

HABITAT RESTORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE RIO GRANDE CANALIZATION PROJECT: SUMMARY JUNE 2009 – NOVEMBER 2017

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

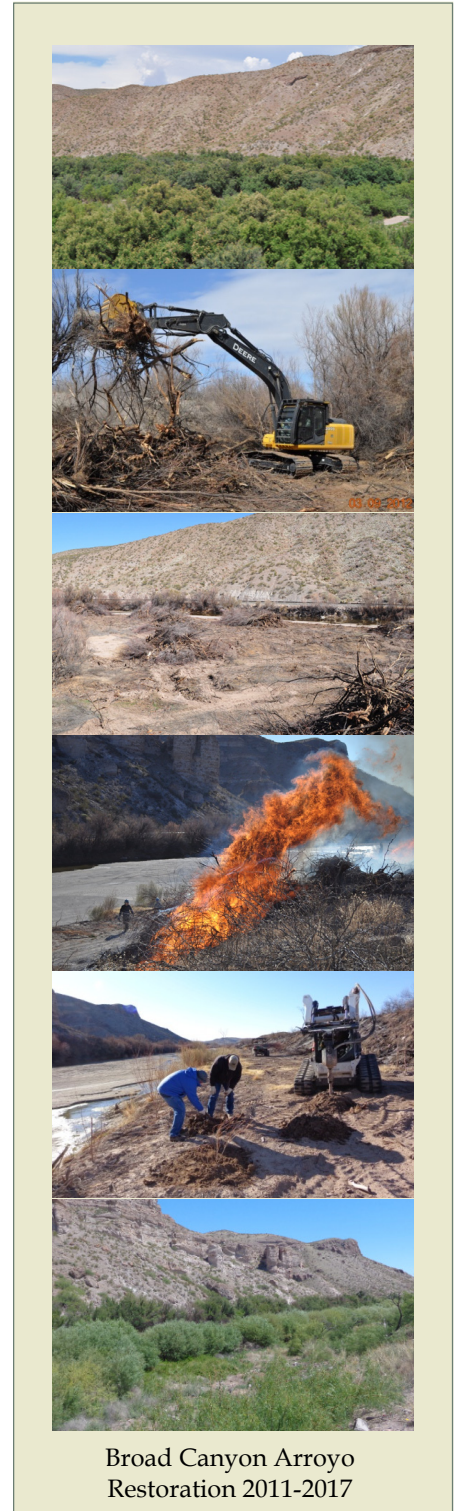
The 2009 Record of Decision committed the USIBWC to implementing about 550 acres of habitat restoration and 2,000 acres of managed grasslands along the Rio Grande in Lower New Mexico and West Texas.

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.



*On Right: Broad Canyon Arroyo Restoration:
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 May 2017.*



Broad Canyon Arroyo
Restoration 2011-2017

Implementation: First 8 Years

From 2009 to 2017, the USIBWC and its partners have:

Restoration Work

- Completed baseline studies
- From 2011 to 2017, planted over 41,000 trees and over 1,500 riparian shrubs and treated or excavated over 360 acres of saltcedar on the first 15 restoration sites. Work was done by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through an Interagency Agreement, and by USIBWC contractors.
- USIBWC has contracted work on 7 more sites which will plant another 36,000 trees and 9,000 shrubs on 140 acres in 2017 and 2018.
- Installed 55 shallow groundwater monitoring wells at 21 sites.
- Began a restoration site monitoring program.

By 2018, USIBWC and its partners have or will have planted over 77,600 native trees and over 10,600 shrubs on 22 restoration sites totaling 509 acres.

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 rules and procedures 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 water for native vegetation on restoration sites.
- Purchased 47.4 acres of surface water rights
- Irrigated the Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8 restoration site nine times from 2014 to 2017.

Other Implementation Work

- Finalized the River Management Plan, covering channel maintenance and monitoring, endangered species management, floodplain management, and designation about 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, which was updated in 2017.
- Secured exclusion of the Lower Rio Grande from designation as critical habitat for the flycatcher because of USIBWC's commitment to a flycatcher management plan, water rights acquisition, and restoration.
- Signed an Interagency Agreement with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to conduct threatened and endangered species surveys.
- Concluded a sediment transport study that evaluated alternatives to channel maintenance.
- USIBWC continues to coordinate with stakeholders (environmental groups, irrigation districts, federal agencies, and elected officials) through an Implementation group.

Future Implementation: The Next 2 Years

- In the next 2 years, the USIBWC anticipates continuing planting and irrigation efforts, implementing 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 after 9 irrigation events, Sept 2017.