

**Programmatic Environmental Assessment/
Biological Assessment of the Carlsbad Project
Vegetation Management Program**



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Albuquerque Area Office
Albuquerque, New Mexico**

September 15, 2004



COVER SHEET

Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment/Biological Assessment of the Carlsbad Project Vegetation Management Program

Lead Agency

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation

Counties that could be Affected

Carlsbad Project Lands, Eddy County, NM

Abstract

The United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation Albuquerque Area Office has prepared a draft programmatic environmental assessment/biological assessment (draft EA/BA) to assess potential environmental effects of the Carlsbad Project Vegetation Management Program (Vegetation Management Program or Program). The Vegetation Management Program consists of a research component and a treatment component. The research component includes studies of a biological agents, herbicides, and mechanical methods; revegetation; and herbicide residue. The treatment component includes potential aerial application of an herbicide for treating saltcedar and some treatments of other invasives that would be implemented in cooperation with the Carlsbad Irrigation District and the Carlsbad Soil and Water Conservation District. The Vegetation Management Program, if implemented, is envisioned to further our knowledge of the most appropriate and most effective treatment and revegetation methodologies while simultaneously reducing the acreage currently impacted by saltcedar and other invasive plants. The Program is anticipated to be dynamic and ongoing over the next approximately 10 years, adapting to new information, and likely initiating new studies. The long-range vision of the Program is a reduction of invasive plants and reestablishment of native vegetation (grasses/shrubs). Though many details and specific activities of the Program are unknown at this time, all future work proposals will be consistent with the long-range vision. The purpose of the Program is to learn about the range of treatment methods, their effectiveness on Carlsbad Project lands, how to optimize invasive species control through integration of the methods, and how to reestablish native vegetation on treated lands as well as to actually reduce the acreage currently infested with saltcedar and other invasive plants. The need for the Program is based on Reclamation's desire to control saltcedar and other invasive plants on its Carlsbad Project lands and reestablish native vegetation appropriate to the impacted areas. Acre for acre, native vegetation consumes less water than saltcedar and is overall more ecologically compatible.

The environmental analysis addresses the following topics: soils, range conditions, noxious weed infestations, grazing, water quality, water, fisheries, wildlife, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, recreation and accessibility, socioeconomic considerations, environmental justice, Indian trust assets, and cumulative impacts.

Interagency Coordination

The proposed Vegetation Management Program was coordinated with the Carlsbad Irrigation District (CID), the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), and the Carlsbad Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). The CID is the beneficiary of the Carlsbad Project and is contracted by Reclamation for operations and maintenance activities. NMDGF is contracted by Reclamation to manage Brantley Wildlife Management Area. SWCD is the source of support for a component of the proposed Vegetation Management Program through its helicopter spraying program.

Public Notification

- A public meeting was held in Carlsbad, New Mexico at the Stevens Inn on Wednesday, March 12, 2004 from 6-8 pm to present information about biological treatment of saltcedar. The field release and study of an approved saltcedar biocontrol beetle was discussed.
- The public will be notified prior to aerial herbicide spraying
- Reclamation issuance of a draft EA/BA for 15-day public review.

Draft EA/BA Contact

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Comment Due Date: September 10, 2004

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AF	Acre-ft
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
DOI	Department of the Interior
EA	Environmental Assessment
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
ITA	Indian Trust Assets
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NMDGF	New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
Carlsbad Project	
Vegetation Management Program	Vegetation Management Program or Program
RMP	Resource Management Plan
Reclamation	Bureau of Reclamation
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
TCP	Traditional Cultural Property

Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment/Biological Assessment for the Carlsbad Project Vegetation Management Program

Summary

This programmatic environmental assessment was prepared by Reclamation to evaluate potential environmental impacts of the Carlsbad Project Vegetation Management Program. Two alternatives, the Vegetation Management Program and the No Action alternative, were assessed. Potential impacts of each alternative are briefly listed in Table 1 for comparison and are further described within this document.

Table 1
Environmental Consequences
Summary of Impacts

INDICATOR (By order of table of contents in document)	No Action Alternative	Vegetation Management Program
Soils (erodibility, productivity)	No change from existing conditions. Moderate localized disturbances from wheeled equipment.	Potentially better soil nutrient availability.
Range Condition	Existing conditions	Excellent potential for improvement.
Noxious Weed Infestations	Moderate potential for noxious weed infestations by scattering reproductive parts and seeds due to mechanical treatments.	Low potential for noxious weed establishment with chemical and biological treatments. Moderate potential with mechanical treatments.
Grazing	Existing conditions – Grazing leases below Brantley and around Avalon	Grazing leases continue with some possibility of improvement.
Water Quality	Existing conditions	Potential for some increased sediment load; chemical use will be protective of water quality; no adverse impacts anticipated.
Water	Existing conditions	Some potential to salvage water though immeasurable.
Fisheries	Existing conditions	No effect
Wildlife (habitat diversity)	Existing conditions	Some potential loss with saltcedar treatments; displacement of some wildlife to adjacent stands; some potential improvement if vegetation is successful.
Threatened and Endangered Species	Existing conditions	No effect
Cultural Resources	Existing conditions	No change
Recreation and Accessibility	Existing conditions	Potentially improved human access to recreation sites.
Socioeconomic	Existing conditions	No effect
Environmental Justice	Existing conditions	No effects.
Indian Trust Assets	No ITAs identified.	No ITAs identified.
Cumulative Impacts	Existing conditions continue	If Vegetation Management Program is successful there may be some water salvaged over the years, there may be a progressive loss of habitat provided by saltcedar; and a progressive increase in native vegetation and the wildlife communities it would support.