant evapotranspiration on the hydrologic cycle combine to create local and regional

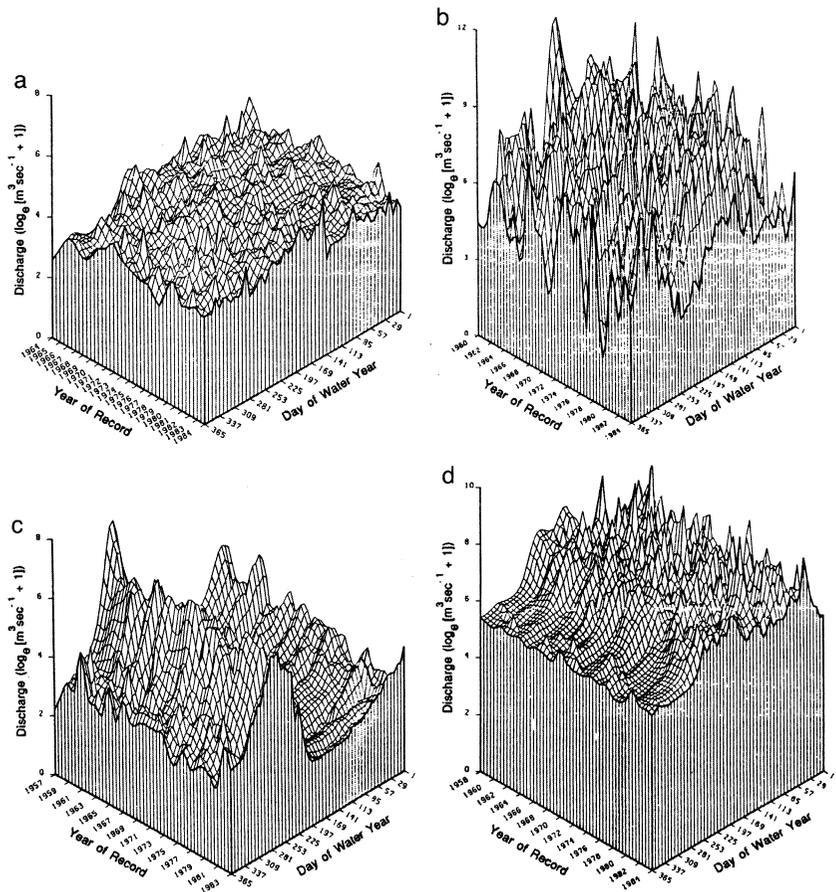


Figure 2. Flow histories based on long-term, daily mean discharge records. These histories show within- and among-year variation for (a) Augusta Creek, MI, (b) Satilla River, GA, (c) upper Colorado River, CO, and (d) South Fork of the McKenzie River, OR. Each water year begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. Adapted from Poff and Ward 1990.

flow patterns. For example, high flows due to rainstorms may occur over periods of hours (for permeable soils) or even minutes (for impermeable soils), whereas snow will melt over a period of days or weeks, which slowly builds the peak snowmelt flood. As one proceeds downstream within a watershed, river flow reflects the sum of flow generation and routing processes operating in multiple small tributary watersheds. The travel time of flow down the river system, combined with nonsynchronous tributary inputs and larger downstream channel and floodplain storage capacities, act to attenuate and to dampen flow peaks. Consequently, annual hydrographs in large streams typically show peaks created by widespread storms or snowmelt events and broad seasonal influences that affect many tributaries together (Dunne and Leopold 1978).

The natural flow regime organizes and defines river ecosystems. In rivers, the physical structure of the environment and, thus, of the habitat, is defined largely by physical processes, especially the movement of water and sediment within the channel and between the channel and floodplain. To understand the biodiversity, production, and sustainability of river ecosystems, it is necessary to appreciate the central organizing role played by a dynamically varying physical environment.

The physical habitat of a river includes sediment size and heterogeneity, channel and floodplain morphology, and other geomorphic features. These features form as the available sediment, woody debris, and other transportable materials are moved and deposited by flow. Thus, habitat conditions associated with channels and floodplains vary among

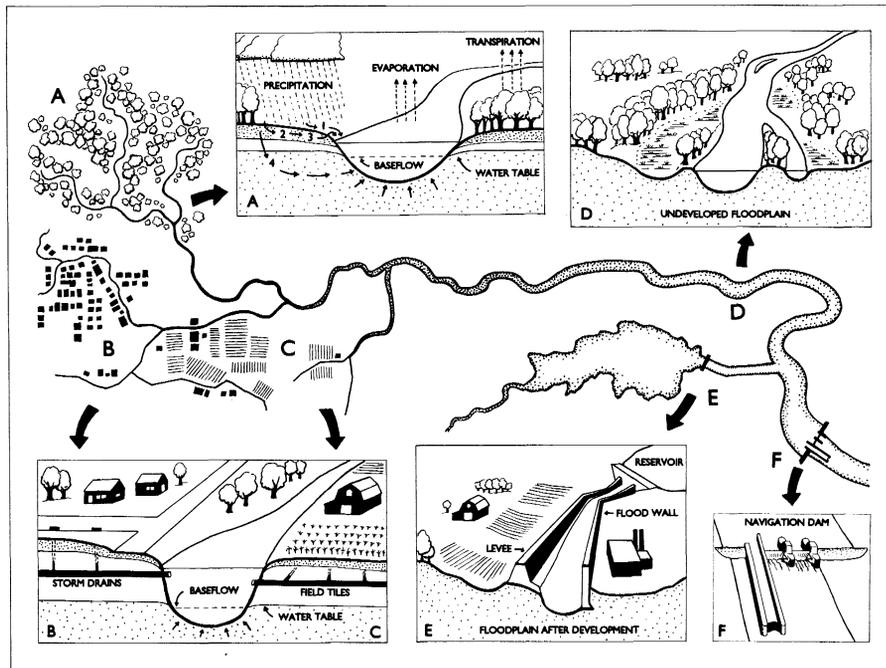


Figure 3. Stream valley cross-sections at various locations in a watershed illustrate basic principles about natural pathways of water moving downhill and human influences on hydrology. Runoff, which occurs when precipitation exceeds losses due to evaporation and plant transpiration, can be divided into four components (a): overland flow (1) occurs when precipitation exceeds the infiltration capacity of the soil; shallow subsurface stormflow (2) represents water that infiltrates the soil but is routed relatively quickly to the stream channel; saturated overland flow (3) occurs where the water table is close to the surface, such as adjacent to the stream channel, upstream of first-order tributaries, and in soils saturated by prior precipitation; and groundwater flow (4) represents relatively deep and slow pathways of water movement and provides water to the stream channel even during periods of little or no precipitation. Collectively, overland and shallow subsurface flow pathways create the peaks in the hydrograph that are a river's response to storm events, whereas deeper groundwater pathways are responsible for baseflow. Urbanized (b) and agricultural (c) land uses increase surface flow by increasing the extent of impermeable surfaces, reducing vegetation cover, and installing drainage systems. Relative to the unaltered state, channels often are scoured to greater depth by unnaturally high flood crests and water tables are lowered, causing baseflow to drop. Side-channels, wetlands, and episodically flooded lowlands comprise the diverse floodplain habitats of unmodified river ecosystems (d). Levees or flood walls (e) constructed along the banks retain flood waters in the main channel and lead to a loss of floodplain habitat diversity and function. Dams impede the downstream movement of water and can greatly modify a river's flow regime, depending on whether they are operated for storage (e) or as "run-of-river," such as for navigation (f).

ivers in accordance with both flow characteristics and the type and the availability of transportable materials.

Within a river, different habitat features are created and maintained by a wide range of flows. For example, many channel and floodplain features, such as river bars and riffle-pool sequences, are formed and maintained by dominant, or bankfull, discharges. These discharges are flows that can move significant quantities of bed or bank sediment and that occur frequently enough (e.g., every several years) to continually modify the channel (Wolman and Miller

1960). In many streams and rivers with a small range of flood flows, bankfull flow can build and maintain the active floodplain through stream migration (Leopold et al. 1964). However, the concept of a dominant discharge may not be applicable in all flow regimes (Wolman and Gerson 1978). Furthermore, in some flow regimes, the flows that build the channel may differ from those that build the floodplain. For example, in rivers with a wide range of flood flows, floodplains may exhibit major bar deposits, such as berms of boulders along the channel,

or other features that are left by infrequent high-magnitude floods (e.g., Miller 1990).

Over periods of years to decades, a single river can consistently provide ephemeral, seasonal, and persistent types of habitat that range from free-flowing, to standing, to no water. This predictable diversity of in-channel and floodplain habitat types has promoted the evolution of species that exploit the habitat mosaic created and maintained by hydrologic variability. For many riverine species, completion of the life cycle requires an array of different habitat types, whose availability over time is regulated by the flow regime (e.g., Greenberg et al. 1996, Reeves et al. 1996, Sparks 1995). Indeed, adaptation to this environmental dynamism allows aquatic and floodplain species to persist in the face of seemingly harsh conditions, such as floods and droughts, that regularly destroy and re-create habitat elements.

From an evolutionary perspective, the pattern of spatial and temporal habitat dynamics influences the relative success of a species in a particular environmental setting. This habitat template (Southwood 1977), which is dictated largely by flow regime, creates both subtle and profound differences in the natural histories of species in different segments of their ranges. It also influences species distribution and abundance, as well as ecosystem function (Poff and Allan 1995, Schlosser 1990, Sparks 1992, Stanford et al. 1996). Human alteration of flow regime changes the established pattern of natural hydrologic variation and disturbance, thereby altering habitat dynamics and creating new conditions to which the native biota may be poorly adapted.

Human alteration of flow regimes

Human modification of natural hydrologic processes disrupts the dynamic equilibrium between the movement of water and the movement of sediment that exists in free-flowing rivers (Dunne and Leopold 1978). This disruption alters both gross- and fine-scale geomorphic features that constitute habitat for aquatic and riparian species (Table 1). After

Table 1. Physical responses to altered flow regimes.

| Source(s) of alteration | Hydrologic change(s) | Geomorphic response(s) | Reference(s) |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Dam | Capture sediment moving downstream | Downstream channel erosion and tributary headcutting | Chien 1985, Petts 1984, 1985, Williams and Wolman 1984 |
| | | Bed armoring (coarsening) | Chien 1985 |
| Dam, diversion | Reduce magnitude and frequency of high flows | Deposition of fines in gravel | Sear 1995, Stevens et al. 1995 |
| | | Channel stabilization and narrowing | Johnson 1994, Williams and Wolman 1984 |
| | | Reduced formation of point bars, secondary channels, oxbows, and changes in channel planform | Chien 1985, Copp 1989, Fenner et al. 1985 |
| Urbanization, tiling, drainage | Increase magnitude and frequency of high flows | Bank erosion and channel widening | Hammer 1972 |
| | | Downward incision and floodplain disconnection | Prestegard 1988 |
| | Reduced infiltration into soil | Reduced baseflows | Leopold 1968 |
| Levees and channelization | Reduce overbank flows | Channel restriction causing downcutting | Daniels 1960, Prestegard et al. 1994 |
| | | Floodplain deposition and erosion prevented | Sparks 1992 |
| | | Reduced channel migration and formation of secondary channels | Shankman and Drake 1990 |
| Groundwater pumping | Lowered water table levels | Streambank erosion and channel downcutting after loss of vegetation stability | Kondolf and Curry 1986 |

such a disruption, it may take centuries for a new dynamic equilibrium to be attained by channel and floodplain adjustments to the new flow regime (Petts 1985); in some cases, a new equilibrium is never attained, and the channel remains in a state of continuous recovery from the most recent flood event (Wolman and Gerson 1978). These channel and floodplain adjustments are sometimes overlooked because they can be confounded with long-term responses of the channel to changing climates (e.g., Knox 1972). Recognition of human-caused physical changes and associated biological consequences may require many years, and physical restoration of the river ecosystem may call for dramatic action (see box on the Grand Canyon flood, page 774).

