

## Work Task E16: Conservation Area Site Selection

FY10 Estimates	FY10 Actual	Cumulative Accomplishment Through FY10	FY11 Approved Estimate	FY12 Proposed Estimate	FY13 Proposed Estimate	FY14 Proposed Estimate
\$360,000	\$294,547.68	\$1,129,547.85	\$375,000	\$375,000	\$375,000	\$375,000

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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, CRCR2, YHCR2, LEBI1, BLRA1, YBCU1, ELOW1, GIFL1, GIWO1, VEFL1, BEVI1, YWAR1, SUTA1, FLSU1, MNSW2, CLMB2, PTBB2.

**Location:** Reaches 1-7, Arizona, California, and Nevada.

**Purpose:** Secure land and water resources to be developed as Conservation Areas to fulfill the habitat creation requirements of the LCR MSCP.

**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 landowners 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 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 or Program Decision Document. 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. Backwaters proposed for management of native fish are reviewed under E15.

**FY10 Accomplishments:** FY10 activities are focused on building partnerships with resource agencies, identifying properties for future development, and securing lands occupied by Flat-tailed horned lizards to satisfy the FTHL conservation measure. The need to develop lands within the state of California has been identified and is a priority of the program.

We continued to attend and contribute at numerous meetings held with other resources agencies and tribal entities. In particular, we regularly attended “Healthy Landscapes” meetings hosted by the BLM, Cocopah bi-national meetings hosted by the tribe, “Riparian Restoration Workshop” hosted by the Yuma Crossing National Heritage, as well as the Laguna Division Planning group which is hosted by the LCR MSCP. We also conduct quarterly meetings with FWS representatives from all 4 federal refuges on the lower Colorado River, both Complex Managers, and staff from both the Ecological Services and the Arizona Fisheries Research Office of the FWS.

With the passing by the Steering Committee of Program Decision Document 10-001: Land Approval in October 2009, Reclamation which directed to evaluate unprotected properties within the Salt Creek ACEC of the Dos Palmas Preserve for inclusion into the program for the protection of FTHL. A review of parcel maps and discussions with FTHL biologists indicate the private lands within the Salt Creek ACEC suitable for FTHL consist of a narrow strip. Parcels within this area are small in size, typically 5-10 acres, and would require extensive appraisal, site assessment and title work to secure.

Costs associated with acquiring multiple small parcels outweigh the benefit to the species and the LCR MSCP at this time. Therefore, we revised decision document 10-001(r) to allow for acquisition in any of the four ACEC’s specifically managed for FTHL. Our intent is to secure all 230 acres within one ACEC; however, that may not be possible given the interest being generated by the search for renewable energy sources, specifically construction of solar plants in the desert southwest.

Reclamation has been working with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), El Centro Field Office to identify private lands occupied by FTHL within the Yuma Desert ACEC located within the greater El Centro Area. Using information from the Imperial County Assessor office, thirteen parcels, with acreages ranging from 70-319 acres have been identified and will be the first to receive letters of interest. If additional acreage is required to meet the minimum of 230 acres, land owners with the two remaining FTHL management areas in the greater El Centro area; East Mesa ACEC and West Mesa ACEC would be contacted. Secured properties would be donated to the BLM and managed as FTHL habitat. All FTHL acquisition costs prior to FY11 will be captured under this work task. Costs include preliminary site visits for lands and realty personnel, discussions with the BLM, working with landowners, and costs of appraisals. Beginning in FY11, Flat-

tailed Horned Lizard (E30) will track expenditures to secure properties and turn over management to the BLM.

In January 2010 the LCR MSCP held a technical two-day workshop in Boulder City, Nevada to review the draft land cover type creation goals by reach and state presented at the October 2009 Steering Committee meeting in Laughlin. All LCR MSCP stakeholders were invited to attend and participate in the meeting, which will help refine the creation goals. As a result of the workshop, working with our partners the LCR MSCP will be actively talking with potential landowners to secure additional lands, primarily in California, to meet the goals of the program.

**FY11 Activities:** Coordination with resource agencies and attendance at planning meetings is expected to be similar to those in FY10. In FY10 it was anticipated that at least one backwater, which would be created on existing ground at existing or potential conservation areas, may be identified and evaluated in California during this interim period. This effort is being initiated to bring a backwater, created from dry ground, to parity with existing backwaters identified under E15. However, those efforts are temporarily on hold in accordance with the discussion in Work Task E15.

Two development plans are currently being drafted and are expected to be sent to the California Department of Fish and Game for evaluation and approval. The first is the establishment of honey mesquite on lands adjacent to the Palo Verde Ecological Reserve and owned by the Palo Verde Irrigation District. The second is the development of over 500 acres located on Cibola National Wildlife Refuge into primarily honey mesquite. Both properties, if developed, would satisfy over ½ of the programs honey mesquite goal for the state of California.

Development of marsh and backwater projects require the collection of significantly more site specific data than projects targeting honey mesquite and therefore their development plans will take longer to be drafted.

**Proposed FY12 Activities:** Coordination with resource agencies and attendance at planning meetings is expected to be similar to those in FY11. FY12 activities will focus on the identification and evaluation of potential conservation areas, primarily in California. Specific activities may include: Completion of the site-selection process for sites identified under the 2008 RFP. Steps 2-6 of the *Draft Final Guidelines for the Screening and Evaluation of Potential Conservation Areas* will be conducted if the sites meet the goals identified in the workshop held in FY10.

**Pertinent Reports:** *Draft Guidelines for the Screening and Evaluation of Potential Conservation Areas*, and *October 2008 Trip Reports* are posted on the LCR MSCP website.