

Monitoring and Evaluation Report
Grand Valley Unit
Colorado River Salinity Control Project
2007

*USDA-NRCS
GRAND JUNCTION*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY GRAND VALLEY 2007

HYDROSALINITY -

- ◆ The project plan is to treat approx. 53,000 acres with improved irrigation systems.
- ◆ To date 35,505 acres have been treated with improved irrigation systems.
- ◆ The project plan is to reduce salt loading to the Colorado River system by 132,000 tons of salt.
- ◆ In FY 2007, salt loading has been reduced by 3,280 tons of salt per year as a result of installed salinity reduction practices.
- ◆ The cumulative salt reduction applied is 98,101 tons/year, or 77 percent of the goal.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS -

- ◆ The planned cost per ton of salt saved with FY 2007 contracts (one year) is \$83.86/Ton. This figure is calculated as follows:

(FA + TA = Total Cost) X Amortization factor = Amortized cost

Amortized cost / Tons salt reduced = Cost/Ton

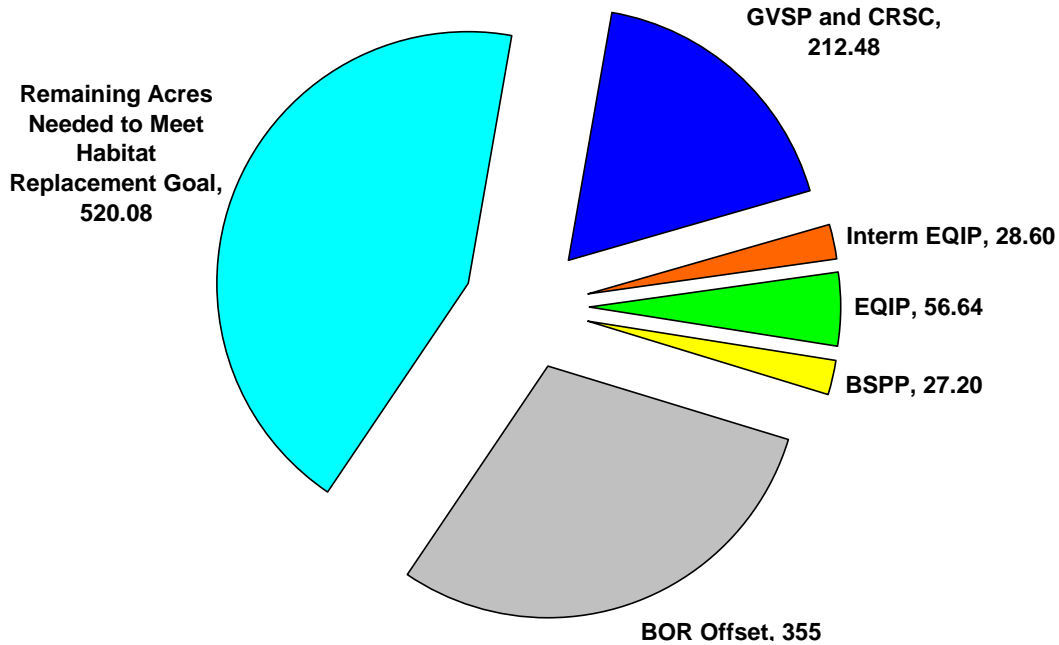
FA = Total dollars obligated in EQIP and Parallel Program (including wildlife)

Amortization for 2007 = 0.07007

TA = technical assistance cost: (FA x 0.67)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY- WILDLIFE GRAND VALLEY 2007

**Graph 1
Wildlife Acres Applied and Credited to NRCS
Grand Valley Unit**



Summary of Wildlife Habitat Planned and Applied (All Salinity Programs)

Wildlife habitat replacement acres planned 1978-2007	1473.75
Habitat replacement acres applied and existing 1978-2007	324.92
Bureau of Reclamation Offset	355
Remaining acres needed to meet habitat replacement goal	520.08

