

HABITAT RESTORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE RIO GRANDE CANALIZATION PROJECT: SUMMARY JUNE 2009 – AUGUST 2018

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION, U.S. SECTION

RESTORING THE RIO GRANDE

BACKGROUND: The Record of Decision

In 1999, the International Boundary and Water Commission, U.S. Section (USIBWC) began a public scoping and consultation process to develop alternatives for an Environmental Impact Statement on river management of the Rio Grande Canalization Project

(RGCP), the 105-mile flood control project from the Percha Dam near Arrey, NM downstream to the American Diversion Dam in El Paso, TX. In

June 2009, after ten years of discussions with the public and stakeholders, the USIBWC signed the Record of Decision (ROD) on River Management Alternatives for the RGCP. The ROD committed the USIBWC to continuing the agency's mission of water delivery, flood control

and maintaining flood capacity while changing management practices of the Rio Grande corridor. New management practices would now include implementation of a variety of environmental improvements through the year 2019, including:

- implementing 30 habitat restoration sites which would restore about 550 acres of 12 habitat types,
 - phasing out grazing leases,
 - ceasing floodplain mowing on almost 2,000 acres to develop managed grasslands,
 - updating the river management plan,
- evaluating alternative channel maintenance activities,
- resurveying river cross sections, and
- developing an environmental water transactions program to acquire or lease water rights.

The 2009 Record of Decision committed the USIBWC to implementing about 550 acres of habitat restoration and 2,000 acres of managed grasslands along the Rio Grande in Lower New Mexico and West Texas.



Broad Canyon Arroyo Restoration Work with USFWS. On Right, From top: Dense saltcedar August 2011; Saltcedar excavation March 2012; Post saltcedar excavation March 2012; Prescribed burns of saltcedar debris piles January 2013; Planting along the river banks February 2013; and Growing willow trees June 2018.



Broad Canyon Arroyo Restoration Site 2011-2018

Implementation: First 9 Years

From 2009 to 2018, the USIBWC and its partners have:

Restoration Work

- Completed baseline studies
- Planted over 62,000 trees and 3,000 riparian shrubs & treated or excavated over 500 acres of saltcedar on 22 restoration sites. Work was done by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), through an Interagency Agreement, and by environmental contractors.
- Installed 55 shallow groundwater monitoring wells at 21 sites.
- Began a restoration site monitoring program.
- USIBWC anticipates that USFWS and contractors will plant an estimated 20,000 more trees and shrubs from fall of 2018 to spring of 2019.

From 2009 to 2018, USIBWC and its partners have planted over 62,000 native trees and almost 3,000 shrubs on 22 restoration sites totaling 508 acres, with tens of thousands more trees and shrubs planned.

Environmental Water Transaction Program

- Developed an Environmental Water Transaction Program (EWTP) through a Public-Private partnership with USFWS, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Audubon New Mexico, and the Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID). The EWTP established the initial framework for the USIBWC to acquire or lease water rights for restoration sites, through a market-based voluntary program.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with EBID to work collaboratively on the EWTP.
- EBID Board passed a policy in 2013 that authorizes use of EBID-administered surface water for native vegetation on restoration sites.
- Purchased 47.4 acres of surface water rights and worked on irrigation plans and infrastructure at several restoration sites.
- Irrigated the Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8 restoration site 11 times from 2014 to 2018. Irrigated two new sites in 2018 for the first time.

Other Implementation Work

- Finalized the River Management Plan, covering channel maintenance, endangered species management, floodplain management, and designation of 1,700 acres of No Mow areas.
- Consulted with the USFWS on possible impacts to threatened and endangered species. The USFWS issued a Biological and Conference Opinion in August 2012 and an updated Biological Opinion in 2017.
- Signed an Interagency Agreement with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to conduct threatened and endangered species surveys.
- Concluded a sediment transport study to evaluate alternatives to channel maintenance. Contracted design and construction of two sediment basins on the Thurman I and II Arroyos in Hatch, NM.
- USIBWC continues to coordinate with stakeholders through an Implementation group.

Future Implementation: The Next Year

- In the next year, the USIBWC anticipates finalizing planting, constructing new irrigation infrastructure for 2 more sites, updating the RMP, evaluating aquatic habitat restoration sites, purchasing or leasing additional water rights, and completing a final report documenting the 10-year ROD activities.

For more information, call Elizabeth Verdecchia at 915-832-4701 or visit http://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/canalization_eis.html



Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8

Restoration Work: From top:
 Tree planting February 2012;
 Measuring groundwater levels July 2013;
 Blooming cottonwoods & willows May 2014;
 Historic first irrigation June 2014
 Habitat after 4 irrigation events Oct 2015
 Habitat during 11th irrigation event, July 2018