

Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), through the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), is Congressionally mandated to identify, classify and digitize all wetlands and deepwater habitats in the United States. The NWI has extensive mapping expertise and knowledge involving wetland identification and classification, photointerpretation, and digital data capabilities. Reflecting this expertise, the NWI is regularly asked to provide resource mapping guidance, and with increasing frequency, is requested to map riparian areas of the western United States.

Riparian habitats are among the most important vegetative communities for western wildlife species. Chaney, et al (1990) observed that greater than 75 percent of terrestrial wildlife species in the Great Basin region of eastern Oregon, as well as in southeastern Wyoming, are dependent on riparian habitats.

In Arizona and New Mexico, 80 percent of all vertebrates use riparian areas for at least half their life cycles; more than half of these are totally dependent on riparian areas. Similarly, the Arizona Riparian Council stated that 60-75 percent of Arizona's resident wildlife species depend on riparian areas to sustain their populations, yet these areas occupy less than 0.5 percent of the state's land area. Aquatic and fish productivity are directly related to a properly functioning and healthy riparian habitat (Washington Dept. Fish and Wildlife 1995).

The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 authorizes the Service to map habitats used by fish and wildlife resources. However, the Service has never formally adopted a standardized riparian definition or developed conventions to guide the mapping of riparian areas. This paper fills that void.



Cottonwoods (forested, deciduous) occurring on the second terrace adjacent to emergent wetland along Arikaree Creek, Colorado.