***This does not include 16.2 acres applied with WHIP**

Funding for Wildlife Habitat Replacement Projects (All Salinity Programs)

Funds obligated to wildlife projects 1978-2007	\$2,165,338
Funds spent on wildlife projects 1978-2007	\$673,838
% of total salinity obligated funds that are obligated to wildlife projects through 2007	6.7%
% of total salinity obligated funds spent on wildlife projects through 2007	2.1%

*This does not include WHIP

Summary of Wildlife Habitat Projects Planned and Applied with BSPP funds

Habitat replacement acres planned 2001-2007	168.8
Habitat replacement acres applied and existing 2001-2007	27.2
Funds obligated to wildlife projects 2001-2007	\$311,929
Funds spent on wildlife projects 2001-2007	\$80,224

Summary of Wildlife Habitat Projects Planned and Applied with WHIP funds

Acres planned in salinity area	190.4
Acres applied and existing in salinity area	16.2
Funds obligated in salinity area	\$76,343
Funds spent in salinity area	\$34,708

Wetland Data from 1991-2007 - Grand Valley Unit

Cumulative acres improved 1991-2007 (Salinity Programs)	44.79
Net AREM change 1991-2007(Salinity Programs)	+ 25.32
Cumulative acres impacted 1991-2007(WHIP)	9
Net AREM change 1991-2007(WHIP)	+ 2.98

Estimated Wildlife and Wetland Impacts – Debeque Salinity Unit

Total wildlife habitat acres expected to be lost 2007	1.6
Cumulative wetland acres expected to be lost 2007	0.3
Net AREM expected change 2007	-0.17

Estimated Wildlife and Wetland Impacts – Whitewater Salinity Unit

Total wildlife habitat acres expected to be lost 2007	0.1
Cumulative wetland acres expected to be lost 2007	0
Net AREM expected change 2007	0

2007 Summary of Wildlife Mitigation Efforts

Habitat replacement acres planned (All Salinity Programs)	28.5
Habitat replacement acres applied (All Salinity Programs)	26.6
Funds spent on wildlife projects (All Salinity Programs)	\$31,925
Habitat replacement acres planned (BSPP)	15.7
Habitat replacement acres applied (BSPP)	10.9
Funds spent on wildlife projects (BSPP)	\$3,442
Wetland acres improved 2007 (All Salinity Programs)	2.6
Net AREM change 2007 (All Salinity Programs)	+ 2.76

HYDRO SALINITY MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Introduction

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been placing improved irrigation methodology with selected cost-sharing to cooperators since 1979 through the Colorado River Salinity Control Program. The Colorado NRCS in the Grand Salinity Control Program Unit completed irrigation monitoring on a variety of improved irrigation systems for the crops commonly grown to determine the effectiveness of the salinity control programs in meeting planned goals. Irrigation in the Mesa County area is characterized by mostly gravity-fed systems installed on heavy, clayey soils derived from a marine shale formation (Mancos shale) that is very saline. The intake rates of the soils are generally low to medium. Plentiful and inexpensive irrigation water coupled with the heavy clay soils, long irrigation set times and excessive flow rates continue to be the norm. This leads to deep percolation losses of water and low application efficiencies. The excess water from deep percolation contacts the underlying Mancos shale and subsequently loads salt to the Colorado River. Deep percolation is considered to be the primary indicator of the effectiveness of the irrigation application. A variety of irrigation systems were evaluated including earthen ditches with earth feeder ditches, earthen ditches with siphon tubes, concrete ditches with siphon tubes, ported concrete ditches, pipeline to gated pipe, side roll sprinklers, and micro spray. Crops included alfalfa, corn, small grain, dry beans, orchards, grapes, onions, pasture, and vegetables. This monitoring took place throughout the entire Salinity program period from 1979 to 2003. Data are compiled for 213 site years of measured irrigation inflows, outflows, crop consumptive use, precipitation, and deep percolation.

