



Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

Balancing Resource Use and Conservation

Overview

The Colorado River has often been called the lifeblood of the West. Today the Colorado River supplies vital water and power resources for more than 20 million people in the lower basin states of Arizona, California, and Nevada.

Following the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 1994 designation of critical habitat for four endangered fish species in the Colorado River basin, concerns were raised about the reliability of these water and power resources. In response,



representatives of the three states, Department of the Interior agencies, and various non-federal stakeholders and water and power agencies along the Lower Colorado River formed a regional partnership. The partners developed a first-of-its-kind multi-species conservation program aimed at protecting endangered, threatened, and sensitive fish and wildlife species and their habitats.

Description

The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) works toward the recovery of listed species through habitat and species conservation. The program also reduces the likelihood of additional species listings under the Endangered Species Act.

Implemented over a 50-year period, the program also accommodates current water diversions and power production, and will optimize opportunities for future water and power development, consistent with law.

This comprehensive program addresses future Federal agency consultation needs under the Endangered Species Act's Section 7, and non-Federal agency needs for endangered species incidental take authorizations under the Act's Section 10. The program also allows California agencies to meet their obligations under California state law.

Conservation Plan

Implementing the LCR MSCP will create 8,132 acres of new habitat (5,940 acres of cottonwood-willow, 1,320 acres of honey mesquite, 512 acres of marsh, and 360 acres of backwaters), and produce



660,000 sub-adult razorback sucker and 620,000 bonytail to augment the existing populations of these fish in the Lower Colorado River. The program also establishes a \$25 million fund to support projects implemented by land use managers in the planning area to protect and maintain existing habitat for species that are covered in the program's conservation plan.

Biological Scope

Twenty-six Federal or state-listed candidate and sensitive species and their associated habitats, ranging from aquatic and wetland habitats to riparian and upland areas, are addressed in the program's habitat conservation plan. Of the 26 covered species, 6 are currently listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The program addresses the biological needs of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, and reptiles, as well as invertebrates and plants.

Geographic Scope

The LCR MSCP covers the areas up to and including the full-pool elevations of lakes Mead, Mohave, and Havasu, and the historical floodplain of the Colorado River from Lake Mead to the Southerly International Boundary with Mexico, a distance of about 400 river miles.

Accomplishments

Through 2010, 3,359 acres of land and 15,534 acre-feet of water have been secured by the program. A total of 1,141 acres of cottonwood-willow habitat and 139 acres of mesquite have been established at four conservation areas (Cibola Valley, Beal Lake, Palo Verde Ecological Reserve, and Cibola National Wildlife Refuge). Eighty acres of backwater have been developed at Imperial National Wildlife Refuge.

Construction will be completed at Hart Mine Marsh, which will provide over 186 acres of backwater and marsh habitat. The program also protected 15 acres of backwater at Big Bend Conservation Area. Approximately 174,000 razorback suckers and bonytails have been stocked in the Lower Colorado River. Each year the Bureau of Reclamation, as the implementing

agency, publishes an annual work plan, budget, and accomplishment report. These annual reports, as well as other project-specific information, can be found online at www.lcrmscp.gov.

Program Cost

The program's estimated cost in 2003 dollars is \$626 million and is annually adjusted for inflation. The Federal government pays 50 percent of the program's costs. The participants in the states of Arizona, California, and Nevada pay the remaining 50 percent, with California paying one-half of the non-Federal total, and Arizona and Nevada each paying one-quarter of the non-Federal total. More than \$92 million has been expended during the first five years of program implementation. This included \$8.7 million for fish augmentation, \$32.5 million for research, monitoring, and adaptive management, \$4.8 million for securing land and water, and \$37.5 million for habitat development.

Steering Committee

A Steering Committee representing 57 Federal, state, and local water and power agencies, Indian tribes, cities and counties, and environmental resource groups, provides oversight for program implementation. The current list of Steering Committee members can be found online at www.lcrmscp.gov.

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