Dams, which are the most obvious direct modifiers of river flow, capture both low and high flows for flood control, electrical power generation, irrigation and municipal water needs, maintenance of recreational reservoir levels, and naviga-

tion. More than 85% of the inland waterways within the continental United States are now artificially controlled (NRC 1992), including nearly 1 million km of rivers that are affected by dams (Echeverria et al. 1989). Dams capture all but the finest sediments moving down a river, with many severe downstream consequences. For example, sediment-depleted water released from dams can erode finer sediments from the receiving channel. The coarsening of the streambed can, in turn, reduce habitat availability for the many aquatic species living in or using interstitial spaces. In addition, channels may erode, or downcut, triggering rejuvenation of tributaries, which themselves begin eroding and migrating headward (Chien 1985, Petts 1984). Fine sediments that are contributed by tributaries downstream of a dam may be deposited between the coarse particles of the streambed (e.g., Sear 1995). In the absence of high flushing flows, species with life stages that are sensitive to sedimentation, such as the eggs and larvae of

many invertebrates and fish, can suffer high mortality rates.

For many rivers, it is land-use activities, including timber harvest, livestock grazing, agriculture, and urbanization, rather than dams, that are the primary causes of altered flow regimes. For example, logging and the associated building of roads have contributed greatly to degradation of salmon streams in the Pacific Northwest, mainly through effects on runoff and sediment delivery (NRC 1996). Converting forest or prairie lands to agricultural lands generally decreases soil infiltration and results in increased overland flow, channel incision, floodplain isolation, and headward erosion of stream channels (Prestegard 1988). Many agricultural areas were drained by the construction of ditches or tile-and-drain systems, with the result that many channels have become entrenched (Brookes 1988).

These land-use practices, combined with extensive draining of wetlands or overgrazing, reduce retention of water in watersheds and,

A controlled flood in the Grand Canyon

Since the Glen Canyon dam first began to store water in 1963, creating Lake Powell, some 430 km (270 miles) of the Colorado River, including Grand Canyon National Park, have been virtually bereft of seasonal floods. Before 1963, melting snow in the upper basin produced an average peak discharge exceeding 2400 m³/s; after the dam was constructed, releases were generally maintained at less than 500 m³/s. The building of the dam also trapped more than 95% of the sediment moving down the Colorado River in Lake Powell (Collier et al. 1996).

This dramatic change in flow regime produced drastic alterations in the dynamic nature of the historically sediment-laden Colorado River. The annual cycle of scour and fill had maintained large sandbars along the river banks, prevented encroachment of vegetation onto these bars, and limited bouldery debris deposits from constricting the river at the mouths of tributaries (Collier et al. 1997). When flows were reduced, the limited amount of sand accumulated in the channel rather than in bars farther up the river banks, and shallow low-velocity habitat in eddies used by juvenile fishes declined. Flow regulation allowed for increased cover of wetland and riparian vegetation, which expanded into sites that were regularly scoured by floods in the constrained fluvial canyon of the Colorado River; however, much of the woody vegetation that established after the dam's construction is composed of an exotic tree, salt cedar (*Tamarix* sp.; Stevens et al. 1995). Restoration of flood flows clearly would help to steer the aquatic and riparian ecosystem toward its former state and decrease the area of wetland and riparian vegetation, but precisely how the system would respond to an artificial flood could not be predicted.

In an example of adaptive management (i.e., a planned experiment to guide further actions), a controlled, seven-day flood of 1274 m³/s was released through the Glen Canyon dam in late March 1996. This flow, roughly 35% of the pre-dam average for a spring flood (and far less than some large historical floods), was the maximum flow that could pass through the power plant turbines plus four steel drainpipes, and it cost approximately \$2 million in lost hydropower revenues (Collier et al. 1997). The immediate result was significant beach building: Over 53% of the beaches increased in size, and just 10% decreased in size. Full documentation of the effects will continue to be monitored by measuring channel cross-sections and studying riparian vegetation and fish populations.

instead, route it quickly downstream, increasing the size and frequency of floods and reducing baseflow levels during dry periods (Figure 3b; Leopold 1968). Over time, these practices degrade in-channel habitat for aquatic species. They may also isolate the floodplain from overbank flows, thereby degrading habitat for riparian species. Similarly, urbanization and suburbanization associated with human population expansion across the landscape create impermeable surfaces that direct water away from subsurface pathways to overland flow (and often into storm drains). Consequently, floods increase in frequency and intensity (Beven 1986), banks erode, and channels widen (Hammer 1972),

and baseflow declines during dry periods (Figure 3c).

Whereas dams and diversions affect rivers of virtually all sizes, and land-use impacts are particularly evident in headwaters, lowland rivers are greatly influenced by efforts to sever channel-floodplain linkages. Flood control projects have shortened, narrowed, straightened, and leveed many river systems and cut the main channels off from their floodplains (NRC 1992). For example, channelization of the Kissimmee River above Lake Okechobee, Florida, by the US Army Corps of Engineers transformed a historical 166 km meandering river with a 1.5 to 3 km wide floodplain into a 90 km long canal flowing through a series of five

impoundments, resulting in great loss of river channel habitat and adjacent floodplain wetlands (Toth 1995). Because levees are designed to prevent increases in the width of flow, rivers respond by cutting deeper channels, reaching higher velocities, or both.

Channelization and wetland drainage can actually increase the magnitude of extreme floods, because reduction in upstream storage capacity results in accelerated water delivery downstream. Much of the damage caused by the extensive flooding along the Mississippi River in 1993 resulted from levee failure as the river reestablished historic connections to the floodplain. Thus, although elaborate storage dam and levee systems can "reclaim" the floodplain for agriculture and human settlement in most years, the occasional but inevitable large floods will impose increasingly high disaster costs to society (Faber 1996). The severing of floodplains from rivers also stops the processes of sediment erosion and deposition that regulate the topographic diversity of floodplains. This diversity is essential for maintaining species diversity on floodplains, where relatively small differences in land elevation result in large differences in annual inundation and soil moisture regimes, which regulate plant distribution and abundance (Sparks 1992).

Ecological functions of the natural flow regime

Naturally variable flows create and maintain the dynamics of in-channel and floodplain conditions and habitats that are essential to aquatic and riparian species, as shown schematically in Figure 4. For purposes of illustration, we treat the components of a flow regime individually, although in reality they interact in complex ways to regulate geomorphic and ecological processes. In describing the ecological functions associated with the components of a flow regime, we pay particular attention to high- and low-flow events, because they often serve as ecological "bottlenecks" that present critical stresses and opportunities for a wide array of riverine species (Poff and Ward 1989).

The magnitude and frequency of high and low flows regulate numerous ecological processes. Frequent, moderately high flows effectively transport sediment through the channel (Leopold et al. 1964). This sediment movement, combined with the force of moving water, exports organic resources, such as detritus and attached algae, rejuvenating the biological community and allowing many species with fast life cycles and good colonizing ability to reestablish (Fisher 1983). Consequently, the composition and relative abundance of species that are present in a stream or river often reflect the frequency and intensity of high flows (Meffe and Minckley 1987, Schlosser 1985).

High flows provide further ecological benefits by maintaining ecosystem productivity and diversity. For example, high flows remove and transport fine sediments that would otherwise fill the interstitial spaces in productive gravel habitats (Beschta and Jackson 1979). Floods import woody debris into the channel (Keller and Swanson 1979), where it creates new, high-quality habitat (Figure 4; Moore and Gregory 1988, Wallace and Benke 1984). By connecting the channel to the floodplain, high overbank flows also maintain broader productivity and diversity. Floodplain wetlands provide important nursery grounds for fish and export organic matter and organisms back into the main channel (Junk et al. 1989, Sparks 1995, Welcomme 1992). The scouring of floodplain soils rejuvenates habitat for plant species that germinate only on barren, wetted surfaces that are free of competition (Scott et al. 1996) or that require access to shallow water tables (Stromberg et al. 1997). Flood-resistant, disturbance-adapted riparian communities are maintained by flooding along river corridors, even in river sections that have steep banks and lack floodplains (Hupp and Osterkamp 1985).

Flows of low magnitude also provide ecological benefits. Periods of low flow may present recruitment opportunities for riparian plant species in regions where floodplains are frequently inundated (Wharton et al. 1981). Streams that dry temporarily, generally in arid regions, have aquatic (Williams and Hynes 1977)

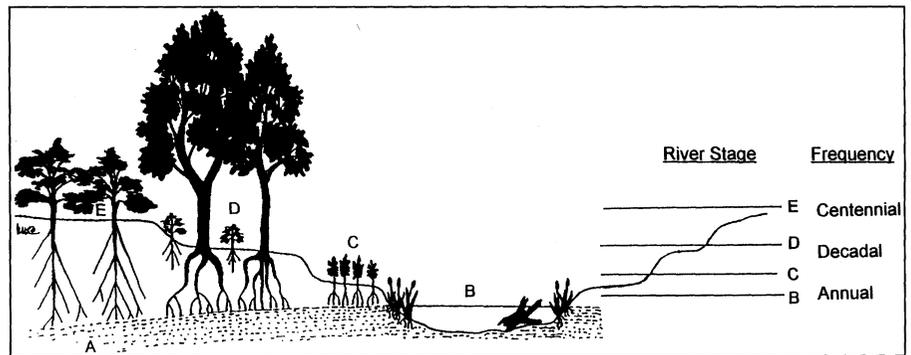


Figure 4. Geomorphic and ecological functions provided by different levels of flow. Water tables that sustain riparian vegetation and that delineate in-channel baseflow habitat are maintained by groundwater inflow and flood recharge (A). Floods of varying size and timing are needed to maintain a diversity of riparian plant species and aquatic habitat. Small floods occur frequently and transport fine sediments, maintaining high benthic productivity and creating spawning habitat for fishes (B). Intermediate-size floods inundate low-lying floodplains and deposit entrained sediment, allowing for the establishment of pioneer species (C). These floods also import accumulated organic material into the channel and help to maintain the characteristic form of the active stream channel. Larger floods that recur on the order of decades inundate the aggraded floodplain terraces, where later successional species establish (D). Rare, large floods can uproot mature riparian trees and deposit them in the channel, creating high-quality habitat for many aquatic species (E).

and riparian (Nilsen et al. 1984) species with special behavioral or physiological adaptations that suit them to these harsh conditions.

The duration of a specific flow condition often determines its ecological significance. For example, differences in tolerance to prolonged flooding in riparian plants (Chapman et al. 1982) and to prolonged low flow in aquatic invertebrates (Williams and Hynes 1977) and fishes (Closs and Lake 1996) allow these species to persist in locations from which they might otherwise be displaced by dominant, but less tolerant, species.