The data indicate that the salinity projects in Grand Valley are typically achieving a deep percolation reduction of at least 10 to 15 inches for each acre treated which meets or exceeds the 8 inches of deep percolation reduction estimated in the original project reports.

Areas with a greater conversion to sprinkler or micro spray will be at the 15 inch reduction and areas with predominantly flood irrigation will be at the 10 inch reduction. Areas that are converting unimproved flood systems will have deep percolation

reductions in the 27 to 32 inch range. Areas that are converting very old systems with limited improvements, will most likely be somewhere between the higher values and the lower values, but probably closer to the 10 to 15 inch reduction than the 27 to 32 inch reduction.

2007 Highlights

Beginning in 2004, NRCS, in cooperation with the Mesa Conservation District and the Colorado State Conservation Board began a program designed to place emphasis on Irrigation Water Management (IWM). During 2006, a full-time IWM position was made available to increase emphasis on IWM. Visits to check and certify IWM were made on 77 farms during 2007.

Land Use	System type	Acres IWM reported
Vineyards/orchard	Underground/gated	13
Vineyards/Orchard	Micro-irrigation	108
Grass and alfalfa Hay	Underground/gated	1444
Row crops	Underground/gated	615 acres

For the coming irrigation season, the Grand Valley project area is increasing efforts to expand the use of sprinklers for smaller acreages. Smaller, subdivided parcels are causing significant problems in the traditional tail water delivery and disposal methods. This is causing water to flow more slowly and stand in ditches for longer periods of time. This problem could cancel out some of the positive deep percolation reduction effects in the program. Sprinkler systems could help to solve that problem. One of the main drawbacks to the use of sprinklers has been the need to install pumps, as there is no gravity pressure available. Solar-powered pumps and other alternatives will be studied this irrigation season. There is increasing interest in small-scale center pivots for use on larger fields in the Grand valley.

Urban Use of Irrigation Water

Although not a part of the EQIP and the monitoring and reporting requirements of the program, there have been concerns about the potential overuse of irrigation water by suburban and urban users, both newcomers to the area as well as homeowners familiar with the area and the local conditions. In late 2004, the Mesa Conservation District received a grant to study the effects of ex-urban and suburban development on irrigation water use and deep percolation. Monitoring and study of this segment of land use continued in 2006, and was completed at the end of the irrigation season.

Final report of results is currently being published. The project goal was to characterize the deep percolation from urban irrigation, and compare it to historic levels of deep percolation from agricultural irrigation.

Preliminary data show a wide range of deep percolation on small acreage and urban lot-size units, similar to the variability found in traditional farmland. It was thought that overall water use would be reduced due to an increase of impervious areas such as streets, curbs and gutters, and rooftops in these urbanizing areas. The study found that the conversion of land use from agricultural land use to urban land use reduces water use by about 74 percent and deep percolation as much as about 90 percent. Estimated reductions in salt loading were as much as 92 percent. However, on individual systems, there is the same range of proper water use to misuse that exists elsewhere.

Demographic and Area changes in the Grand Valley

For several years it has been reported that parcel and field sizes are changing in the Grand Valley, and that this has begun to limit potential applicants and eligible property to further implement the Grand Valley portion of the salinity control program. For 2006, data were gathered and compiled to determine the extent of these changes. This process was continued and updated for 2007. Data were collected from Mesa County Planning and Development Department subdivision and land development records, and County Assessor records to estimate parcel and ownership size changes, if any for the Grand Valley area.

Additionally, an estimate of parcel size change was determined by utilizing ArcView (GIS) information. For this comparison, maps, aerial photography coverage, and GIS

data layers were utilized to estimate changes and trends. During the past year nearly 800 acres of irrigated lands were subdivided into parcels of 5 acres or less, and one 200 acre parcel was subdivided into 0.5 acre lots. The average parcel size in the Grand Valley area remains at under 5 acres.

