



# Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

*Balancing Resource Use and Conservation*

## Big Bend Conservation Area

### 2015 Annual Report



July 2018

Work conducted under LCR MSCP Work Task E25

# Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program Steering Committee Members

## **Federal Participant Group**

Bureau of Reclamation  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
National Park Service  
Bureau of Land Management  
Bureau of Indian Affairs  
Western Area Power Administration

## **Arizona Participant Group**

Arizona Department of Water Resources  
Arizona Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.  
Arizona Game and Fish Department  
Arizona Power Authority  
Central Arizona Water Conservation District  
Cibola Valley Irrigation and Drainage District  
City of Bullhead City  
City of Lake Havasu City  
City of Mesa  
City of Somerton  
City of Yuma  
Electrical District No. 3, Pinal County, Arizona  
Golden Shores Water Conservation District  
Mohave County Water Authority  
Mohave Valley Irrigation and Drainage District  
Mohave Water Conservation District  
North Gila Valley Irrigation and Drainage District  
Town of Fredonia  
Town of Thatcher  
Town of Wickenburg  
Salt River Project Agricultural Improvement and Power District  
Unit "B" Irrigation and Drainage District  
Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District  
Yuma County Water Users' Association  
Yuma Irrigation District  
Yuma Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District

## **Other Interested Parties Participant Group**

QuadState Local Governments Authority  
Desert Wildlife Unlimited

## **California Participant Group**

California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
City of Needles  
Coachella Valley Water District  
Colorado River Board of California  
Bard Water District  
Imperial Irrigation District  
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power  
Palo Verde Irrigation District  
San Diego County Water Authority  
Southern California Edison Company  
Southern California Public Power Authority  
The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

## **Nevada Participant Group**

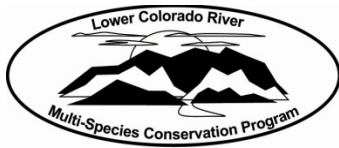
Colorado River Commission of Nevada  
Nevada Department of Wildlife  
Southern Nevada Water Authority  
Colorado River Commission Power Users  
Basic Water Company

## **Native American Participant Group**

Hualapai Tribe  
Colorado River Indian Tribes  
Chemehuevi Indian Tribe

## **Conservation Participant Group**

Ducks Unlimited  
Lower Colorado River RC&D Area, Inc.  
The Nature Conservancy



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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| BBCA        | Big Bend Conservation Area                                  |
| FY          | fiscal year   |
| LCR MSCP    | Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program     |
| lidar       | light detection and ranging                                 |
| pH          | the acidity or basicity (alkalinity) of an aqueous solution |
| Reclamation | Bureau of Reclamation                                       |
| SNWA        | Southern Nevada Water Authority                             |

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this annual report is to summarize all activities that have occurred at the Big Bend Conservation Area (BBCA) from October 1, 2014, through September 30, 2015, which is Federal fiscal year (FY) 2015, and projected activities for FY16. Water usage is presented for the calendar year, January 1 through December 31, 2015, consistent with water accounting reporting.

## 1.1 Background

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), State of Nevada, and the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) worked in partnership since 2005 to secure the Boy Scout Camp property and protect the adjacent backwater for inclusion into the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP). The Boy Scout Camp property purchased by the SNWA (15 acres of upland honey mesquite [*Prosopis glandulosa*] habitat) and the adjacent 15 acres of backwater within Reach 3 owned by the State of Nevada are collectively known as the Big Bend Conservation Area.

The LCR MSCP has a conservation measure requiring the creation of 85 acres of flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*) habitat within Reach 3 (Davis Dam to Parker Dam). In addition, the program also requires the creation of 360 acres of backwater for both razorback suckers (*Xyrauchen texanus*) and bonytail (*Gila elegans*).

Flannelmouth suckers were reintroduced into the Colorado River below Davis Dam by the Arizona Game and Fish Department in 1976 by transfer of fish captured at the confluence of the Colorado and Paria Rivers at Lee's Ferry, Arizona. This stock has persisted for three decades and now represents the only known population of this native species in the Colorado River downstream from the Grand Canyon.