The timing, or predictability, of flow events is critical ecologically because the life cycles of many aquatic and riparian species are timed to either avoid or exploit flows of variable magnitudes. For example, the natural timing of high or low streamflows provides environmental cues for initiating life cycle transitions in fish, such as spawning (Montgomery et al. 1983, Nesler et al. 1988), egg hatching (Næsje et al. 1995), rearing (Seegrist and Gard 1978), movement onto the floodplain for feeding or reproduction (Junk et al. 1989, Sparks 1995, Welcomme 1992), or migration upstream or downstream (Trépanier et al. 1996). Natural seasonal variation in flow conditions can prevent

the successful establishment of non-native species with flow-dependent spawning and egg incubation requirements, such as striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*; Turner and Chadwick 1972) and brown trout (*Salmo trutta*; Moyle and Light 1996, Strange et al. 1992).

Seasonal access to floodplain wetlands is essential for the survival of certain river fishes, and such access can directly link high wetland productivity with fish production in the stream channel (Copp 1989, Welcomme 1979). Studies of the effects on stream fishes of both extensive and limited floodplain inundation (Finger and Stewart 1987, Ross and Baker 1983) indicate that some fishes are adapted to exploiting floodplain habitats, and these species decline in abundance when floodplain use is restricted. Models indicate that catch rates and biomass of fish are influenced by both maximum and minimum wetland area (Power et al. 1995, Welcomme and Hagborg 1977), and empirical work shows that the area of floodplain water bodies during nonflood periods influences the species richness of those wetland habitats (Halyk and Balon 1983). The timing of floodplain inundation is important for some fish because migratory and reproductive behaviors must coincide with access to and avail-

Table 2. Ecological responses to alterations in components of natural flow regime.^a

| Flow component | Specific alteration | Ecological response | Reference(s) |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| Magnitude and frequency | Increased variation | Wash-out and/or stranding Loss of sensitive species | Cushman 1985, Petts 1984 Gehrke et al. 1995, Kingsolving and Bain 1993, Travnichek et al. 1995 |
| | | Increased algal scour and wash-out of organic matter | Petts 1984 |
| | Flow stabilization | Life cycle disruption | Scheidegger and Bain 1995 |
| | | Altered energy flow Invasion or establishment of exotic species, leading to: Local extinction Threat to native commercial species Altered communities | Valentin et al. 1995 Kupferberg 1996, Meffe 1984 Stanford et al. 1996 Busch and Smith 1995, Moyle 1986, Ward and Stanford 1979 |
| Timing | Loss of seasonal flow peaks | Reduced water and nutrients to floodplain plant species, causing: Seedling desiccation Ineffective seed dispersal Loss of scoured habitat patches and secondary channels needed for plant establishment | Duncan 1993 Nilsson 1982 Fenner et al. 1985, Rood et al. 1995, Scott et al. 1997, Shankman and Drake 1990 |
| | | Encroachment of vegetation into channels | Johnson 1994, Nilsson 1982 |
| | | Disrupt cues for fish: Spawning | Fausch and Bestgen 1997, Montgomery et al. 1993, Nesler et al. 1988 |
| | | Egg hatching Migration Loss of fish access to wetlands or backwaters Modification of aquatic food web structure Reduction or elimination of riparian plant recruitment Invasion of exotic riparian species Reduced plant growth rates | Næsje et al. 1995 Williams 1996 Junk et al. 1989, Sparks 1995 Power 1992, Wootton et al. 1996 Fenner et al. 1985 Horton 1977 Reily and Johnson 1982 |
| Duration | Prolonged low flows | Concentration of aquatic organisms Reduction or elimination of plant cover Diminished plant species diversity Desertification of riparian species composition Physiological stress leading to reduced plant growth rate, morphological change, or mortality | Cushman 1985, Petts 1984 Taylor 1982 Taylor 1982 Busch and Smith 1995, Stromberg et al. 1996 Kondolf and Curry 1986, Perkins et al. 1984, Reily and Johnson 1982, Rood et al. 1995, Stromberg et al. 1992 |
| | | Prolonged baseflow “spikes” | Robertson 1997 |
| | Altered inundation duration | Altered plant cover types | Auble et al. 1994 |
| | Prolonged inundation | Change in vegetation functional type Tree mortality Loss of riffle habitat for aquatic species | Bren 1992, Connor et al. 1981 Harms et al. 1980 Bogan 1993 |
| Rate of change | Rapid changes in river stage | Wash-out and stranding of aquatic species | Cushman 1985, Petts 1984 |
| | Accelerated flood recession | Failure of seedling establishment | Rood et al. 1995 |

^aOnly representative studies are listed here. Additional references are located on the Web at <http://lamar.colostate.edu/~poff/natflow.html>.

ability of floodplain habitats (Welcomme 1979). The match of reproductive period and wetland access also explains some of the yearly variation in stream fish community composition (Finger and Stewart 1987).

Many riparian plants also have life cycles that are adapted to the seasonal timing components of natu-

ral flow regimes through their “emergence phenologies”—the seasonal sequence of flowering, seed dispersal, germination, and seedling growth. The interaction of emergence phenologies with temporally varying environmental stress from flooding or drought helps to maintain high species diversity in, for example,

southern floodplain forests (Streng et al. 1989). Productivity of riparian forests is also influenced by flow timing and can increase when short-duration flooding occurs in the growing season (Mitsch and Rust 1984, Molles et al. 1995).

The rate of change, or flashiness, in flow conditions can influence spe-

cies persistence and coexistence. In many streams and rivers, particularly in arid areas, flow can change dramatically over a period of hours due to heavy storms. Non-native fishes generally lack the behavioral adaptations to avoid being displaced downstream by sudden floods (Minckley and Deacon 1991). In a dramatic example of how floods can benefit native species, Meffe (1984) documented that a native fish, the Gila topminnow (*Poeciliopsis occidentalis*), was locally extirpated by the introduced predatory mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*) in locations where natural flash floods were regulated by upstream dams, but the native species persisted in naturally flashy streams.

Rapid flow increases in streams of the central and southwestern United States often serve as spawning cues for native minnow species, whose rapidly developing eggs are either broadcast into the water column or attached to submerged structures as floodwaters recede (Fausch and Bestgen 1997, Robertson in press). More gradual, seasonal rates of change in flow conditions also regulate the persistence of many aquatic and riparian species. Cottonwoods (*Populus* spp.), for example, are disturbance species that establish after winter-spring flood flows, during a narrow "window of opportunity" when competition-free alluvial substrates and wet soils are available for germination. A certain rate of floodwater recession is critical to seedling germination because seedling roots must remain connected to a receding water table as they grow downward (Rood and Mahoney 1990).

Ecological responses to altered flow regimes

Modification of the natural flow regime dramatically affects both aquatic and riparian species in streams and rivers worldwide. Ecological responses to altered flow regimes in a specific stream or river depend on how the components of flow have changed relative to the natural flow regime for that particular stream or river (Poff and Ward 1990) and how specific geomorphic and ecological processes will respond to this relative change. As a result of

variation in flow regime within and among rivers (Figure 2), the same human activity in different locations may cause different degrees of change relative to unaltered conditions and, therefore, have different ecological consequences.

Flow alteration commonly changes the magnitude and frequency of high and low flows, often reducing variability but sometimes enhancing the range. For example, the extreme daily variations below peaking power hydroelectric dams have no natural analogue in freshwater systems and represent, in an evolutionary sense, an extremely harsh environment of frequent, unpredictable flow disturbance. Many aquatic populations living in these environments suffer high mortality from physiological stress, from wash-out during high flows, and from stranding during rapid dewatering (Cushman 1985, Petts 1984). Especially in shallow shoreline habitats, frequent atmospheric exposure for even brief periods can result in massive mortality of bottom-dwelling organisms and subsequent severe reductions in biological productivity (Weisberg et al. 1990). Moreover, the rearing and refuge functions of shallow shoreline or backwater areas, where many small fish species and the young of large species are found (Greenberg et al. 1996, Moore and Gregory 1988), are severely impaired by frequent flow fluctuations (Bain et al. 1988, Stanford 1994). In these artificially fluctuating environments, specialized stream or river species are typically replaced by generalist species that tolerate frequent and large variations in flow. Furthermore, life cycles of many species are often disrupted and energy flow through the ecosystem is greatly modified (Table 2). Short-term flow modifications clearly lead to a reduction in both the natural diversity and abundance of many native fish and invertebrates.

At the opposite hydrologic extreme, flow stabilization below certain types of dams, such as water supply reservoirs, results in artificially constant environments that lack natural extremes. Although production of a few species may increase greatly, it is usually at the expense of other native species and of systemwide species diversity

(Ward and Stanford 1979). Many lake fish species have successfully invaded (or been intentionally established in) flow-stabilized river environments (Moyle 1986, Moyle and Light 1996). Often top predators, these introduced fish can devastate native river fish and threaten commercially valuable stocks (Stanford et al. 1996). In the southwestern United States, virtually the entire native river fish fauna is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, largely as a consequence of water withdrawal, flow stabilization, and exotic species proliferation. The last remaining strongholds of native river fishes are all in dynamic, free-flowing rivers, where exotic fishes are periodically reduced by natural flash floods (Minckley and Deacon 1991, Minckley and Meffe 1987).

Flow stabilization also reduces the magnitude and frequency of overbank flows, affecting riparian plant species and communities. In rivers with constrained canyon reaches or multiple shallow channels, loss of high flows results in increased cover of plant species that would otherwise be removed by flood scour (Ligon et al. 1995, Williams and Wolman 1984). Moreover, due to other related effects of flow regulation, including increased water salinity, non-native vegetation often dominates, such as the salt cedar (*Tamarix* sp.) in the semiarid western United States (Busch and Smith 1995). In alluvial valleys, the loss of overbank flows can greatly modify riparian communities by causing plant desiccation, reduced growth, competitive exclusion, ineffective seed dispersal, or failure of seedling establishment (Table 2).

The elimination of flooding may also affect animal species that depend on terrestrial habitats. For example, in the flow-stabilized Platte River of the United States Great Plains, the channel has narrowed dramatically (up to 85%) over a period of decades (Johnson 1994). This narrowing has been facilitated by vegetative colonization of sandbars that formerly provided nesting habitat for the threatened piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) and endangered least tern (*Sterna antillarum*; Sidle et al. 1992). Sand-

hill cranes (*Grus canadensis*), which made the Platte River famous, have abandoned river segments that have narrowed the most (Krapu et al. 1984).

Changes in the duration of flow conditions also have significant biological consequences. Riparian plant species respond dramatically to channel dewatering, which occurs frequently in arid regions due to surface water diversion and groundwater pumping. These biological and ecological responses range from altered leaf morphology to total loss of riparian vegetation cover (Table 2). Changes in duration of inundation, independent of changes in annual volume of flow, can alter the abundance of plant cover types (Auble et al. 1994). For example, increased duration of inundation has contributed to the conversion of grassland to forest along a regulated Australian river (Bren 1992). For aquatic species, prolonged flows of particular levels can also be damaging. In the regulated Pecos River of New Mexico, artificially prolonged high summer flows for irrigation displace the floating eggs of the threatened Pecos bluntnose shiner (*Notropis sinius pecosensis*) into unfavorable habitat, where none survive (Robertson in press).