Recommendations for Future Monitoring and Discussion

- For 2008, effort will continue on all new EQIP and BPP contract recipients to address irrigation water management and proper use of newly installed irrigation systems.
 - Emphasis needs to be placed on landowner irrigation scheduling tools and methods such as “checkbook” and field probing for soil moisture observation.
 - For 2008, data will continue to be collected and compiled from urban and small acreage sites. The effects of conversion to urban and small acreage land units must be evaluated to assess the effects of the changes on the projected salinity reduction. Many of the areas treated under the program are being converted to smaller 1 to 2 acre parcels. The Grand Valley areas near Grand Junction, Fruita, and Loma are transitioning to these smaller parcels. There appears to be increasing support and transition to smaller parcels in the Grand Valley, in spite of the general community desire for larger lots that create the appearance of more open space, etc. They continue to be irrigated, but by a new landowner and with different crops, usually hay or pasture and lawn and garden.
 - Many of the larger parcels are being subdivided in the 20 acre to 40 plus acre size and remain in some type of crop production, but under a new owner/manager that works a primary job off the farm and may have no previous experience with irrigation.
-
- Significant problems still exist in the delivery of water in unimproved and outdated laterals and other group delivery systems. There is a need for these groups to

incorporate and improve these systems; however it is increasingly difficult for this to occur. Most laterals have doubled or even tripled the number of users on the laterals due to subdivision, and this influx of inexperience has driven more complaints and operation problems. The EQIP program is poorly suited to planning and providing cost share for improving these systems, as participants must be agricultural producers.

- The cost of improving many of these systems exceeds the cost-effectiveness limits for the BPP and EQIP programs, set at \$60/Ton for BPP and \$150/ton for EQIP.
- Many irrigation systems improved in the early years of the salinity programs are nearing the end of their practice life. This will need to be addressed as some of these systems will eventually need to be replaced. Some systems are capable of lasting far longer than the stated practice life, e.g. underground pipeline, while other systems have definitely deteriorated. It is important for these systems to remain “on line”.
- The participation level of the program and the treated area completed to date show significant success for both the popularity and the past participation of the program. There is still much interest for improvements in parts of the Grand Valley dominated by vineyards and fruit crops. For more traditional crops, the treated acreage level is resulting in fewer applications, as the majority of large acreages have been treated. Many applications are received for irrigation improvements for parcels as small as one acre.
- There are opportunities to assist the new and inexperienced land owners with effective irrigation water management and systems operation.
- The projected salinity reduction for these types of units should be evaluated so appropriate adjustments to cumulative salinity loading information can be made based on measured values.
- Knowing that many of the land units may be facing future land use changes due to development requires adjustments to irrigation system designs to provide a

salinity reduction benefit with the current operation. Designs must take into account further and future development, which drives up the current construction costs.

- Cost effectiveness of the Grand Valley program is being affected by the above construction cost increases and by the reduction of the sizes of parcels made available for the cost share programs.

WILDLIFE

History and background:

The Grand Valley Unit is located in west central Colorado adjacent to the Colorado-Utah state line and includes the entire irrigated area of the Grand Valley North of the Colorado River and the area served by the Orchard Mesa Irrigation District on Orchard Mesa. Added to the Grand Valley Unit in 2006 are the Debeque and Whitewater Units. The Debeque Unit is located 24 miles east of Grand Junction adjacent to the Colorado River. The Whitewater Unit is located 7 miles south of Grand Junction adjacent to the Gunnison River. The Grand Valley is characteristic of arid, cold desert ecosystems common to western Colorado and eastern Utah. Historically, the Grand Valley Unit was dominated by desert vegetation communities. Narrow wetlands and riparian zones were located along the Colorado and Gunnison rivers as well as several natural washes. The present mosaic of habitat types (agricultural, riparian, wetland, and desert shrub) is a result of current irrigation systems and practices. With the advent of irrigation and associated waste water return flows and seepage, the natural vegetation has changed. A sparse, saltbush desert community has been converted to crops and habitat types such as wetland, riparian, willow and cottonwood, tamarisk, tall wheatgrass, or a mosaic of these cover types. Habitat types other than cropland are restricted to areas unsuitable for agriculture, such as canal and lateral banks, fence rows, washes, irrigation return flows and drains, roadsides, and other low-lying areas.

