

## Work Task E15: Backwater Site Selection

| FY12 Estimate | FY12 Actual Obligations | Cumulative Expenditures Through FY12 | FY13 Approved Estimate | FY14 Proposed Estimate | FY15 Proposed Estimate | FY16 Proposed Estimate |
|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| \$20,000      | \$28,211.19             | \$1,310,691.05                       | \$550,000              | \$0                    | \$0                    | \$0                    |

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**Start Date:** FY06

**Expected Duration:** Closed in FY13

**Long-term Goal:** Habitat creation.

**Conservation Measures:** BONY2, RASU2, and FLSU1.

**Location:** Reaches 3-6; California, and Nevada, River Mile 22-276, Arizona, California, and Nevada.

**Purpose:** The backwater site selection process is used to evaluate and prioritize potential sites for backwater habitat creation for razorback sucker, bonytail, and flannelmouth sucker.

**Connections with Other Work Tasks (past and future):** E16 was used with this work task to identify projects other than existing backwaters for habitat creation. Starting in FY14, E15 and E16 have been combined into one Work Task E16.

**Project Description:** Backwater site selection consists of a five-step process to evaluate existing backwaters along the Colorado River within the LCR MSCP planning area, from reaches 3 to 6. This ultimately results in the conceptual-level planning efforts for a select number of sites, which would become available for the Program Manager to select for inclusion into the program. New backwaters, which may be constructed separate from the existing river channel (and its associated backwaters), are excluded from this effort, and would follow the general site-selection process (E16). Backwaters may be disconnected or connected with the main channel of the Lower Colorado River. Backwaters that are disconnected from the LCR channel are of considerably higher value to bonytail and razorback sucker than connected backwaters in the LCR, and are the preferred type of backwater to achieve LCR MSCP conservation goals for these species.

**Previous Activities:** The inventory of existing backwaters within Reaches 3-6 has been completed. Three backwaters are currently being managed under the LCR MSCP: 1) Beal Lake, 2) Big Bend Conservation Area, and 3) Imperial Ponds. Beal Lake was created under the 1997 Biological Opinion and does not count towards the 360 acres required under the LCR MSCP. Big Bend represents 15 acres of connected backwater within Reach 3 and Imperial Ponds represents 80 of disconnected backwater within Reach 5.

Discussions were held with representatives from the USFWS, CDFW, AGFD, NDOW, and Reclamation to clarify the goals of the backwater creation conservation measures and allow the program to continue to select and implement additional backwaters. As discussed with our Steering Committee, the focus of the new backwaters is on development in California.

The key discussion items and decisions addressed both the type of backwater to be created (disconnected and connected) and the location of these backwaters (Reach and State). First, although disconnected backwaters are the preference for the program a mix of connected and disconnected is expected to provide benefit to native fishes and therefore is acceptable. Second, backwaters within Reach 3 should be open to river to allow flannelmouth suckers access to the slackwater. Based on these clarifications, a five-year backwater strategy is no longer necessary.

Since the program is no longer inventorying the river to identify backwaters for restoration as originally envisioned the Work Task will be closed and backwaters will be identified using Work Task E16. This will also allow backwaters to be developed as a mosaic of multiple land cover types, which is the intent of the program and was also confirmed by the USFWS.

**FY12 Accomplishments:** With all parties in agreement, evaluation of backwaters in Reach 3 within California, which should be open to the river, have begun. An opportunity to partner with the City of Needles to maintain an open backwater at Bureau Bay arose and was evaluated. After discussion with our Yuma Area Office to clarify the frequency of maintenance required to keep the small backwater connected to the mainstem it was determined that the project was not feasible. In consultation with the City of Needles, Work Task E32: Bureau Bay will be closed at this time. If site conditions change, such as the need to re-open the dredge yard, the project may be reviewed again.

Excavation of a new backwater adjacent to Park Moabi was reviewed and initial discussions with the land owner (California State Lands Department), the leasee (San Bernardino County), and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife were initiated.

Another potential backwater project within Reach 4, located on an area referred to as PVER-South, are being evaluated with CDFW and would consist of both connected and disconnected backwaters.

**FY13 Activities:**

**Reach 3.** A 146-acre parcel adjacent to Park Moabi along the Colorado River in California, between river mile 237 and 236, is being investigated as the location for a potential connected backwater project. The property is owned by the California State Lands Commission and leased to San Bernardino County, who manages the parcel as part of the Park Moabi Regional Park. Discussions between the California State Lands Commission, San Bernardino County, and the LCR MSCP are underway.

A design concept and a report for the backwater was developed. The report reviews the location, offers expertise on the proposed channel's point of approach, evaluates potential sediment dynamics, and suggests ways of introducing habitat complexity without increasing maintenance. The design concept and report were submitted in October 2012. Should the project move forward based on the current design concept, approximately 50 acres of connected backwater habitat will be created.

**Reach 4.** Parker Dam Camp is being evaluated as a potential Conservation Area with an emphasis on creating backwater acreage. Originally developed as employee housing for the dam workers, the construction of Parker Dam Government Camp began in 1934 with the construction of Parker Dam. Once established, the property consisted of numerous residences and other buildings. Many decades after the completion of the Dam, in the 1990s, the Bureau of Reclamation determined that the facility was no longer required for project activities, and began the process of disposing of the houses and other buildings off site.

Asphalt roads, concrete sidewalks, and sparse landscaping are all that remain of the government town. Still owned and managed by Reclamation, the property is being purposed as the site for a new conservation area, and will consist of a series of native fish ponds between four and six acres each, along with riparian and upland land cover types. While the conservation area design is still being developed, 36 acres is the goal for disconnected backwater habitat credit. Drilling of investigatory wells at the project is scheduled for FY13.

In order to determine the quantity and quality of groundwater beneath PVER-South, which would provide water to any disconnected backwaters, drilling of investigatory wells are scheduled for FY13.

**Proposed FY14 Activities:** This Work Task is closed and activities will be tracked under E16: Conservation Area Site Selection.

**Pertinent Reports:** N/A