Modification of natural flow timing, or predictability, can affect aquatic organisms both directly and indirectly. For example, some native fishes in Norway use seasonal flow peaks as a cue for egg hatching, and river regulation that eliminates these peaks can directly reduce local population sizes of these species (Næsje et al. 1995). Furthermore, entire food webs, not just single species, may be modified by altered flow timing. In regulated rivers of northern California, the seasonal shifting of scouring flows from winter to summer indirectly reduces the growth rate of juvenile steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) by increasing the relative abundance of predator-resistant invertebrates that divert energy away from the food chain leading to trout (Wootton et al. 1996). In unregulated rivers, high winter flows reduce these predator-resistant insects and favor species that are more palatable to fish.

Riparian plant species are also strongly affected by altered flow tim-

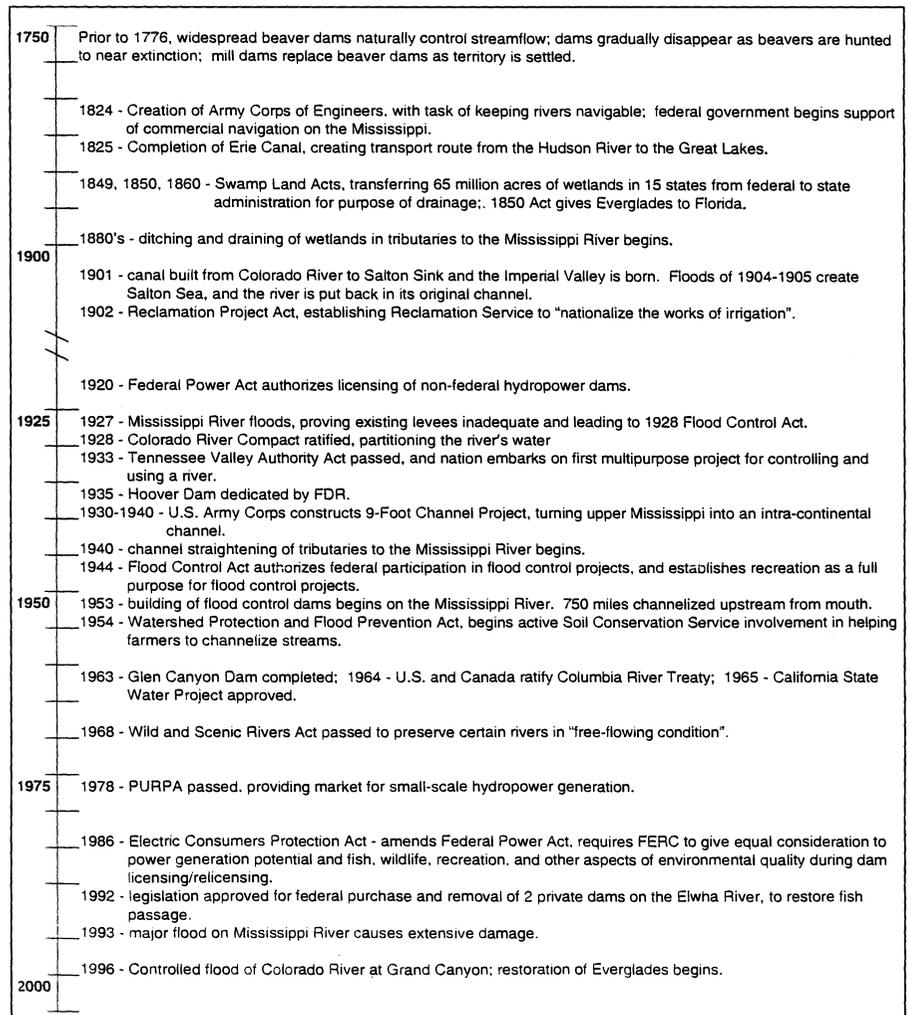


Figure 5. A brief history of flow alteration in the United States.

ing (Table 2). A shift in timing of peak flows from spring to summer, as often occurs when reservoirs are managed to supply irrigation water, has prevented reestablishment of the Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), the dominant plant species in Arizona, because flow peaks now occur after, rather than before, its germination period (Fenner et al. 1985). Non-native plant species with less specific germination requirements may benefit from changes in flood timing. For example, salt cedar's (*Tamarix* sp.) long seed dispersal period allows it to establish after floods occurring any time during the growing season, contributing to its abundance on floodplains of the western United States (Horton 1977).

Altering the rate of change in flow can negatively affect both aquatic and riparian species. As mentioned above, loss of natural flashiness

threatens most of the native fish fauna of the American Southwest (Minckley and Deacon 1991), and artificially increased rates of change caused by peaking power hydroelectric dams on historically less flashy rivers creates numerous ecological problems (Table 2; Petts 1984). A modified rate of change can devastate riparian species, such as cottonwoods, whose successful seedling growth depends on the rate of groundwater recession following floodplain inundation. In the St. Mary River in Alberta, Canada, for example, rapid draw-downs of river stage during spring have prevented the recruitment of young trees (Rood and Mahoney 1990). Such effects can be reversed, however. Restoration of the spring flood and its natural, slow recession in the Truckee River in California has allowed the successful establishment of a new generation of cotton-

Table 3. Recent projects in which restoration of some component(s) of natural flow regimes has occurred or been proposed for specific ecological benefits.

| Location | Flow component(s) | Ecological purpose(s) | Reference |
|--|---|--|----------------------------|
| Trinity River, CA | Mimic timing and magnitude of peak flow | Rejuvenate in-channel gravel habitats; restore early riparian succession; provide migration flows for juvenile salmon | Barinaga 1996 ^a |
| Truckee River, CA | Mimic timing, magnitude, and duration of peak flow, and its rate of change during recession | Restore riparian trees, especially cottonwoods | Klotz and Swanson 1997 |
| Owens River, CA | Increase base flows; partially restore overbank flows | Restore riparian vegetation and habitat for native fishes and non-native brown trout | Hill and Platts in press |
| Rush Creek, CA (and other tributaries to Mono Lake) | Increase minimum flows | Restore riparian vegetation and habitat for waterfowl and non-native fishes | LADWP 1995 |
| Oldman River and tributaries, southern Alberta, Canada | Increase summer flows; reduce rates of postflood stage decline; mimic natural flows in wet years | Restore riparian vegetation (cottonwoods) and cold-water (trout) fisheries | Rood et al. 1995 |
| Green River, UT | Mimic timing and duration of peak flow and duration and timing of nonpeak flows; reduce rapid baseflow fluctuations from hydropower generation | Recovery of endangered fish species; enhance other native fishes | Stanford 1994 |
| San Juan River, UT/NM | Mimic magnitude, timing, and duration of peak flow; restore low winter baseflows | Recovery of endangered fish species | — ^b |
| Gunnison River, CO | Mimic magnitude, timing, and duration of peak flow; mimic duration and timing of nonpeak flows | Recovery of endangered fish species | — ^b |
| Rio Grande River, NM | Mimic timing and duration of floodplain inundation | Ecosystem processes (e.g., nitrogen flux, microbial activity, litter decomposition) | Molles et al. 1995 |
| Pecos River, NM | Regulate duration and magnitude of summer irrigation releases to mimic spawning flow “spikes”; maintain minimum flows | Determine spawning and habitat needs for threatened fish species | Robertson 1997 |
| Colorado River, AZ | Mimic magnitude and timing | Restore habitat for endangered fish species and scour riparian zone | Collier et al. 1997 |
| Bill Williams River, AZ (proposed) | Mimic natural flood peak timing and duration | Promote establishment of native trees | USCOE 1996 |
| Pemigewasset River, NH | Reduce frequency (i.e., to no more than natural frequency) of high flows during summer low-flow season; reduce rate of change between low and high flows during hydropower cycles | Enhance native Atlantic salmon recovery | FERC 1995 |
| Roanoke River, VA | Restore more natural patterning of monthly flows in spring; reduce rate of change between low and high flows during hydropower cycles | Increased reproduction of striped bass | Rulifson and Manooch 1993 |
| Kissimmee River, FL | Mimic magnitude, duration, rate of change, and timing of high- and low-flow periods | Restore floodplain inundation to recover wetland functions; reestablish in-channel habitats for fish and other aquatic species | Toth 1995 |

^aJ. Polos, 1997, personal communication. US Fish & Wildlife Service, Arcata, CA.

^bF. Pfeifer, 1997, personal communication. US Fish & Wildlife Service, Grand Junction, CO.

wood trees (Klotz and Swanson 1997).

Recent approaches to streamflow management

Methods to estimate environmental flow requirements for rivers focus

primarily on one or a few species that live in the wetted river channel. Most of these methods have the narrow intent of establishing minimum allowable flows. The simplest make use of easily analyzed flow data, of assumptions about the regional similarity of rivers, and of professional

opinions of the minimal flow needs for certain fish species (e.g., Larson 1981).

A more sophisticated assessment of how changes in river flow affect aquatic habitat is provided by the Instream Flow Incremental Methodology (IFIM; Bovee and Milhous

1978). IFIM combines two models, a biological one that describes the physical habitat preferences of fishes (and occasionally macroinvertebrates) in terms of depth, velocity, and substrate, and a hydraulic one that estimates how the availability of habitat for fish varies with discharge. IFIM has been widely used as an organizational framework for formulating and evaluating alternative water management options related to production of one or a few fish species (Stalnaker et al. 1995).

As a predictive tool for ecological management, the IFIM modeling approach has been criticized both in terms of the statistical validity of its physical habitat characterizations (Williams 1996) and the limited realism of its biological assumptions (Castleberry et al. 1996). Field tests of its predictions have yielded mixed results (Morehardt 1986). Although this approach continues to evolve, both by adding biological realism (Van Winkle et al. 1993) and by expanding the range of habitats modeled (Stalnaker et al. 1995), in practice it is often used only to establish minimum flows for "important" (i.e., game or imperiled) fish species. But current understanding of river ecology clearly indicates that fish and other aquatic organisms require habitat features that cannot be maintained by minimum flows alone (see Stalnaker 1990). A range of flows is necessary to scour and revitalize gravel beds, to import wood and organic matter from the floodplain, and to provide access to productive riparian wetlands (Figure 4). Inter-annual variation in these flow peaks is also critical for maintaining channel and riparian dynamics. For example, imposition of only a fixed high-flow level each year would simply result in the equilibration of in-channel and floodplain habitats to these constant peak flows.

Moreover, a focus on one or a few species and on minimum flows fails to recognize that what is "good" for the ecosystem may not consistently benefit individual species, and that what is good for individual species may not be of benefit to the ecosystem. Long-term studies of naturally variable systems show that some species do best in wet years, that other species do best in dry years, and that

overall biological diversity and ecosystem function benefit from these variations in species success (Tilman et al. 1994). Indeed, experience in river restoration clearly shows the impossibility of simultaneously engineering optimal conditions for all species (Sparks 1992, 1995, Toth 1995). A holistic view that attempts to restore natural variability in ecological processes and species success (and that acknowledges the tremendous uncertainty that is inherent in attempting to mechanistically model all species in the ecosystem) is necessary for ecosystem management and restoration (Franklin 1993).