Agricultural areas are composed of orchards, pastures, and crops. Crops grown vary from peaches, grapes and cherries, to alfalfa, corn and small grains. All crops are entirely dependent upon irrigation for production. The area originally comprised about 66,000 acres of agricultural land; however, urban and commercial development over the last 30 years has reduced the agricultural area to approximately 58,000 acres. Areas west and north of Fruita, Loma, and Mack have large irrigated agriculture fields. Other areas in the unit are characterized by small fields associated with ranchettes and growing specialty crops.

The size of most program participant's properties is small (1-20 acres). Many landowners and participants are moving from the city to recently created small parcels. The Grand Valley area is beginning to see a shift in how landowners view and manage the land. Landowners purchase these parcels for open space, privacy, views, and a rural life style. They manage the parcels as "extra-large lots", rather than farms. Many of these landowners are still interested in improving their land and irrigation but not just for agricultural reasons.

Impacts to wildlife and habitat in the Grand Valley Unit are addressed in the Grand Valley Environmental Assessment, prepared jointly by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The Environmental Assessment determined 4000 acres of wildlife habitat would be lost due to improvement of on-farm and off-farm irrigation systems.

Based upon analysis of the potential impacts, the assessment and subsequent agreements by the agencies required replacement of the 4000 acres of wildlife habitat. Seventy percent of the replacement requirement was assigned to the BOR. The remaining thirty percent, or 1200 acres, was assigned to the NRCS. In 1993, The BOR purchased 355 acres of property for development of wildlife habitat to augment the NRCS goal of 1200 acres. In previous Monitoring and Evaluation reports for the Grand Valley it was stated that the BOR purchased nearly 400 acres to be credited to the NRCS. A review of documentation shows only 355 acres were purchased, resulting in an NRCS replacement goal of 845 acres.

Wildlife habitat replacement in the Debeque and Whitewater Units will be determined on a site by site basis by an NRCS biologist. Habitat acres that will be negatively impacted by salinity projects in these units will be added to the remaining habitat replacement goal of 845 acres set for the Grand Valley Unit.

Over the last 30 years, salinity and wildlife habitat improvements projects have been cost-shared by several different programs as documented in table 1. Note that there are some overlaps between programs. Additionally, wildlife habitat has been created in the Grand Valley Unit through the USDA Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). To date, habitat developed with the WHIP program has not been considered salinity project habitat replacement. It is addressed in this document for information purposes.

Table 1. Salinity Control Programs in the Grand Valley Unit

Grand Valley Salinity Control Program (GVSP)	1978 -1989
Colorado River Salinity Control Program (CRSC)	1987 – 1995
Interim Environmental Quality Incentives Program (IEQIP)	1996
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	1997 -2007
Colorado River Basin States Parallel Program (BSPP)	1998 – 2007

Beginning in 2001, additional funding for wildlife projects that would contribute to habitat replacement goals was made available through the Basin States Parallel Program (BSPP). All BSPP wildlife projects are selected through a ranking process developed by an interagency committee. Projects funded with BSPP funds may be located outside of the Grand Valley Unit.

In 1991, the Grand Valley Unit began tracking wetland type and value changes based upon the Avian Richness and Evaluation Methods for wetlands of the Colorado Plateau (AREM). Wetlands impacted by planned conservation practices were evaluated using this method and Circular 39 from USDI to establish an existing habitat value.

The impacted wetlands were re-evaluated using the above criteria to determine existing wetland habitat values.

