

# Endangered fish from MCC replenish wild populations

By **Dawn Zimmer** - 08/20/2020

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The endangered, native Gila Topminnows at the Mesa Community College Red Mountain Campus support the recovery of their species. The population in the college's cienega reached a level healthy enough to serve as a source to stock other bodies of water throughout the state.

On August 17 the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) relocated 100 Topminnows to Pima County's Roger Road Nodal Park ponds to help replenish the species in the wild. The endangered fish were originally introduced to the MCC Cienega in 2016 through a collaboration with the Phoenix Zoo, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and AZGFD. The partnership's main goals are conservation and nurturing the growth of endangered species so they can eventually be reintroduced in their native environments. MCC Life Science Professor Andrew Holycross and Life Sciences Exhibits Coordinator Paula Swanson have worked extensively on the cienega project, caring for the endangered Topminnows.

Holycross notes how big of an achievement this is for the wildlife team at MCC. "This is the first time our population has been used as a source of fish for new populations, which means we've arrived!"

A cienega is a spring that is usually a wet, marshy area at the foot of a mountain, in a canyon, or on the edge of a grassland where groundwater bubbles to the surface. In 2015, the completion of the cienega at MCC Red Mountain marked the start of a new journey to provide students with an on-site exhibit and reserve. With native plants and animals, the cienega incorporates educational signage for faculty, staff and the general public.

The MCC Life Science Department played a significant role in the conservation and regrowth of not just Gila Topminnows, but also other species such as Desert Pupfish and Lowland Leopard Frogs. The endangered species in the cienega provide faculty and students with the opportunity to offer research experiences, the ability to collect data on rare habitats, and to observe endangered plants and animals.

#### Editor's Notes

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