# 2.0 CONSERVATION AREA INFORMATION

## 2.1 Purpose

Backwater habitat maintained within the BBCA is being managed for flannelmouth suckers, razorback suckers, and bonytail. The adjacent marsh habitat is being maintained for western least bitterns (*Ixobrychus exilis hesperis*) and Yuma clapper rails (*Rallus longirostris yumanensis* [also known as Ridgway's rail = *R. obsoletus yumanensis*]). The upland honey mesquite habitat is being maintained to provide foraging habitat for additional LCR MSCP covered species and to provide a venue for low-impact recreation.



## **2.2 Location**

The BBKA is located in Reach 3, in Laughlin, Nevada. It is within the historic flood plain of the lower Colorado River at River Mile 266. The total project footprint is 30 contiguous acres (figure 1).

## **2.3 Landownership**

The 15 acres of backwater habitat is owned by the State of Nevada, and the 15 acres of upland honey mesquite is owned by the SNWA (figure 2).

## **2.4 Water**

The SNWA has an entitlement to Colorado River water for use on 15 acres of honey mesquite upland for up to 10 acre-feet per year. However, the restored honey mesquite plantings have reached the water table; therefore, irrigation is no longer required.

## **2.5 Agreements**

A Land Use Agreement was signed in 2008 by Reclamation, the SNWA, and the State of Nevada to secure land and water for the BBKA for the remainder of the 50-year LCR MSCP. The agreement outlines the rights and responsibilities of each partner in the project's development and maintenance.

## **2.6 Public Use**

The upland area consists of a low-impact recreational hiking trail and a wildlife viewing area. Interpretive signage is located at the gravel parking lot for visitors. Although the LCR MSCP does not have substantial involvement in the interpretive area, cooperation is necessary to ensure all activities conducted in the upland area are consistent with the program's goals and objectives.

The backwater area has been designated as a no-wake zone. Coordination between the Nevada Department of Wildlife and the Nevada Wildlife Commission resulted in the installation of two buoys at the entrance to the backwater to designate the wakeless area. Installation of the buoys occurred after the Wildlife Commission in FY10 approved the BBKA backwater as a no-wake