Current methods

In the Grand Valley Unit wildlife habitat replacement progress is tracked by acres. Additionally, wetland habitat value changes are assessed using AREM as described above. In an interagency meeting on December 10, 2004 it was agreed, that only habitat development currently on the ground will be credited for habitat replacement. 845 acres of habitat replacement assigned to NRCS will need to be on the ground when the project is finished. At project end, past NRCS habitat development that no longer exists (due to a variety of reasons) will not be credited to NRCS. The process of reporting and field verification of program results and records will continue for the remainder of the program.

For the duration of the salinity program, the type of wildlife improvement practices has remained consistent. Practices include ponds, fencing, grass and forbs establishment, brush (tamarisk control) management, and tree and shrub establishment. Pond construction includes membrane lining at all locations except where the pond is at equilibrium with an existing water table. To address Colorado River endangered fish concerns, all ponds are constructed with fish screens on outlet structures (unless the pond will be drained during winter), and, water depletion loss is calculated and reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their review.

Results

Progress from wildlife projects, both planned and applied, is updated yearly in a spreadsheet maintained by the NRCS Grand Junction Field Office. This data represents the final audit and update for all wildlife projects in the Grand Valley Unit, and are verified from field visits performed by a wildlife biologist.

Salinity and wildlife habitat improvements have been cost-shared by several different programs. Progress in acres of wildlife habitat replacement by program is illustrated by Graph 1. Table 2 summarizes the applied data for all salinity programs. Table 3 is a summation of dollars spent on wildlife projects with salinity program funds. Table 4 summarizes the wildlife habitat replacement acres and funding for the BSPP program. Table 5 summarizes the wildlife acres and funds for the WHIP program spent in the salinity area. WHIP acres applied in Table 5 are not included in Table 2. Wetland data collected over the last 15 years for all salinity programs and WHIP is summarized in Table 6. Table 7 and Table 8 reflect expected impacts to wildlife and wetlands in the Debeque and Whitewater Salinity Units. Table 9 is a summary of all wildlife mitigation efforts for 2007 for the Grand Valley Unit.