Managing toward a natural flow regime

The first step toward better incorporating flow regime into the management of river ecosystems is to recognize that extensive human alteration of river flow has resulted in widespread geomorphic and ecological changes in these ecosystems. The history of river use is also a history of flow alteration (Figure 5). The early establishment of the US Army Corps of Engineers is testimony to the importance that the nation gave to developing navigable water routes and to controlling recurrent large floods. However, growing understanding of the ecological impacts of flow alteration has led to a shift toward an appreciation of the merits of free-flowing rivers. For example, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 recognized that the flow of certain rivers should be protected as a national resource, and the recent blossoming of natural flow restoration projects (Table 3) may herald the beginning of efforts to undo some of the damage of past flow alterations. The next century holds promise as an era for renegotiating human relationships with rivers, in which lessons from past experience are used to direct wise and informed action in the future.

A large body of evidence has shown that the natural flow regime of virtually all rivers is inherently variable, and that this variability is critical to ecosystem function and native biodiversity. As we have already discussed, rivers with highly altered and regulated flows lose their ability to support natural processes

and native species. Thus, to protect pristine or nearly pristine systems, it is necessary to preserve the natural hydrologic cycle by safeguarding against upstream river development and damaging land uses that modify runoff and sediment supply in the watershed.

Most rivers are highly modified, of course, and so the greatest challenges lie in managing and restoring rivers that are also used to satisfy human needs. Can reestablishing the natural flow regime serve as a useful management and restoration goal? We believe that it can, although to varying degrees, depending on the present extent of human intervention and flow alteration affecting a particular river. Recognizing the natural variability of river flow and explicitly incorporating the five components of the natural flow regime (i.e., magnitude, frequency, duration, timing, and rate of change) into a broader framework for ecosystem management would constitute a major advance over most present management, which focuses on minimum flows and on just a few species. Such recognition would also contribute to the developing science of stream restoration in heavily altered watersheds, where, all too often, physical channel features (e.g., bars and woody debris) are re-created without regard to restoring the flow regime that will help to maintain these re-created features.

Just as rivers have been incrementally modified, they can be incrementally restored, with resulting improvements to many physical and biological processes. A list of recent efforts to restore various components of a natural flow regime (that is, to "naturalize" river flow) demonstrates the scope for success (Table 3). Many of the projects summarized in Table 3 represent only partial steps toward full flow restoration, but they have had demonstrable ecological benefits. For example, high flood flows followed by mimicked natural rates of flow decline in the Oldman River of Alberta, Canada, resulted in a massive cottonwood recruitment that extended for more than 500 km downstream from the Oldman Dam. Dampening of the unnatural flow fluctuations caused by hydroelectric generation on the Roanoke River in

Virginia has increased juvenile abundances of native striped bass. Mimicking short-duration flow spikes that are historically caused by summer thunderstorms in the regulated Pecos River of New Mexico has benefited the reproductive success of the Pecos bluntnose shiner.

We also recognize that there are scientific limits to how precisely the natural flow regime for a particular river can be defined. It is possible to have only an approximate knowledge of the historic condition of a river, both because some human activities may have preceded the installation of flow gauges, and because climate conditions may have changed over the past century or more. Furthermore, in many rivers, year-to-year differences in the timing and quantity of flow result in substantial variability around any average flow condition. Accordingly, managing for the "average" condition can be misguided. For example, in human-altered rivers that are managed for incremental improvements, restoring a flow pattern that is simply proportional to the natural hydrograph in years with little runoff may provide few if any ecological benefits, because many geomorphic and ecological processes show nonlinear responses to flow. Clearly, half of the peak discharge will not move half of the sediment, half of a migration-motivational flow will not motivate half of the fish, and half of an overbank flow will not inundate half of the floodplain. In such rivers, more ecological benefits would accrue from capitalizing on the natural between-year variability in flow. For example, in years with above-average flow, "surplus" water could be used to exceed flow thresholds that drive critical geomorphic and ecological processes.

If full flow restoration is impossible, mimicking certain geomorphic processes may provide some ecological benefits. Well-timed irrigation could stimulate recruitment of valued riparian trees such as cottonwoods (Friedman et al. 1995). Strategically clearing vegetation from river banks could provide new sources of gravel for sediment-starved regulated rivers with reduced peak flows (e.g., Ligon et al. 1995). In all situations, managers will be

required to make judgments about specific restoration goals and to work with appropriate components of the natural flow regime to achieve those goals. Recognition of the natural flow variability and careful identification of key processes that are linked to various components of the flow regime are critical to making these judgments.

Setting specific goals to restore a more natural regime in rivers with altered flows (or, equally important, to preserve unaltered flows in pristine rivers) should ideally be a cooperative process involving river scientists, resource managers, and appropriate stakeholders. The details of this process will vary depending on the specific objectives for the river in question, the degree to which its flow regime and other environmental variables (e.g., thermal regime, sediment supply) have been altered, and the social and economic constraints that are in play. Establishing specific criteria for flow restoration will be challenging because our understanding of the interactions of individual flow components with geomorphic and ecological processes is incomplete. However, quantitative, river-specific standards can, in principle, be developed based on the reconstruction of the natural flow regime (e.g., Richter et al. 1997). Restoration actions based on such guidelines should be viewed as experiments to be monitored and evaluated—that is, adaptive management—to provide critical new knowledge for creative management of natural ecosystem variability (Table 3).

To manage rivers from this new perspective, some policy changes are needed. The narrow regulatory focus on minimum flows and single species impedes enlightened river management and restoration, as do the often conflicting mandates of the many agencies and organizations that are involved in the process. Revisions of laws and regulations, and redefinition of societal goals and policies, are essential to enable managers to use the best science to develop appropriate management programs.

Using science to guide ecosystem management requires that basic and applied research address difficult questions in complex, real-world settings, in which experimental con-

trols and statistical replication are often impossible. Too little attention and too few resources have been devoted to clarifying how restoring specific components of the flow regime will benefit the entire ecosystem. Nevertheless, it is clear that, whenever possible, the natural river system should be allowed to repair and maintain itself. This approach is likely to be the most successful and the least expensive way to restore and maintain the ecological integrity of flow-altered rivers (Stanford et al. 1996). Although the most effective mix of human-aided and natural recovery methods will vary with the river, we believe that existing knowledge makes a strong case that restoring natural flows should be a cornerstone of our management approach to river ecosystems.

Acknowledgments

We thank the following people for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this paper: Jack Schmidt, Lou Toth, Mike Scott, David Wegner, Gary Meffe, Mary Power, Kurt Fausch, Jack Stanford, Bob Naiman, Don Duff, John Epifanio, Lori Robertson, Jeff Baumgartner, Tim Randle, David Harpman, Mike Armbruster, and Thomas Payne. Members of the Hydropower Reform Coalition also offered constructive comments. Excellent final reviews were provided by Greg Auble, Carter Johnson, an anonymous reviewer, and the editor of *BioScience*. Robin Abell contributed to the development of the timeline in Figure 5, and graphics assistance was provided by Teresa Peterson (Figure 3), Matthew Chew (Figure 4) and Robin Abell and Jackie Howard (Figure 5). We also thank the national offices of Trout Unlimited and American Rivers for encouraging the expression of the ideas presented here. We especially thank the George Gund Foundation for providing a grant to hold a one-day workshop, and The Nature Conservancy for providing logistical support for several of the authors prior to the workshop.

References cited

Abramovitz JN. 1996. Imperiled waters, impoverished future: the decline of freshwa-