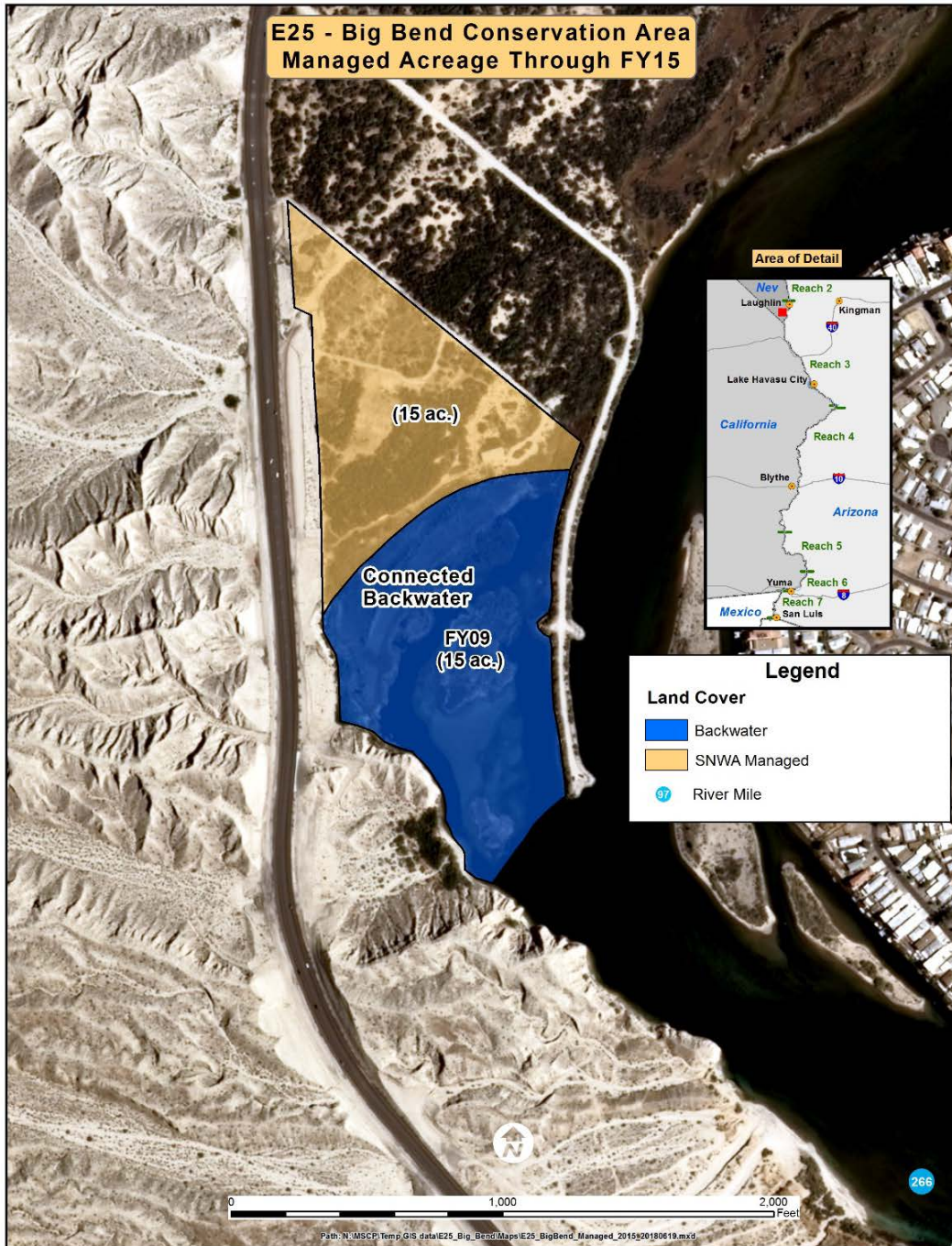
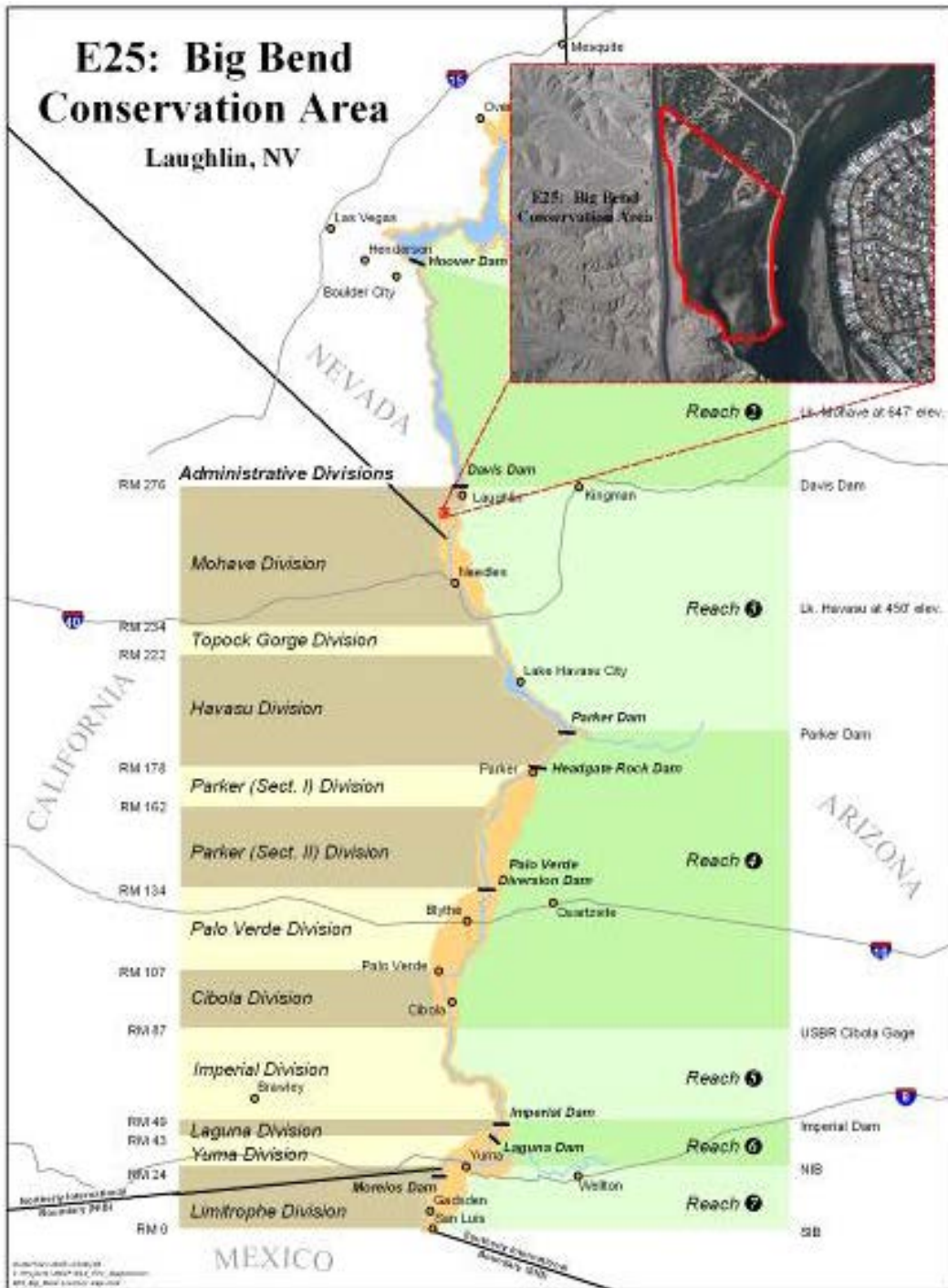


