

NORTHERN REDBELLY DACE (*Phoxinus eos*)**Description**

The northern redbelly dace is a small minnow approximately 2-3 inches in length. They have dark stripes surrounding a light band on the side. Breeding males have brilliant crimson and/or yellow flanks below the thick black band. The northern redbelly dace and the finescale dace frequently form hybrids, which can make identification of the species difficult. Eats mainly diatoms and filamentous algae, also zooplankton and aquatic insects.

**Distribution**

Historically, the northern redbelly dace was found throughout much of the central portion of the state as well as the northern panhandle. Current distribution has been reduced primarily to the Sandhills and several small tributaries of the North Platte River and South Loup River. Survey work in Cherry, Brown, and Keya Paha counties in 1995-97 in Sandhill streams recorded the species from streams in the drainages of the Niobrara, North Loup, and Snake Rivers.

**Habitat**

The northern redbelly dace is most commonly found in small, Sandhills streams. They are usually found at sites high in the drainage near the headwaters of the stream. Inhabited streams are usually relatively narrow, one to several yards wide, and shallow, several inches to a foot deep, with deeper pools. During the late summer and dry periods, the flows in these streams may stop and the fish find refuge in the remaining pools. High water quality, fine sand substrate, some in-stream floating vegetation, and bank vegetation of grasses, forbs, some willows, and shrubs characterize these streams.

**Status**

Global: G5-Secure. Federally not listed. State Threatened. Nebraska: S2-Imperiled. Recent survey work has shown that the northern redbelly dace has a limited distribution in the Sandhills, which is the primary portion of its distribution. Decreased water quality such as depleted oxygen levels, increased siltation, and runoff containing chemicals and livestock waste will cause this minnow to disappear. Southern-most population in Colorado has been reduced by stream channelization, reductions in discharge, and changes in water quality; now threatened by continued urban development.

**Management**

Proper grazing management, stream bank erosion control, cautious and conservative use of pesticides near streams, as well as protecting the streams from runoff containing sediment, agricultural chemicals, and livestock waste will improve and maintain the habitat quality of the streams. Ditching and channel maintenance/cleaning can have a highly disruptive and negative impact on in-stream habitat and direct physical impact on fish. Whenever possible such activities should be avoided in stream segments with this species. If undertaken, it is recommended that ditching and channel maintenance/cleaning are limited to a quarter-mile section per year to allow for areas of escape and provide for necessary habitat. The stocking of predatory and competitive game Species in stream segments or drainages to streams with the northern redbelly dace should be prevented.

**More Information**

<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/FactSheet.asp?speciesID=618>