- ter ecosystems. Washington (DC): Worldwatch Institute. Worldwatch paper nr 128.
- Allan JD, Flecker AS. 1993. Biodiversity conservation in running waters. *BioScience* 43: 32–43.
- Arthington AH, King JM, O'Keefe JH, Bunn SE, Day JA, Pusey BJ, Bluhdorn DR, Thame R. 1991. Development of an holistic approach for assessing environmental flow requirements of riverine ecosystems. Pages 69–76 in Pigram JJ, Hooper BA, eds. *Water allocation for the environment: proceedings of an international seminar and workshop*. University of New England Armidale (Australia): The Centre for Water Policy Research.
- Auble GT, Friedman JM, Scott ML. 1994. Relating riparian vegetation to present and future streamflows. *Ecological Applications* 4: 544–554.
- Bain MB, Finn JT, Booke HE. 1988. Streamflow regulation and fish community structure. *Ecology* 69: 382–392.
- Barinaga M. 1996. A recipe for river recovery? *Science* 273: 1648–1650.
- Beschta RL, Jackson WL. 1979. The intrusion of fine sediments into a stable gravel bed. *Journal of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada* 36: 207–210.
- Beven KJ. 1986. Hillslope runoff processes and flood frequency characteristics. Pages 187–202 in Abrahams AD, ed. *Hillslope processes*. Boston: Allen and Unwin.
- Bogan AE. 1993. Freshwater bivalve extinctions (Mollusca: Unionida): a search for causes. *American Zoologist* 33: 599–609.
- Bovee KD, Milhous R. 1978. Hydraulic simulation in instream flow studies: theory and techniques. Ft. Collins (CO): Office of Biological Services, US Fish & Wildlife Service. *Instream Flow Information Paper nr 5, FWS/OBS-78/33*.
- Bren LJ. 1992. Tree invasion of an intermittent wetland in relation to changes in the flooding frequency of the River Murray, Australia. *Australian Journal of Ecology* 17: 395–408.
- Brookes A. 1988. Channelized rivers, perspectives for environmental management. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Busch DE, Smith SD. 1995. Mechanisms associated with decline of woody species in riparian ecosystems of the Southwestern US. *Ecological Monographs* 65: 347–370.
- Castleberry DT, et al. 1996. Uncertainty and instream flow standards. *Fisheries* 21: 20–21.
- Chapman RJ, Hinckley TM, Lee LC, Teskey RO. 1982. Impact of water level changes on woody riparian and wetland communities. Vol. 10. Kearneysville (WV): US Fish & Wildlife Service. Publication nr OBS-82/83.
- Chien N. 1985. Changes in river regime after the construction of upstream reservoirs. *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* 10: 143–159.
- Closs GP, Lake PS. 1996. Drought, differential mortality and the coexistence of a native and an introduced fish species in a south east Australian intermittent stream. *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 47: 17–26.
- Collier M, Webb RH, Schmidt JC. 1996. Dams and rivers: primer on the downstream effects of dams. Reston (VA): US Geological Survey. Circular nr 1126.
- Collier MP, Webb RH, Andrews ED. 1997. Experimental flooding in the Grand Canyon. *Scientific American* 276: 82–89.
- Connor WH, Gosselink JG, Parrondo RT. 1981. Comparison of the vegetation of three Louisiana swamp sites with different flooding regimes. *American Journal of Botany* 68: 320–331.
- Copp GH. 1989. The habitat diversity and fish reproductive function of floodplain ecosystems. *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 26: 1–27.
- Cushman RM. 1985. Review of ecological effects of rapidly varying flows downstream from hydroelectric facilities. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management* 5: 330–339.
- Daniels RB. 1960. Entrenchment of the willow drainage ditch, Harrison County, Iowa. *American Journal of Science* 258: 161–176.
- Duncan RP. 1993. Flood disturbance and the coexistence of species in a lowland podocarp forest, south Westland, New Zealand. *Journal of Ecology* 81: 403–416.
- Dunne T, Leopold LB. 1978. *Water in Environmental Planning*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co.
- Echeverria JD, Barrow P, Roos-Collins R. 1989. Rivers at risk: the concerned citizen's guide to hydropower. Washington (DC): Island Press.
- Faber S. 1996. On borrowed land: public policies for floodplains. Cambridge (MA): Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
- Fausch KD, Bestgen KR. 1997. Ecology of fishes indigenous to the central and southwestern Great Plains. Pages 131–166 in Knopf FL, Samson FB, eds. *Ecology and conservation of Great Plains vertebrates*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- [FERC] Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. 1995. Relicensing the Ayers Island hydroelectric project in the Pemigewasset/Merrimack River Basin. Washington (DC): Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Final environmental impact statement, FERC Project nr 2456–009.
- Fenner P, Brady WW, Patten DR. 1985. Effects of regulated water flows on regeneration of Fremont cottonwood. *Journal of Range Management* 38: 135–138.
- Finger TR, Stewart EM. 1987. Response of fishes to flooding in lowland hardwood wetlands. Pages 86–92 in Matthews WJ, Heins DC, eds. *Community and evolutionary ecology of North American stream fishes*. Norman (OK): University of Oklahoma Press.
- Fisher SG. 1983. Succession in streams. Pages 7–27 in Barnes JR, Minshall GW, eds. *Stream ecology: application and testing of general ecological theory*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Franklin JF. 1993. Preserving biodiversity: species, ecosystems, or landscapes? *Ecological Applications* 3: 202–205.
- Friedman JM, Scott ML, Lewis WM. 1995. Restoration of riparian forest using irrigation, artificial disturbance, and natural seedfall. *Environmental Management* 19: 547–557.
- Gehrke PC, Brown P, Schiller CB, Moffatt DB, Bruce AM. 1995. River regulation and fish communities in the Murray-Darling river system, Australia. *Regulated Rivers: Research & Management* 11: 363–375.
- Greenberg L, Svendsen P, Harby A. 1996. Availability of microhabitats and their use by brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) and grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*) in the River Vojman, Sweden. *Regulated Rivers: Research & Management* 12: 287–303.
- Halyk LC, Balon EK. 1983. Structure and ecological production of the fish taxocene of a small floodplain system. *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 61: 2446–2464.
- Hammer TR. 1972. Stream channel enlargement due to urbanization. *Water Resources Research* 8: 1530–1540.
- Harms WR, Schreuder HT, Hook DD, Brown CL, Shropshire FW. 1980. The effects of flooding on the swamp forest in Lake Oklawaha, Florida. *Ecology* 61: 1412–1421.
- Hill MT, Platts WS. In press. Restoration of riparian habitat with a multiple flow regime in the Owens River Gorge, California. *Journal of Restoration Ecology*.
- Hill MT, Platts WS, Beschta RL. 1991. Ecological and geomorphological concepts for instream and out-of-channel flow requirements. *Rivers* 2: 198–210.
- Holling CS, Meffe GK. 1996. Command and control and the pathology of natural resource management. *Conservation Biology* 10: 328–337.
- Horton JS. 1977. The development and perpetuation of the permanent tamarisk type in the phreatophyte zone of the Southwest. USDA Forest Service. General Technical Report nr RM-43: 124–127.
- Hughes FMR. 1994. Environmental change, disturbance, and regeneration in semi-arid floodplain forests. Pages 321–345 in Millington AC, Pye K, eds. *Environmental change in drylands: biogeographical and geomorphological perspectives*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Hughes RM, Noss RF. 1992. Biological diversity and biological integrity: current concerns for lakes and streams. *Fisheries* 17: 11–19.
- Hupp CR, Osterkamp WR. 1985. Bottomland vegetation distribution along Passage Creek, Virginia, in relation to fluvial landforms. *Ecology* 66: 670–681.
- Johnson WC. 1994. Woodland expansion in the Platte River, Nebraska: patterns and causes. *Ecological Monographs* 64: 45–84.
- Johnson WC, Burgess RL, Keammerer WR. 1976. Forest overstory vegetation and environment on the Missouri River floodplain in North Dakota. *Ecological Monographs* 46: 59–84.
- Junk WJ, Bayley PB, Sparks RE. 1989. The flood pulse concept in river-floodplain systems. *Canadian Special Publication of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* 106: 110–127.
- Karr JR. 1991. Biological integrity: a long-neglected aspect of water resource management. *Ecological Applications* 1: 66–84.
- Karr JR, Toth LA, Dudley DR. 1985. Fish communities of midwestern rivers: a history of degradation. *BioScience* 35: 90–95.
- Keller EA, Swanson FJ. 1979. Effects of large organic material on channel form and fluvial processes. *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* 4: 351–380.
- Kingsolving AD, Bain MB. 1993. Fish assemblage recovery along a riverine disturbance gradient. *Ecological Applications* 3: 531–544.
- Klotz JR, Swanson S. 1997. Managed instream flows for woody vegetation recruitment, a case study. Pages 483–489 in Warwick J,

- ed. Symposium proceedings: water resources education, training, and practice: opportunities for the next century. American Water Resources Association, Universities Council on Water Resources, American Water Works Association; 29 Jun–3 Jul; Keystone, CO.
- Knox JC. 1972. Valley alluviation in southwestern Wisconsin. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 62: 401–410.
- Kondolf GM, Curry RR. 1986. Channel erosion along the Carmel River, Monterey County, California. *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* 11: 307–319.
- Krapu GL, Facey DE, Fritzell EK, Johnson DH. 1984. Habitat use by migrant sandhill cranes in Nebraska. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 48: 407–417.
- Kupferberg SK. 1996. Hydrologic and geomorphic factors affecting conservation of a river-breeding frog (*Rana boylei*). *Ecological Applications* 6: 1332–1344.
- Larson HN. 1981. New England flow policy. Memorandum, interim regional policy for New England stream flow recommendations. Boston: US Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 5.
- Leopold LB. 1968. Hydrology for urban land planning: a guidebook on the hydrologic effects of land use. Reston (VA): US Geological Survey. Circular nr 554.
- Leopold LB, Wolman MG, Miller JP. 1964. Fluvial processes in geomorphology. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman & Sons.
- Ligon FK, Dietrich WE, Trush WJ. 1995. Downstream ecological effects of dams, a geomorphic perspective. *BioScience* 45: 183–192.
- [LADWP] Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. 1995. Draft Mono Basin stream and channel restoration plan. Los Angeles: Department of Water and Power.
- Meffe GK. 1984. Effects of abiotic disturbance on coexistence of predator and prey fish species. *Ecology* 65: 1525–1534.
- Meffe GK, Minckley WL. 1987. Persistence and stability of fish and invertebrate assemblages in a repeatedly disturbed Sonoran Desert stream. *American Midland Naturalist* 117: 177–191.
- Miller AJ. 1990. Flood hydrology and geomorphic effectiveness in the central Appalachians. *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* 15: 119–134.
- Minckley WL, Deacon JE, ed. 1991. Battle against extinction: native fish management in the American West. Tucson (AZ): University of Arizona Press.
- Minckley WL, Meffe GK. 1987. Differential selection by flooding in stream-fish communities of the arid American Southwest. Pages 93–104 in Matthews WJ, Heins DC, eds. Community and evolutionary ecology of North American stream fishes. Norman (OK): University of Oklahoma Press.
- Mitsch WJ, Rust WG. 1984. Tree growth responses to flooding in a bottomland forest in northern Illinois. *Forest Science* 30: 499–510.
- Molles MC, Crawford CS, Ellis LM. 1995. Effects of an experimental flood on litter dynamics in the Middle Rio Grande riparian ecosystem. *Regulated Rivers: Research & Management* 11: 275–281.
- Montgomery WL, McCormick SD, Naiman RJ, Whoriskey FG, Black GA. 1983. Spring migratory synchrony of salmonid, catostomid, and cyprinid fishes in Rivière à la Truite, Québec. *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 61: 2495–2502.
- Moore KMS, Gregory SV. 1988. Response of young-of-the-year cutthroat trout to manipulations of habitat structure in a small stream. *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 117: 162–170.
- Morehardt JE. 1986. Instream flow methodologies. Palo Alto (CA): Electric Power Research Institute. Report nr EPRI EA-4819.
- Moyle PB. 1986. Fish introductions into North America: patterns and ecological impact. Pages 27–43 in Mooney HA, Drake JA, eds. Ecology of biological invasions of North America and Hawaii. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Moyle PB, Light T. 1996. Fish invasions in California: do abiotic factors determine success? *Ecology* 77: 1666–1669.
- Næsje T, Jonsson B, Skurdal J. 1995. Spring flood: a primary cue for hatching of river spawning Coregoninae. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* 52: 2190–2196.
- Naiman RJ, Magnuson JJ, McKnight DM, Stanford JA. 1995. The freshwater imperative: a research agenda. Washington (DC): Island Press.
- [NRC] National Research Council. 1992. Restoration of aquatic systems: science, technology, and public policy. Washington (DC): National Academy Press.
- _____. 1996. Upstream: salmon and society in the Pacific Northwest. Washington (DC): National Academy Press.
- Nesler TP, Muth RT, Wasowicz AF. 1988. Evidence for baseline flow spikes as spawning cues for Colorado Squawfish in the Yampa River, Colorado. *American Fisheries Society Symposium* 5: 68–79.
- Nilsen ET, Sharifi MR, Rundel PW. 1984. Comparative water relations of phreatophytes in the Sonoran Desert of California. *Ecology* 65: 767–778.
- Nilsson C. 1982. Effects of stream regulation on riparian vegetation. Pages 93–106 in Lillehammer A, Saltveit SJ, eds. Regulated rivers. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Perkins DJ, Carlsen BN, Fredstrom M, Miller RH, Rofer CM, Ruggerone GT, Zimmerman CS. 1984. The effects of groundwater pumping on natural spring communities in Owens Valley. Pages 515–527 in Warner RE, Hendrix KM, eds. California riparian systems: ecology, conservation, and productive management. Berkeley (CA): University of California Press.
- Petts GE. 1984. Impounded rivers: perspectives for ecological management. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- _____. 1985. Time scales for ecological concern in regulated rivers. Pages 257–266 in Craig JF, Kemper JB, eds. Regulated streams: advances in ecology. New York: Plenum Press.
- Pickett STA, Parker VT, Fiedler PL. 1992. The new paradigm in ecology: implications for conservation biology above the species level. Pages 66–88 in Fiedler PL, Jain SK, eds. Conservation biology. New York: Chapman & Hall.
- Poff NL. 1996. A hydrogeography of unregulated streams in the United States and an examination of scale-dependence in some hydrological descriptors. *Freshwater Biology* 36: 101–121.
- Poff NL, Allan JD. 1995. Functional organization of stream fish assemblages in relation to hydrological variability. *Ecology* 76: 606–627.
- Poff NL, Ward JV. 1989. Implications of streamflow variability and predictability for lotic community structure: a regional analysis of streamflow patterns. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* 46: 1805–1818.
- _____. 1990. The physical habitat template of lotic systems: recovery in the context of historical pattern of spatio-temporal heterogeneity. *Environmental Management* 14: 629–646.
- Power ME. 1992. Hydrologic and trophic controls of seasonal algal blooms in northern California rivers. *Archiv für Hydrobiologie* 125: 385–410.
- Power ME, Sun A, Parker M, Dietrich WE, Wootton JT. 1995. Hydraulic food-chain models: an approach to the study of food-web dynamics in large rivers. *BioScience* 45: 159–167.
- Prestegard KL. 1988. Morphological controls on sediment delivery pathways. Pages 533–540 in Walling DE, ed. Sediment budgets. Wallingford (UK): IAHS Press. International Association of Hydrological Sciences Publication nr 174.
- Prestegard KL, Matherne AM, Shane B, Houghton K, O'Connell M, Katyl N. 1994. Spatial variations in the magnitude of the 1993 floods, Raccoon River Basin, Iowa. *Geomorphology* 10: 169–182.
- Reeves GH, Benda LE, Burnett KM, Bisson PA, Sedell JR. 1996. A disturbance-based ecosystem approach to maintaining and restoring freshwater habitats of evolutionarily significant units of anadromous salmonids in the Pacific Northwest. *American Fisheries Society Symposium* 17: 334–349.
- Reily PW, Johnson WC. 1982. The effects of altered hydrologic regime on tree growth along the Missouri River in North Dakota. *Canadian Journal of Botany* 60: 2410–2423.
- Resh VH, Brown AV, Covich AP, Gurtz ME, Li HW, Minshall GW, Reice SR, Sheldon AL, Wallace JB, Wissmar R. 1988. The role of disturbance in stream ecology. *Journal of the North American Benthological Society* 7: 433–455.
- Richter BD, Baumgartner JV, Powell J, Braun DP. 1996. A method for assessing hydrologic alteration within ecosystems. *Conservation Biology* 10: 1163–1174.
- Richter BD, Baumgartner JV, Wigington R, Braun DP. 1997. How much water does a river need? *Freshwater Biology* 37: 231–249.
- Robertson L. In press. Water operations on the Pecos River, New Mexico and the Pecos bluntnose shiner, a federally-listed minnow. US Conference on Irrigation and Drainage Symposium.
- Rood SB, Mahoney JM. 1990. Collapse of riparian poplar forests downstream from dams in western prairies: probable causes and prospects for mitigation. *Environmental Management* 14: 451–464.
- Rood SB, Mahoney JM, Reid DE, Zilm L. 1995. Instream flows and the decline of