**Graph 1
Wildlife Acres Applied and Credited to NRCS
Grand Valley Unit**

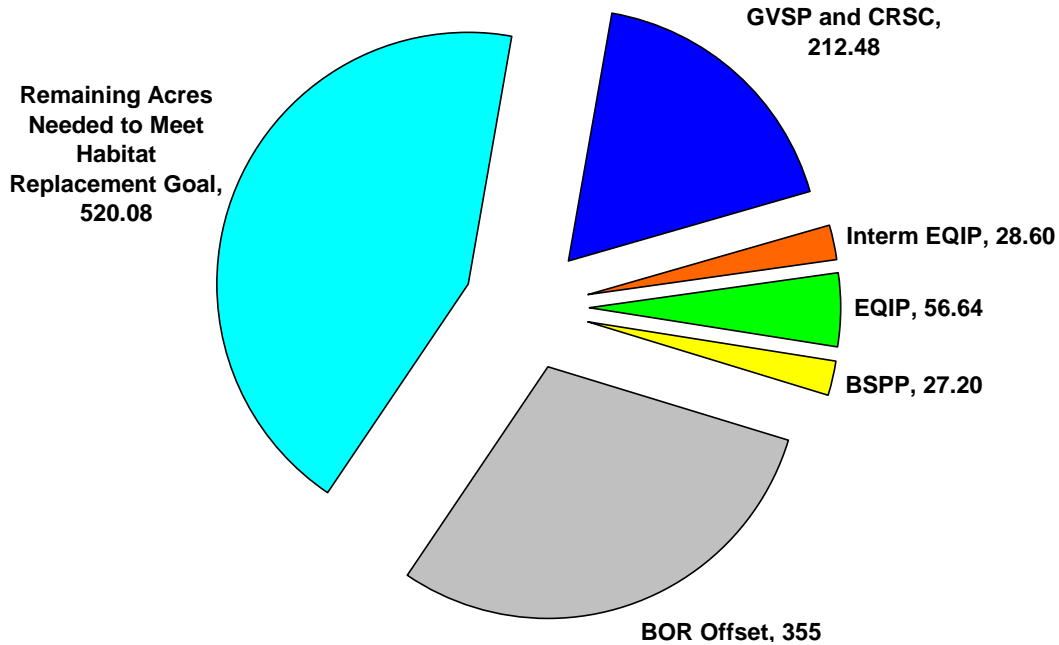


Table 2. Summary of Wildlife Habitat Planned and Applied (All Salinity Programs)

Wildlife habitat replacement acres planned 1978-2007	1473.75
Habitat replacement acres applied and existing 1978-2007	324.92
Bureau of Reclamation Offset	355
Remaining acres needed to meet habitat replacement goal	520.08

Table 3. Funding for Wildlife Habitat Replacement Projects (All Salinity Programs)

Funds obligated to wildlife projects 1978-2007	\$2,165,338
Funds spent on wildlife projects 1978-2007	\$673,838
% of total salinity obligated funds that are obligated to wildlife projects through 2007	6.7%
% of total salinity obligated funds spent on wildlife projects through 2007	2.1%

Table 4. Summary of Wildlife Habitat Projects Planned and Applied with BSPP funds

Habitat replacement acres planned 2001-2007	168.8
Habitat replacement acres applied and existing 2001-2007	27.2
Funds obligated to wildlife projects 2001-2007	\$311,929
Funds spent on wildlife projects 2001-2007	\$80,224

Table 5. Summary of Wildlife Habitat Projects Planned and Applied with WHIP funds

Acres planned in salinity area	190.4
Acres applied and existing in salinity area	16.2
Funds obligated in salinity area	\$76,343
Funds spent in salinity area	\$34,708

Table 6. Wetland Data from 1991-2007 - Grand Valley Unit

Cumulative acres improved 1991-2007 (Salinity Programs)	44.79
Net AREM change 1991-2007(Salinity Programs)	+ 25.32
Cumulative acres impacted 1991-2007(WHIP)	9
Net AREM change 1991-2007(WHIP)	+ 2.98

Table 7. Estimated Wildlife and Wetland Impacts – Debeque Salinity Unit

Total wildlife habitat acres expected to be lost 2007	1.6
Cumulative wetland acres expected to be lost 2007	0.3
Net AREM expected change 2007	-0.17

Table 8. Estimated Wildlife and Wetland Impacts – Whitewater Salinity Unit

Total wildlife habitat acres expected to be lost 2007	0.1
Cumulative wetland acres expected to be lost 2007	0
Net AREM expected change 2007	0

Table 9. 2007 Summary of Wildlife Mitigation Efforts

Habitat replacement acres planned (All Salinity Programs)	28.5
Habitat replacement acres applied (All Salinity Programs)	26.6
Funds spent on wildlife projects (All Salinity Programs)	\$31,925
Habitat replacement acres planned (BSPP)	15.7
Habitat replacement acres applied (BSPP)	10.9
Funds spent on wildlife projects (BSPP)	\$3,442
Wetland acres improved 2007 (All Salinity Programs)	2.6
Net AREM change 2007 (All Salinity Programs)	+ 2.76

Discussion of Results

Over the last 30 years 5 salinity programs have been utilized to replace wildlife acreage (Graph 1). A majority of the replacement effort has been a result of the CRSC and GVSP salinity programs. The EQIP program has produced 56.64 acres in eleven years. During the first 7 years of the EQIP program, wildlife and irrigation projects for the same landowner were often combined in one contract and there was a high cancellation rate of the wildlife portion of the contract. Since 2004 all wildlife contracts under EQIP are separate contracts and cancellation rates have decreased.

