

Work Task E16: Conservation Area Site Selection

FY16 Estimate	FY16 Actual Obligations	Cumulative Expenditures Through FY16	FY17 Approved Estimate	FY18 Proposed Estimate	FY19 Proposed Estimate	FY20 Proposed Estimate
\$1,300,000	\$785,451.33	\$3,725,596.44	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$300,000	\$200,000

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Start Date: FY05

Expected Duration: FY25

Long-Term Goal: Habitat creation

Conservation Measures: BEV11, BLRA1, BONY2, CLNB2, CLRA1, CRCR2, ELOW1, FLSU1, GIFL1, GIWO1, LEB11, MNSW2, PTBB2, RASU2, SUTA1, VEFL1, WIFL1, WRBA2, WYBA2, YBCU1, YHCR2, and YWAR1

Location: Reaches 1–7, Arizona, California, and Nevada

Purpose: To 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 inform the selection of future conservation area sites to be developed under Conservation Area Development and Management (Section E) work tasks.

Project Description: The Bureau of Reclamation (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 a long-term commitment for the 50-year term of the program.

When developing a financial value for subject lands and water, Reclamation must administer a Federal appraisal using the U.S. Department of the Interior’s designated Appraisal Services Office. The cost of appraisal services is captured under the Work Task E16 budget.

After new sites are evaluated and prioritized, Reclamation will get concurrence from the Steering Committee to go forward with the new conservation areas either through the site selection process or, if acquisition is required, through a land and water resolution.

This approval allows Reclamation to move forward with the new site and prepare specific Restoration Development and Monitoring Plans that inform implementation of the conservation area.

In FY14, backwater site selection previously tracked under Work Task E15 (closed) was combined with this work task. This reflects the change in the process to select backwaters and allows integration of multiple land cover types on a conservation area in which the 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. Through FY15, 12 conservation areas have been established.

FY16 Accomplishments: Coordination with resource agencies and attendance at planning meetings was similar to that of previous years. Obligations were less than the approved budget due to the lack of backwater areas to be evaluated this fiscal year. The evaluation of backwaters typically includes collection of topographic information, soil borings, installation of monitoring wells, and collection of river data as well as groundwater and surface modeling.

New Conservation Areas:

Parker Dam Camp: A Memorandum of Understanding between the LCR MSCP and the Lower Colorado Dams Office was signed.

Proposed Conservation Areas:

Palo Verde Ecological Reserve-South (PVER-South): An expansion of the acquired property to include a remnant meander that would have allowed connection back to the Colorado River has ended without the acquisition of any land; therefore, the conservation area will be developed as cottonwood-willow (*Populus fremontii-Salix gooddingii*) and honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) and will no longer have a marsh and backwater component. PVER-South will become a formal conservation area in FY17 and will be tracked under Work Task E37. A Restoration Development and Monitoring Plan will be drafted and discussed with the landowner (California Department of Fish and Wildlife).

Three Fingers Lake: Three Fingers Lake was identified during a workshop with representatives of the California parties as having the potential to provide both backwater and marsh land cover types for the LCR MSCP. The lake is located on the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge within the State of California on lands owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Multiple options for creation of a conservation area were discussed with stakeholders. An agreement in principle

has been reached between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the LCR MSCP to develop the area as a conservation area. Starting in FY17, accomplishments will be tracked under Work Task E38.

Potential Conservation Areas:

Davis Lake: Davis Lake was identified during a workshop with representatives of California parties as having the potential for creation of a shallow marsh similar in size to Hart Mine Marsh. The remnant lake is located on the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge within the State of California on lands owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Light detection and ranging (LiDAR) data were collected to help determine whether to proceed with this potential conservation area; however, no decision was made in FY16.

Backwaters and Marsh within Reach 4: Reach 4 has the highest potential for establishment of marshes and backwaters in California based on the needs of the LCR MSCP. Increased efforts to identify these areas on lands withdrawn by Reclamation, typically between the bank line and levee, are ongoing.

Topock Marsh Inlet Canal: An opportunity may exist to create a connected backwater in Reach 3 using the former Topock Marsh Inlet Canal. However, prior to any technical investigations, landownership needs to be verified, so a survey was initiated in FY16.

FY17 Proposed Activities: Coordination with resource agencies will continue. The need for additional cadastral surveys is being discussed to define landownership prior to evaluating properties for consideration as new conservation areas. Installation of groundwater monitoring wells and collection of river data to support selection of backwater and marsh sites are planned.

Proposed Conservation Areas:

Dennis Underwood Conservation Area: An agreement in principle has been reached with the landowner, the Metropolitan Water District, to utilize up to 635 acres for development of cottonwood-willow and honey mesquite. This conservation area is located south of Blythe, California, within the Palo Verde Irrigation District. Initial investigations included an evaluation of available soils data and a conceptual layout for restoration. Prior to the drafting of a land and water resolution, the property will be appraised through the Office of Evaluation Services.

Potential Conservation Areas:

Backwaters and Marsh within Reach 4 and 6: Investigations of areas on which to create backwaters or marshes have expanded into Reach 6. Reaches 4 and 6 have land available for establishment of marshes and backwaters in California. Preliminary restoration concepts for potential conservation areas are being developed, land status is being determined, and both river and groundwater data are being collected.

Davis Lake: No additional investigations are anticipated at this time.

Topock Marsh Inlet Canal: The cadastral survey is underway to determine land ownership. The survey has required extensive records research, field verification, placement of monuments, and discussion with multiple partners; therefore, a restoration concept is not anticipated until at least FY18.

FY18 Proposed Activities: Coordination efforts with resource agencies will continue in order to identify the remaining conservation areas necessary to complete the habitat creation requirements of the LCR MSCP.

Dennis Underwood Conservation Area: If approved by the Steering Committee through a land and water resolution to officially become a conservation area, obligations will be tracked under Work Task E39.

Pertinent Reports: N/A