

## Work Task E16: Conservation Area Site Selection

FY13 Estimate	FY13 Actual Obligations	Cumulative Expenditures Through FY13	FY14 Approved Estimate	FY15 Proposed Estimate	FY16 Proposed Estimate	FY17 Proposed Estimate
\$375,000	\$374,317.11	\$1,787,209.47	\$600,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000

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**Start Date:** FY05

**Expected Duration:** FY25

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

**Conservation Measures:** CLRA1, WIFL1, BONY2, RASU2, WRBA2, WYBA2, CRCR2, YHCR2, LEB11, BLRA1, YBCU1, ELOW1, GIFL1, GIWO1, VEFL1, BEV11, YWAR1, SUTA1, FLSU1, MNSW2, CLMB2, PTBB2

**Location:** Reaches 1-7, Arizona, California, and Nevada

**Purpose:** Identify, visit, evaluate, prioritize, and recommend potential conservation areas to the Steering Committee for development under the habitat creation requirements of the LCR MSCP.

**Connections with Other Work Tasks (past and future):** The process developed under this work task will guide the selection of future conservation area sites to be developed under Section E work tasks.

**Project Description:** Reclamation will work with landowners to secure an interest in land and water resources sufficient to create and maintain LCR MSCP habitats. It is anticipated that willing landowners will enter into some form of long-term commitment that secures resources for the 50-year term of the LCR MSCP.

When developing a financial value for subject lands and water, Reclamation must administer a Federal appraisal using the Department of Interior's designated appraisal services office. The cost of appraisal services is typically captured in the E16 budget.

As new sites are evaluated and prioritized, each new site will be presented to the Steering Committee either through the site selection process or, if acquisition is required, through a Land and Water Resolution or Program Decision Document. This approval allows Reclamation to move forward with the new site and prepare specific restoration development and monitoring plans guiding implementation of the conservation area.

Starting in FY14, Backwater Site Selection previously tracked under Work Task E15 will be combined with E16. This change reflects the change in process to select backwaters

and allows integration of multiple land cover types on a Conservation Area whose primary purpose is the creation of a backwater.

**Previous Activities:** Guidelines have been developed to describe the process of working with interested parties to identify sites for screening and evaluation as potential conservation areas for creating and maintaining habitat over the term of the LCR MSCP.

**FY13 Accomplishments:** Attended and contributed at numerous meetings held with other resource agencies and tribal entities. We also conducted quarterly meetings with the USFWS representatives from all four federal refuges on the lower Colorado River both complex managers, and staff from both the Ecological Services Office and the Arizona Fisheries Research Office of the USFWS.

CDFW and Reclamation have partnered with the California Wildlife Board, Trust for Public Land, and the Conservation Fund to identify lands within the State of California that could be secured and developed as Conservation Areas under the Program. The potential acquisitions range in size from small undeveloped parcels (less than 10 acres) to large parcels over 2,000 acres in size. Securing additional acreage for restoration of marsh and backwaters within California is the highest priority at this time.

*Mohave Valley Conservation Area.* Development and construction of the Mohave Valley Conservation Area, 56 acres of open water and emergent marsh, along with planting approximately 34 acres of cottonwood-willow and mesquite habitats is expected to result in approximately 90 acres of native land cover types. A survey of the parcel was conducted to establish new control points and develop elevation contours. Additionally, a temporary gaging station was installed to monitor river stage. This data, in conjunction with the site elevation data, will be used to determine the volume of material that will need to be excavated. The project is progressing under the new E35 Work Task.

*Virgin River.* The Virgin River lands owned by the NDOW on the Overton Wildlife Management Area have been identified for potential restoration. To evaluate the potential for restoration at the site, soil and groundwater data were collected. Several piezometers with data loggers were installed throughout the 300 acre site to monitor the depth to groundwater. Data is being downloaded quarterly and may be used to support a restoration development concept at a later date.

*Needles Lagoon.* Discussions with the City of Needles and the Fort Mohave Indian Tribe indicate a high interest in restoring the Needles lagoon. The lagoon was previously identified as a potential backwater area within Reach 3 in the state of California. Reclamation has agreed to collect information and evaluate the backwater early in FY14.

**FY14 Activities:** Coordination with resource agencies and attendance at planning meetings is expected to be expanded slightly with the inclusion of Work Task E15.

*PVER-South.* A small fire, approximately 60 acres in size, occurred within the undeveloped portion of PVER-South in December 2013. The program may take

advantage of the fire to survey the topography and limit the re-sprout of non-native vegetation in advance of the restoration of the entire Conservation Area using funds from Work Task E18: Law Enforcement and Fire Suppression.

### **Reach 3 Backwaters.**

*Mojave Valley Conservation Area.* For the Mojave Valley Conservation Area, a preliminary design drawings will be completed by the end of the fiscal year. The NEPA/CEQA permitting process and the Army Corps of Engineers 404 application will begin once a design is drafted. These costs will be tracked under E35 starting in FY15.

*Needles Lagoon.* Four adjacent parcels of land, totaling 53 acres and located along the Colorado River at river mile 247, are being investigated as the location for a potential 20 acre backwater project in Needles, California. The site, commonly referred to as Needles Lagoon, is a remnant of the old river channel that became isolated once the river was channelized in 1960. Three of the four parcels are owned by the California State Lands Commission and leased to the City of Needles while the fourth is federally owned. Needles Lagoon is adjacent to the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation creating a partnership between the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, the City of Needles and the LCR MSCP.

A feasibility report for the backwater was developed and presented to both the City of Needles and the Fort Mohave Indian Tribe. The report reviewed the location and site characteristics, proposed a design and layout for the backwater based on the species specific conservation measure FLSU-2 for the Flannelmouth sucker, discussed the design for both the inlet and outlet structures, assessed potential sediment and flood runoff dynamics, and provided a cost estimate for construction and maintenance of the backwater. Although the lagoon does have the potential to be restored, the high cost and technical issues associated with the site do not make it viable at this time. However, should conditions change or the priorities of the program be altered the project may be revised and re-evaluated for implementation at a later date. Should the project move forward based on the current design concept, approximately 20 acres of connected backwater habitat would be created in California for the flannelmouth sucker.

*Soto Ranch.* Approximately 1,500 acres of land, located just south of the Avi Casino in California, are owned by the Soto Family. Currently 775 acres, a mix of undeveloped land, fallow agricultural land, and a small backwater are for sale. The remaining parcels may also be put up for sale.

**Proposed FY15 Activities:** Coordination with resource agencies and attendance at planning meetings is expected to be similar to those in FY14. FY15 activities will be expanded to address all Conservation Area selection and continue to focus on the identification and evaluation of potential conservation areas, primarily in California.

**Pertinent Reports:** N/A