- riparian cottonwoods along the St. Mary River, Alberta. *Canadian Journal of Botany* 73: 1250–1260.
- Ross ST, Baker JA. 1983. The response of fishes to periodic spring floods in a southeastern stream. *American Midland Naturalist* 109: 1–14.
- Rulifson RA, Manooch CS III, eds. 1993. Roanoke River water flow committee report for 1991–1993. Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine study. Raleigh (NC): US Environmental Protection Agency. Project nr APES 93-18.
- Scheidegger KJ, Bain MB. 1995. Larval fish in natural and regulated rivers: assemblage composition and microhabitat use. *Copeia* 1995: 125–135.
- Schlosser IJ. 1985. Flow regime, juvenile abundance, and the assemblage structure of stream fishes. *Ecology* 66: 1484–1490.
- _____. 1990. Environmental variation, life history attributes, and community structure in stream fishes: implications for environmental management assessment. *Environmental Management* 14: 621–628.
- Scott ML, Friedman JM, Auble GT. 1996. Fluvial processes and the establishment of bottomland trees. *Geomorphology* 14: 327–339.
- Scott ML, Auble GT, Friedman JM. 1997. Flood dependency of cottonwood establishment along the Missouri River, Montana, USA. *Ecological Applications* 7: 677–690.
- Sear DA. 1995. Morphological and sedimentological changes in a gravel-bed river following 12 years of flow regulation for hydropower. *Regulated Rivers: Research & Management* 10: 247–264.
- Seegrist DW, Gard R. 1972. Effects of floods on trout in Sagehen Creek, California. *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 101: 478–482.
- Shankman D, Drake DL. 1990. Channel migration and regeneration of bald cypress in western Tennessee. *Physical Geography* 11: 343–352.
- Sidle JG, Carlson DE, Kirsch EM, Dinan JJ. 1992. Flooding mortality and habitat renewal for least terns and piping plovers. *Colonial Waterbirds* 15: 132–136.
- Southwood TRE. 1977. Habitat, the templet for ecological strategies? *Journal of Animal Ecology* 46: 337–365.
- Sparks RE. 1992. Risks of altering the hydrologic regime of large rivers. Pages 119–152 in Cairns J, Niederlehner BR, Orvos DR, eds. *Predicting ecosystem risk*. Vol XX. *Advances in modern environmental toxicology*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton Scientific Publishing Co.
- _____. 1995. Need for ecosystem management of large rivers and their floodplains. *BioScience* 45: 168–182.
- Stalnaker CB. 1990. Minimum flow is a myth. Pages 31–33 in Bain MB, ed. *Ecology and assessment of warmwater streams: workshop synopsis*. Washington (DC): US Fish & Wildlife Service. Biological Report nr 90(5).
- Stalnaker C, Lamb BL, Henriksen J, Bovee K, Bartholow J. 1995. The instream flow incremental methodology: a primer for IFIM. Ft. Collins (CO): National Biological Service, US Department of the Interior. Biological Report nr 29.
- Stanford JA. 1994. Instream flows to assist the recovery of endangered fishes of the Upper Colorado River Basin. Washington (DC): US Department of the Interior, National Biological Survey. Biological Report nr 24.
- Stanford JA, Ward JV, Liss WJ, Frissell CA, Williams RN, Lichatowich JA, Coutant CC. 1996. A general protocol for restoration of regulated rivers. *Regulated Rivers: Research & Management* 12: 391–414.
- Stevens LE, Schmidt JC, Brown BT. 1995. Flow regulation, geomorphology, and Colorado River marsh development in the Grand Canyon, Arizona. *Ecological Applications* 5: 1025–1039.
- Strange EM, Moyle PB, Foin TC. 1992. Interactions between stochastic and deterministic processes in stream fish community assembly. *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 36: 1–15.
- Streng DR, Glitzenstein JS, Harcombe PA. 1989. Woody seedling dynamics in an East Texas floodplain forest. *Ecological Monographs* 59: 177–204.
- Stromberg JC, Tress JA, Wilkins SD, Clark S. 1992. Response of velvet mesquite to groundwater decline. *Journal of Arid Environments* 23: 45–58.
- Stromberg JC, Tiller R, Richter B. 1996. Effects of groundwater decline on riparian vegetation of semiarid regions: the San Pedro River, Arizona, USA. *Ecological Applications* 6: 113–131.
- Stromberg JC, Fry J, Patten DT. 1997. Marsh development after large floods in an alluvial, arid-land river. *Wetlands* 17: 292–300.
- Taylor DW. 1982. Eastern Sierra riparian vegetation: ecological effects of stream diversion. Mono Basin Research Group Contribution nr 6, Report to Inyo National Forest. [TNC] The Nature Conservancy. 1996. *Troubled waters: protecting our aquatic heritage*. Arlington (VA): The Nature Conservancy.
- Tilman D, Downing JA, Wedin DA. 1994. Does diversity beget stability? *Nature* 371: 257–264.
- Toth LA. 1995. Principles and guidelines for restoration of river/floodplain ecosystems—Kissimmee River, Florida. Pages 49–73 in Cairns J, ed. *Rehabilitating damaged ecosystems*. 2nd ed. Boca Raton (FL): Lewis Publishers/CRC Press.
- Travnicek VH, Bain MB, Maceina MJ. 1995. Recovery of a warmwater fish assemblage after the initiation of a minimum-flow release downstream from a hydroelectric dam. *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 124: 836–844.
- Trépanier S, Rodriguez MA, Magnan P. 1996. Spawning migrations in landlocked Atlantic salmon: time series modelling of river discharge and water temperature effects. *Journal of Fish Biology* 48: 925–936.
- Turner JL, Chadwick HK. 1972. Distribution and abundance of young-of-the-year striped bass, *Morone saxatilis*, in relation to river flow in the Sacramento-San Joaquin estuary. *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 101: 442–452.
- Tyus HM. 1990. Effects of altered stream flows on fishery resources. *Fisheries* 15: 18–20.
- [USCOE] US Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District. 1996. Reconnaissance report, review of existing project: Alamo Lake, Arizona.
- Valentin S, Wasson JG, Philippe M. 1995. Effects of hydropower peaking on epilithon and invertebrate community trophic structure. *Regulated Rivers: Research & Management* 10: 105–119.
- Van Winkle W, Rose KA, Chambers RC. 1993. Individual-based approach to fish population dynamics: an overview. *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 122: 397–403.
- Walker KF, Sheldon F, Puckridge JT. 1995. A perspective on dryland river ecosystems. *Regulated Rivers: Research & Management* 11: 85–104.
- Wallace JB, Benke AC. 1984. Quantification of wood habitat in subtropical coastal plains streams. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* 41: 1643–1652.
- Ward JV, Stanford JA. 1979. *The ecology of regulated streams*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Weisberg SB, Janicki AJ, Gerritsen J, Wilson HT. 1990. Enhancement of benthic macroinvertebrates by minimum flow from a hydroelectric dam. *Regulated Rivers: Research & Management* 5: 265–277.
- Welcomme RL. 1979. *Fisheries ecology of floodplain rivers*. New York: Longman.
- _____. 1992. River conservation—future prospects. Pages 454–462 in Boon PJ, Calow P, Petts GE, eds. *River conservation and management*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Welcomme RL, Hagborg D. 1977. Towards a model of a floodplain fish population and its fishery. *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 2: 7–24.
- Wharton CH, Lambou VW, Newsome J, Winger PV, Gaddy LL, Mancke R. 1981. The fauna of bottomland hardwoods in the southeastern United States. Pages 87–160 in Clark JR, Benforado J, eds. *Wetlands of bottomland hardwood forests*. New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Co.
- Williams JG. 1996. Lost in space: minimum confidence intervals for idealized PHABSIM studies. *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 125: 458–465.
- Williams DD, Hynes HBN. 1977. The ecology of temporary streams. II. General remarks on temporary streams. *Internationale Revue des gesampften Hydrobiologie* 62: 53–61.
- Williams GP, Wolman MG. 1984. Downstream effects of dams on alluvial rivers. Reston (VA): US Geological Survey. Professional Paper nr 1286.
- Williams RN, Calvin LD, Coutant CC, Erho MW, Lichatowich JA, Liss WJ, McConaha WE, Mundy PR, Stanford JA, Whitney RR. 1996. Return to the river: restoration of salmonid fishes in the Columbia River ecosystem. Portland (OR): Northwest Power Planning Council.
- Wolman MG, Gerson R. 1978. Relative scales of time and effectiveness of climate in watershed geomorphology. *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* 3: 189–208.
- Wolman MG, Miller JP. 1960. Magnitude and frequency of forces in geomorphic processes. *Journal of Hydrology* 69: 54–74.
- Wootton JT, Parker MS, Power ME. 1996. Effects of disturbance on river food webs. *Science* 273: 1558–1561.

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 1 of 7 -



You have printed the following article:

The Natural Flow Regime

N. LeRoy Poff; J. David Allan; Mark B. Bain; James R. Karr; Karen L. Presteggaard; Brian D. Richter; Richard E. Sparks; Julie C. Stromberg

BioScience, Vol. 47, No. 11. (Dec., 1997), pp. 769-784.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0006-3568%28199712%2947%3A11%3C769%3ATNFR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

This article references the following linked citations. If you are trying to access articles from an off-campus location, you may be required to first logon via your library web site to access JSTOR. Please visit your library's website or contact a librarian to learn about options for remote access to JSTOR.