Figure 1.—LCR MSCP planning area with the BBCA.

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**Figure 2.—The BCA.**

zone (Colorado River Regulation 382, Legislative Council Bureau File No. R004-10). The buoys restrict access to the backwater to only wake-less speed in order to decrease disturbance to the wildlife.

## **2.7 Law Enforcement**

The SNWA is responsible for law enforcement at the BBCA. A LCR MSCP Conservation Area Specific Fire Management & Law Enforcement Strategy was finalized for the BBCA (LCR MSCP 2010). Reclamation continues to work with the SNWA and local officials to ensure law enforcement activities do not conflict with the LCR MSCP Habitat Conservation Plan.

## **2.8 Wildfire Management**

A LCR MSCP Conservation Area Specific Fire Management & Law Enforcement Strategy has been finalized for the BBCA (LCR MSCP 2010). The LCR MSCP will continue to work with local State and Federal fire agencies to reduce the risk of wildland fires and to maintain clear lines of communication among agencies.

# **3.0 HABITAT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT**

## **3.1 Planting**

There were no new plantings at the BBCA during FY15.

## **3.2 Irrigation**

The Big Bend backwater fluctuates with the daily rise and fall of the Colorado River's operation. No irrigation is required.

## **3.3 Site Maintenance**

The SNWA contracted the Jean Conservation Camp crew to conduct trail and habitat maintenance activities in March 2015 for 4 days. Existing piles of invasive vegetation, such as saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.) and fountaingrass

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(*Pennisetum setaceum*) that were cut down in previous years, were mulched onsite. The mulched material was spread on trails for dust and erosion control on the eastern end of the upland area.

A 200-foot section of interior chain-link fence was removed along the path of the wash that divides the Big Bend State Park lands from the upland BBCA. Removal of the fencing provides an unobstructed path for the wash that would otherwise damage the chain-link fence during every storm event. BBCA interior roads were repaired and bladed in March 2015 after the September 2014 flood event that swept through and damaged the roads.

The BBCA upland section experienced flood damage in August 2015 following a trend with similar flood damage from September 2013 and 2014. The main wash leading into the site carried debris over Needles Highway and into the BBCA, damaging the security fence along the highway and filling the culverts with sediment. Clark County had cleared the culverts of sediment in spring 2015, but the August 2015 storm clogged the four culverts completely. The LCR MSCP Project Manager was contacted by the SNWA regarding the damage and indicated that Clark County would be responsible for clearing the culverts, and the fencing repair would be the responsibility of the SNWA in FY16. Additionally, the split-rail wood fence within the parking lot of the BBCA was knocked over in several locations. The LCR MSCP notified the SNWA of the fence damage and indicated the repair work would be the responsibility of the SNWA.

## **4.0 MONITORING**

### **4.1 Backwater Monitoring**

Routine fisheries monitoring of the BBCA was conducted monthly from December through May. Monitoring included the use of trammel netting, remote passive integrated transponder scanning, and larval light trapping in areas where adequate water levels permitted access and native fishes had previously been contacted. The water quality was also recorded during each monitoring trip and at least quarterly for the remainder of the year.