The NRCS replacement effort has resulted in 324.92 acres of wildlife habitat applied and existing (Table 2). These applied and existing acres account for about 22% of all planned projects. NRCS funded projects and the BOR offset of 355 acres has resulted in a total of 679.92 acres of wildlife habitat credited to the Grand Valley Unit. An additional 520.08 acres of habitat replacement is required to achieve the 1200 acre goal. During 2007 28.5 acres were planned for wildlife habitat mitigation and 26.6 acres were applied (Table 9).

Funding of wildlife projects from all salinity programs is outlined in Table 3. To date, \$673,838 has been spent on wildlife projects in the Grand Valley Unit, which is 2.1% of the total obligated funds for all salinity programs. Over the last 30 years, \$2,165,338 has been obligated to wildlife projects in the Grand Valley Unit, which is 6.7% of the total funds obligated to for all salinity programs. During 2007 a total of \$31,925 was spent on wildlife projects (Table 9).

The BSPP program has planned 168.8 acres of wildlife habitat since 2001 (Table 4). Currently 27.2 acres have been applied with this program. During 2007, 15.7 acres were planned and 10.9 acres applied for wildlife mitigation projects under the BSPP (Table 9). A total of \$311,929 BSPP funds have been obligated to wildlife projects, with \$80,224 spent to date on wildlife projects (Table 4). A total of \$3,442 was spent on

BSPP wildlife projects in 2007 (Table 9).

Wildlife projects planned using WHIP funds are outlined in Table 5. The values in Table 5 are not included in either Table 2 or Table 3. Currently there are 190.4 acres planned in the Grand Valley Unit under WHIP and 16.2 acres applied and existing. At this time there have been \$76,343 of WHIP funds obligated in the Grand Valley Unit, and a total of \$34,708 has been spent on wildlife projects.

Since 1991, a total of 44.79 acres of wetlands have been improved through salinity programs in the Grand Valley Unit with a net AREM change of +25.32 (Table 6). In 2007 2.6 acres of wetlands were improved and with a net AREM change of +2.76 (Table 9). Wetlands created in 2006 and 2007 will be evaluated for AREM after 3 years to allow for vegetation to establish and wetland functions to develop.

Wildlife and wetland loss for the Debeque Unit and Whitewater Unit is documented in Table 7 and 8. These values are expected losses, actual losses will be determined if and when irrigation projects are installed and any habitat loss will be added to the wildlife mitigation goal for the Grand Valley Unit. Current expected losses for the Debeque Unit are a cumulative 1.9 acres and a change in AREM values of -0.17. Current expected losses for the Whitewater Unit are a cumulative 0.1 acres and no change in AREM values.

Conclusion

Replacement effort for wildlife acres is dynamic as urban development impacts areas that once were managed for wildlife under the salinity programs. Each year wildlife acres are applied throughout the Grand Valley Unit, but acres are also removed as identified by periodic field checks by an NRCS biologist. Effort must be placed upon increasing the interest of landowners to establish and maintain wildlife habitat. Direct contact with landowners that own large parcels or land along natural washes and drainages may be beneficial. With increasing numbers of landowners having small parcels, the salinity program must adjust to accommodate smaller areas. NRCS can utilize these opportunities by showing the benefits of improving small open space parcels for wildlife habitat.

Cancellation rates of EQIP wildlife contracts have decreased with the advent of separate contracts for wildlife projects. Retention rates should also improve as practice lifespan for practices associated with wildlife habitat have increased from 10 years under the GVSP program, to 20 and 25 years under current programs. Retention of applied wildlife habitat acres may also be increased by working with lands that have conservation easements in place. This would entail working closely with land trust organizations to identify possible landowners with conservation easements that are wildlife oriented. Working with Mesa County and the cities of Grand Junction, Fruita, and Palisade to establish projects located in development buffer zones may increase opportunities for wildlife projects with willing landowners.