References cited

Biodiversity Conservation in Running Waters

J. David Allan; Alexander S. Flecker

BioScience, Vol. 43, No. 1. (Jan., 1993), pp. 32-43.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0006-3568%28199301%2943%3A1%3C32%3ABCIRW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-6>

Relating Riparian Vegetation to Present and Future Streamflows

Gregor T. Auble; Jonathan M. Friedman; Michael L. Scott

Ecological Applications, Vol. 4, No. 3. (Aug., 1994), pp. 544-554.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1051-0761%28199408%294%3A3%3C544%3ARRVTPA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-T>

Streamflow Regulation and Fish Community Structure

Mark B. Bain; John T. Finn; Henry E. Booke

Ecology, Vol. 69, No. 2. (Apr., 1988), pp. 382-392.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9658%28198804%2969%3A2%3C382%3ASRAFCS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-K>

A Recipe for River Recovery?

Marcia Barinaga

Science, New Series, Vol. 273, No. 5282. (Sep. 20, 1996), pp. 1648-1650.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0036-8075%2819960920%293%3A273%3A5282%3C1648%3AARFRR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-L>

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 2 of 7 -



Mechanisms Associated With Decline of Woody Species in Riparian Ecosystems of the Southwestern U.S.

David E. Busch; Stanley D. Smith

Ecological Monographs, Vol. 65, No. 3. (Aug., 1995), pp. 347-370.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9615%28199508%2965%3A3%3C347%3AMAWDOW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-L>

Flood Disturbance and the Coexistence of Species in a Lowland Podocarp Forest, South Westland, New Zealand

Richard P. Duncan

The Journal of Ecology, Vol. 81, No. 3. (Sep., 1993), pp. 403-416.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-0477%28199309%2981%3A3%3C403%3AFDATCO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-G>

Preserving Biodiversity: Species, Ecosystems, or Landscapes?

Jerry F. Franklin

Ecological Applications, Vol. 3, No. 2. (May, 1993), pp. 202-205.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1051-0761%28199305%293%3A2%3C202%3APBSEOL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-7>

The Effects of Flooding on the Swamp Forest in Lake Ocklawaha, Florida

William R. Harms; Hans T. Schreuder; Donal D. Hook; Claud L. Brown

Ecology, Vol. 61, No. 6. (Dec., 1980), pp. 1412-1421.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9658%28198012%2961%3A6%3C1412%3ATEOFOT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-5>

Command and Control and the Pathology of Natural Resource Management

C. S. Holling; Gary K. Meffe

Conservation Biology, Vol. 10, No. 2. (Apr., 1996), pp. 328-337.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0888-8892%28199604%2910%3A2%3C328%3ACACATP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-5>

Bottomland Vegetation Distribution along Passage Creek, Virginia, in Relation to Fluvial Landforms

Cliff R. Hupp; W. R. Osterkamp

Ecology, Vol. 66, No. 3. (Jun., 1985), pp. 670-681.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9658%28198506%2966%3A3%3C670%3ABVDAPC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-5>

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 3 of 7 -



Woodland Expansions in the Platte River, Nebraska: Patterns and Causes

W. Carter Johnson

Ecological Monographs, Vol. 64, No. 1. (Feb., 1994), pp. 45-84.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9615%28199402%2964%3A1%3C45%3AWEITPR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-I>

Forest Overstory Vegetation and Environment on the Missouri River Floodplain in North Dakota

W. Carter Johnson; Robert L. Burgess; Warren R. Keammerer

Ecological Monographs, Vol. 46, No. 1. (Winter, 1976), pp. 59-84.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9615%28197624%2946%3A1%3C59%3AFOVAEO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-H>

Biological Integrity: A Long-Neglected Aspect of Water Resource Management

James R. Karr

Ecological Applications, Vol. 1, No. 1. (Feb., 1991), pp. 66-84.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1051-0761%28199102%291%3A1%3C66%3ABIALAO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-R>

Fish Communities of Midwestern Rivers: A History of Degradation

James R. Karr; Louis A. Toth; Daniel R. Dudley

BioScience, Vol. 35, No. 2. (Feb., 1985), pp. 90-95.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0006-3568%28198502%2935%3A2%3C90%3AFCOMRA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-E>

Valley Alluviation in Southwestern Wisconsin

James C. Knox

Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 62, No. 3. (Sep., 1972), pp. 401-410.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0004-5608%28197209%2962%3A3%3C401%3AVAISW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-K>

Hydrologic and Geomorphic Factors Affecting Conservation of a River- Breeding Frog (*Rana Boylei*)

Sarah J. Kupferberg

Ecological Applications, Vol. 6, No. 4. (Nov., 1996), pp. 1332-1344.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1051-0761%28199611%296%3A4%3C1332%3AHAGFAC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 4 of 7 -



Downstream Ecological Effects of Dams

Franklin K. Ligon; William E. Dietrich; William J. Trush

BioScience, Vol. 45, No. 3, Ecology of Large Rivers. (Mar., 1995), pp. 183-192.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0006-3568%28199503%2945%3A3%3C183%3ADEEOD%3E2.0.CO%3B2-E>

Effects of Abiotic Disturbance on Coexistence of Predator-Prey Fish Species

Gary K. Meffe

Ecology, Vol. 65, No. 5. (Oct., 1984), pp. 1525-1534.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9658%28198410%2965%3A5%3C1525%3AEOADOC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-6>

Persistence and Stability of Fish and Invertebrate Assemblages in a Repeatedly Disturbed Sonoran Desert Stream

Gary K. Meffe; W. L. Minckley

American Midland Naturalist, Vol. 117, No. 1. (Jan., 1987), pp. 177-191.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0031%28198701%29117%3A1%3C177%3APASOFA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-X>

Fish Invasions in California: Do Abiotic Factors Determine Success?

Peter B. Moyle; Theo Light

Ecology, Vol. 77, No. 6. (Sep., 1996), pp. 1666-1670.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9658%28199609%2977%3A6%3C1666%3AFIICDA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

Comparative Water Relations of Phreatophytes in the Sonoran Desert of California

Erik Tallak Nilsen; M. Rasoul Sharifi; Philip W. Rundel

Ecology, Vol. 65, No. 3. (Jun., 1984), pp. 767-778.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9658%28198406%2965%3A3%3C767%3ACWROPI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

Functional Organization of Stream Fish Assemblages in Relation to Hydrological Variability

N. LeRoy Poff; J. David Allan

Ecology, Vol. 76, No. 2. (Mar., 1995), pp. 606-627.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9658%28199503%2976%3A2%3C606%3AFOOSFA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V>

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 5 of 7 -



Hydraulic Food-Chain Models

Mary E. Power; Adrian Sun; Gary Parker; William E. Dietrich; J. Timothy Wootton
BioScience, Vol. 45, No. 3, Ecology of Large Rivers. (Mar., 1995), pp. 159-167.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0006-3568%28199503%2945%3A3%3C159%3AHFM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>

The Role of Disturbance in Stream Ecology

Vincent H. Resh; Arthur V. Brown; Alan P. Covich; Martin E. Gurtz; Hiram W. Li; G. Wayne Minshall; Seth R. Reice; Andrew L. Sheldon; J. Bruce Wallace; Robert C. Wissmar
Journal of the North American Benthological Society, Vol. 7, No. 4, Community Structure and Function in Temperate and Tropical Streams: Proceedings of a Symposium. (Dec., 1988), pp. 433-455.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0887-3593%28198812%297%3A4%3C433%3ATRODIS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C>

A Method for Assessing Hydrologic Alteration within Ecosystems

Brian D. Richter; Jeffrey V. Baumgartner; Jennifer Powell; David P. Braun
Conservation Biology, Vol. 10, No. 4. (Aug., 1996), pp. 1163-1174.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0888-8892%28199608%2910%3A4%3C1163%3AAMFAHA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-E>

The Response of Fishes to Periodic Spring Floods in a Southeastern Stream

Stephen T. Ross; John A. Baker
American Midland Naturalist, Vol. 109, No. 1. (Jan., 1983), pp. 1-14.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0031%28198301%29109%3A1%3C1%3ATROFTP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-K>

Larval Fish Distribution and Microhabitat Use in Free-Flowing and Regulated Rivers

Karl J. Scheidegger; Mark B. Bain
Copeia, Vol. 1995, No. 1. (Feb. 15, 1995), pp. 125-135.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0045-8511%2819950215%293%3A1995%3A1%3C125%3ALFDAMU%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>

Flow Regime, Juvenile Abundance, and the Assemblage Structure of Stream Fishes

Isaac J. Schlosser
Ecology, Vol. 66, No. 5. (Oct., 1985), pp. 1484-1490.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9658%28198510%2966%3A5%3C1484%3AFRJAAT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-D>

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 6 of 7 -



Flood Dependency of Cottonwood Establishment Along the Missouri River, Montana, USA

Michael L. Scott; Gregor T. Auble; Jonathan M. Friedman

Ecological Applications, Vol. 7, No. 2. (May, 1997), pp. 677-690.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1051-0761%28199705%297%3A2%3C677%3AFDOCEA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Q>

Flooding: Mortality and Habitat Renewal for Least Terns and Piping Plovers

John G. Sidle; David E. Carlson; Eileen M. Kirsch; John J. Dinan

Colonial Waterbirds, Vol. 15, No. 1. (1992), pp. 132-136.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0738-6028%281992%2915%3A1%3C132%3AFMAHRF%3E2.0.CO%3B2-4>

Habitat, the Templet for Ecological Strategies?

T. R. E. Southwood

The Journal of Animal Ecology, Vol. 46, No. 2. (Jun., 1977), pp. 336-365.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8790%28197706%2946%3A2%3C336%3AHTTFES%3E2.0.CO%3B2-M>

Need for Ecosystem Management of Large Rivers and Their Floodplains

Richard E. Sparks

BioScience, Vol. 45, No. 3, Ecology of Large Rivers. (Mar., 1995), pp. 168-182.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0006-3568%28199503%2945%3A3%3C168%3ANFEMOL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Z>

Flow Regulation, Geomorphology, and Colorado River Marsh Development in the Grand Canyon, Arizona

Lawrence E. Stevens; John C. Schmidt; Tina J. Ayers; Bryan T. Brown

Ecological Applications, Vol. 5, No. 4. (Nov., 1995), pp. 1025-1039.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1051-0761%28199511%295%3A4%3C1025%3AFRGACR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-S>

Woody Seedling Dynamics in an East Texas Floodplain Forest

Donna R. Streng; Jeff S. Glitzenstein; P. A. Harcombe

Ecological Monographs, Vol. 59, No. 2. (Jun., 1989), pp. 177-204.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0012-9615%28198906%2959%3A2%3C177%3AWS DIAE%3E2.0.CO%3B2-H>

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 7 of 7 -



Effects of Groundwater Decline on Riparian Vegetation of Semiarid Regions: The San Pedro, Arizona

J. C. Stromberg; R. Tiller; B. Richter

Ecological Applications, Vol. 6, No. 1. (Feb., 1996), pp. 113-131.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1051-0761%28199602%296%3A1%3C113%3AE0GDOR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-8>

Effects of Disturbance on River Food Webs

J. Timothy Wootton; Michael S. Parker; Mary E. Power

Science, New Series, Vol. 273, No. 5281. (Sep. 13, 1996), pp. 1558-1561.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0036-8075%2819960913%293%3A273%3A5281%3C1558%3AE0DORF%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9>