

Work Task E16: Conservation Area Site Selection

FY08 Estimates	FY08 Actual	Cumulative Accomplishment Through FY08	FY09 Approved Estimate	FY10 Proposed Estimate	FY11 Proposed Estimate	FY12 Proposed Estimate
\$200,000	\$234,994.34	\$631,021.34	\$200,000	\$360,000	\$360,000	\$360,000

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Start Date: FY05

Expected Duration: FY30

Long-term Goal: Request, identify, prioritize, visit, and recommend potential conservation areas to the Steering Committee for development under the habitat creation requirements of the LCR MSCP.

Conservation Measures: CLRA1, WIFL1, BONY2, RASU2, WRBA2, WYBA2 CR2, YHCR2, LEBI1, BLRA1, YBCU1, ELOW1, GIFL1, GIWO1, VEFL1, BEVI1, YWAR1, SUTA1, FLSU1, MNSW2, CLMB2, PTBB2

Location: Reaches 1-7, AZ, CA, and NV.

Purpose: Finalize and implement the *Draft Guidelines for the Screening and Evaluation of Potential Conservation Areas*, which provides Reclamation with a consistent and transparent method for requesting, screening, evaluating, and recommending the suitability of lands that are made available to the program for use as Conservation Areas.

Connections with Other Work Tasks (past and future): The process developed under this work task will guide the selection of future Conservation Area sites to be developed under Section E work tasks.

Project Description: Guidelines have been developed to describe the process for working with interested parties to identify sites for screening and evaluation as potential Conservation Areas for creating and maintaining habitat over the term of the LCR MSCP.

Reclamation will work with land owners 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 some form of long-term commitment that secures resources for the 50-year term of the LCR MSCP.

When developing a financial value for subject lands and water, Reclamation must administer a Federal appraisal using the Department of Interior's designated appraisal services office. The cost of appraisal services is typically captured in the Work Task E16 budget.

As new sites are evaluated and prioritized, each new site will be presented to the Steering Committee 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 guiding implementation of the conservation area. Existing backwaters proposed for management of native fish are reviewed under E15 Backwater Site Selection. However, beginning in FY10 the creation of backwaters from scratch on existing or new Conservation Areas is being implemented to allow for comparison with backwaters identified under E15.

FY08 Accomplishments: FY08 accomplishments consisted of four main work categories:

1. Desert tortoise habitat acquisition was investigated. In 2007, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) proposed the acquisition of 230 acres of desert tortoise habitat within the Chuckwalla Bench Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The Chuckwalla Bench ACEC is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). With the help of the Conservancy individual land owners within the ACEC were identified using county records and tax assessor information. Twelve individual land owners with a combined 1,400 acres located within five section acres were identified. Private parcels for potential acquisition range in size from 40 acres to 120 acres.
2. Flat-tailed horned lizard habitat acquisition was investigated. In 2007, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) proposed the acquisition of 230 acres of flat-tailed horned lizard habitat within the Dos Palmas Preserve. The Dos Palmas Preserve and adjacent Salt Creek ACEC are managed by the BLM. With the help of the Conservancy, individual land owners within the Preserve were identified using county records and tax assessor information. The LCR MSCP also investigated a potential flat-tailed habitat acquisition of 230 acres located in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park managed by the State of California. San Diego County Water Authority, a LCR MSCP stakeholder recently acquired flat-tailed horned lizard habitat in the Park and suggested the LCR MSCP approach the Park for additional acquisition opportunities. LCR MSCP staff met with the Park's superintendent regarding the habitat acquisition potential. The State Park confirmed that as the San Diego acquisition is finalized in late 2008, the Park would be willing to work with the LCR MSCP to investigate additional habitat available.
3. Two appraisals were conducted in FY08. The first appraisal was conducted for Planet Ranch, located near Parker, AZ. The second appraisal was for the Boy Scout Camp located in Laughlin, NV.
4. The LCR MSCP administered its second annual Request for Projects (RFP). The RFP was posted to the Program's website in September 2008 for 30 days and all Program stakeholders were notified by email. The RFP requested that projects be limited to marsh, cottonwood-willow and mesquite development within the LCR MSCP Planning Area. Backwaters were excluded from the RFP and are currently beginning inventoried for potential development under "Work Task E15: Backwater Site Selection."

FY09 Activities: FY09 activities will be conducted within two main work categories:

1. Two opportunities for acquisition of flat-tailed horned lizard habitat were identified in the FY08 RFP. A biological determination of the most suitable property for habitat protection is anticipated this spring. An inter-agency agreement between Reclamation, Boulder City, and the BLM South Coast Field Office will be completed. BLM biologists with prior flat-tailed horned lizard monitoring experience will survey both the Dos Palmas and Anza-Borrego properties for habitat potential. After the two sites are surveyed, one geographic area will be selected and brought to the steering committee as a land a water resolution.
2. In October 2008, trip reports documenting and analyzing the projects submitted under the 2008 RFP were completed. Applicants were evaluated on their relevance based on Step 1 of the *Draft Final Guidelines for the Screening and Evaluation of Potential Conservation Areas* and specific RFP criteria. An interdisciplinary team made up of Reclamation professionals visited nine individual sites. The sites are located on the 'Ahakhav Tribal Preserve, Palo Verde Irrigation District lands, Imperial National Wildlife Refuge, Reclamation withdrawn lands, Bureau of Land Management lands, State of Arizona lands and Quechan Tribal lands. Specific information on each site was documented in the *October 2008 Trip Reports*, posted to the LCR MSCP web site. Preliminary findings and site recommendations were discussed during the February 2009 Work Group meeting.

The Steering Committee approved a Land and Water Resolution to commence desert tortoise habitat acquisition. In FY09 all costs associated with the acquisition of the inhabited lands will be accounted for within the newly created Desert Tortoise Work Plan (E29). Using \$50,000 from E16, land owners within the Chuckwalla Bench ACEC will be contacted to initiate the appraisals.

Proposed FY10 Activities: FY10 activities will be conducted within three work categories:

1. After the flat-tailed horned lizard habitat areas have been surveyed for habitat value and one geographic areas is selected, the Steering Committee will receive a Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Land and Water Resolution. Once approved for acquisition, land owners will be contacted and federal appraisals conducted.
2. Further analysis will be conducted on the sites identified under the 2008 RFP. Steps 2-6 of the *Draft Final Guidelines for the Screening and Evaluation of Potential Conservation Area* will be conducted if appropriate.
3. Backwaters created on existing ground at existing or potential Conservation Areas will be identified and evaluated. This effort is being initiated to bring additional backwaters, created from scratch, to parity with existing backwaters identified under Work Task E15 Backwater Site Selection.

Pertinent Reports: *Draft Guidelines for the Screening and Evaluation of Potential Conservation Areas* and the *November 2006 Trip Reports* are posted on the LCR MSCP Web site.