#### **4.1.1 Native Fishes**

In FY15, 12 adult razorback and 3 adult flannelmouth suckers were captured or contacted within the BBCA. All but one of the razorback suckers originated from localized stocking events that had occurred within the previous 3 years. Multiple telemetered (sonic- or radio-tagged) juvenile flannelmouth suckers were also contacted within the backwater through ongoing research being carried out under Work Task C53. Juvenile flannelmouth suckers were observed to use

cattail (*Typha* spp.) and *Schoenoplectus* stands within the backwater for periods of 1–3 weeks. Larval fish surveys were also conducted throughout the spawning season, with razorback and flannelmouth sucker larvae being captured at rates similar to previous years.

#### **4.1.2 Water Quality**

The water quality was recorded at a single location in the backwater during each fish monitoring trip. Due to its hydrological connection to the river, this backwater maintained excellent water quality throughout the year. Temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, and conductivity all remained within the known thresholds for native fishes throughout FY15.

### **4.2 Avian Monitoring**

Avian monitoring in FY15 included surveys for marsh birds.

#### **4.2.1 Marsh Bird Surveys**

Presence surveys for California black rails (*Laterallus jamaicensis coturniculus*), western least bitterns, Virginia rails (*Rallus limicola*), and Yuma clapper rails were conducted in marsh habitat at the BBCA in three survey sessions during March and April. There were no LCR MSCP covered species detected during the first two survey sessions (March 16 and April 10). There was one detection of a Yuma clapper rail during the third survey session (April 21) (Ronning and Kahl 2017).

### **4.3 Small Mammal Monitoring**

Rodent monitoring was conducted at the BBCA in FY15.

#### **4.3.1 Rodent Monitoring**

Live trapping was conducted in the fall and spring of FY15 to determine the presence of Colorado River cotton rats (*Sigmodon arizonae plenus*) and desert pocket mice (*Chaetodipus pencillatus*). In fall, 120 traps were set on transects at the BBCA for 1 night, and in spring, 80 traps were set on transects for 1 night. One Colorado River cotton rat was captured in fall and four were captured in spring. Fourteen desert pocket mice were captured in fall and two were captured in spring; it is likely they were of the *sobrinus* subspecies based on range (Hill and Calvert 2016; Hill 2017).

## 4.4 MacNeill’s Sootywing Skipper Monitoring

Surveys for MacNeill’s sootywing skippers (*Pholisora graciellae* = *Hesperopsis graciellae* [MacNeill]) were conducted in April, May, and June 2015. There were no MacNeill’s sootywing skippers documented in the BBCA (Nelson et al. 2017).

## 5.0 HABITAT CREATION CONSERVATION MEASURE ACCOMPLISHMENT

### 5.1 Vegetation Monitoring

Vegetation data were collected in FY15 using light detection and ranging (lidar). Lidar measures the vegetation structure and provides the ability to identify structural diversity and successional growth stages. BBCA vegetation will be evaluated on a periodic basis using lidar to ensure the habitat is meeting species’ requirements. A procedure to analyze and provide vegetation structure metrics will be developed, and the results will be presented in future reports.

Preliminary analyses suggest that airborne lidar may not provide the necessary detail for evaluating marsh habitat. Alternative techniques will be explored.

### 5.2 Evaluation of Conservation Area Habitat

The Final Habitat Creation Conservation Measure Accomplishment Tracking Process was finalized in October 2011 (LCR MSCP 2011). All areas within the BBCA were designed to benefit covered species at the landscape level. The BBCA was brought into the LCR MSCP to benefit flannel mouth suckers (FLSU1), razorback suckers (RASU2), and bonytail (BONY2), including other covered species.

Table 1.—Species-specific habitat creation conservation measure creditable total acres for 2015

| Species-specific habitat creation conservation measure | FLSU1 | RASU2 | BONY2 |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| Creditable acres in 2015                               | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| Total, including previous years                        | 15    | 15    | 15    |

## **6.0 ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

Adaptive management relies on the initial receipt of new information, the analysis of that information, and the incorporation of the new information into the design and/or direction of future project work (LCR MSCP 2007). The Adaptive Management Program's role is to ensure habitat creation sites are biologically effective and fulfill the conservation measures outlined in the Habitat Conservation Plan for 26 covered species and if they potentially benefit 5 evaluation species. Post-development monitoring and species research results will be used to adaptively manage habitat creation sites after initial implementation. Once monitoring data are collected over a few years, and then analyzed for the BBCA, recommendations may be made through the adaptive management process for site improvements in the future.

There are no adaptive management recommendations for the BBCA at this time.



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