Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

Balancing Resource Use and Conservation

Big Bend Conservation Area 2010 Annual Report

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

December 2011

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program Steering Committee Members

Federal Participant Group

Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Park Service
Bureau of Land Management
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Western Area Power Administration

Arizona Participant Group

Arizona Department of Water Resources
Arizona Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.
Arizona Game and Fish Department
Arizona Power Authority
Central Arizona Water Conservation District
Cibola Valley Irrigation and Drainage District
City of Bullhead City
City of Lake Havasu City
City of Mesa
City of Somerton
City of Yuma
Electrical District No. 3, Pinal County, Arizona
Golden Shores Water Conservation District
Mohave County Water Authority
Mohave Valley Irrigation and Drainage District
Mohave Water Conservation District
North Gila Valley Irrigation and Drainage District
Town of Fredonia
Town of Thatcher
Town of Wickenburg
Salt River Project Agricultural Improvement and Power District
Unit "B" Irrigation and Drainage District
Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District
Yuma County Water Users' Association
Yuma Irrigation District
Yuma Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District

Other Interested Parties Participant Group

QuadState County Government Coalition
Desert Wildlife Unlimited

California Participant Group

California Department of Fish and Game
City of Needles
Coachella Valley Water District
Colorado River Board of California
Bard Water District
Imperial Irrigation District
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
Palo Verde Irrigation District
San Diego County Water Authority
Southern California Edison Company
Southern California Public Power Authority
The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

Nevada Participant Group

Colorado River Commission of Nevada
Nevada Department of Wildlife
Southern Nevada Water Authority
Colorado River Commission Power Users
Basic Water Company

Native American Participant Group

Hualapai Tribe
Colorado River Indian Tribes
Chemehuevi Indian Tribe

Conservation Participant Group

Ducks Unlimited
Lower Colorado River RC&D Area, Inc.
The Nature Conservancy

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

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Multi-Species Conservation Program
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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BBCA	Big Bend Conservation Area
Commission	Nevada Wildlife Commission
FY	fiscal year
HCP	Habitat Conservation Plan
LCR MSCP	Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program
NDOW	Nevada Department of Wildlife
PARKS	Nevada Division of State Parks
Reclamation	Bureau of Reclamation
SNWA	Southern Nevada Water Authority
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), State of Nevada, and the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) have worked in partnership since 2005 to secure the Boy Scout Camp property and protect the adjacent backwater for inclusion into the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP). The Boy Scout Camp property purchased by SNWA (15 acres of upland) and adjacent 15 acres of backwater within Reach 3 owned by the State of Nevada are collectively known as the Big Bend Conservation Area (BBCA).

The LCR MSCP requires a total of 360 acres of backwater be developed to support razorback sucker and bonytail. Of the 360 acres of backwater, 85 acres will be managed for the flannelmouth sucker in Reach 3 (Davis Dam to Parker Dam).

Flannelmouth sucker were reintroduced into the Colorado River below Davis Dam by the Arizona Game and Fish Department in 1976 by transfer of fish captured at the confluence of the Colorado and Paria Rivers at Lee's Ferry, Arizona. This stock has persisted for three decades and now represents the only known population of this native species in the Colorado River downstream from Grand Canyon.

Since 2007, all stakeholders involved have worked together to analyze both the backwater area and upland area as a potential LCR MSCP Conservation Area. Beginning in fiscal year (FY) 2009, both the backwater and upland area were combined to form the BBCA.

SITE INFORMATION

Purpose

This annual report will provide information pertaining to the procurement and maintenance of backwater area and summarized monitoring results that would influence the adaptive management process for the backwater area of the BBCA. The purpose of the BBCA is to protect an existing backwater from development. Several life stages of all three LCR MSCP covered native fish species (flannelmouth sucker, razorback sucker, and bonytail) have been contacted in and around the backwater. Due to the limited number of available backwaters within Reach 3 and increasing urban development in the surrounding areas, securing this property for native fishes is a priority of the LCR MSCP.

The upland portion is being restored by SNWA to complement the BBCA. The area is not being managed as habitat for the LCR MSCP at this time and, therefore, is not described in this document.

Location/Description

The site is physically located in southern Nevada south of the town of Laughlin. Needles Highway and Hotel Casino Dr. is the major nearby intersection. The BBCA is located between River Miles 265–266.

The property is a private in-holding of the Big Bend of the Colorado River, Nevada State Park. Figures 1–3 shown below describe the location of the BBCA in more detail.

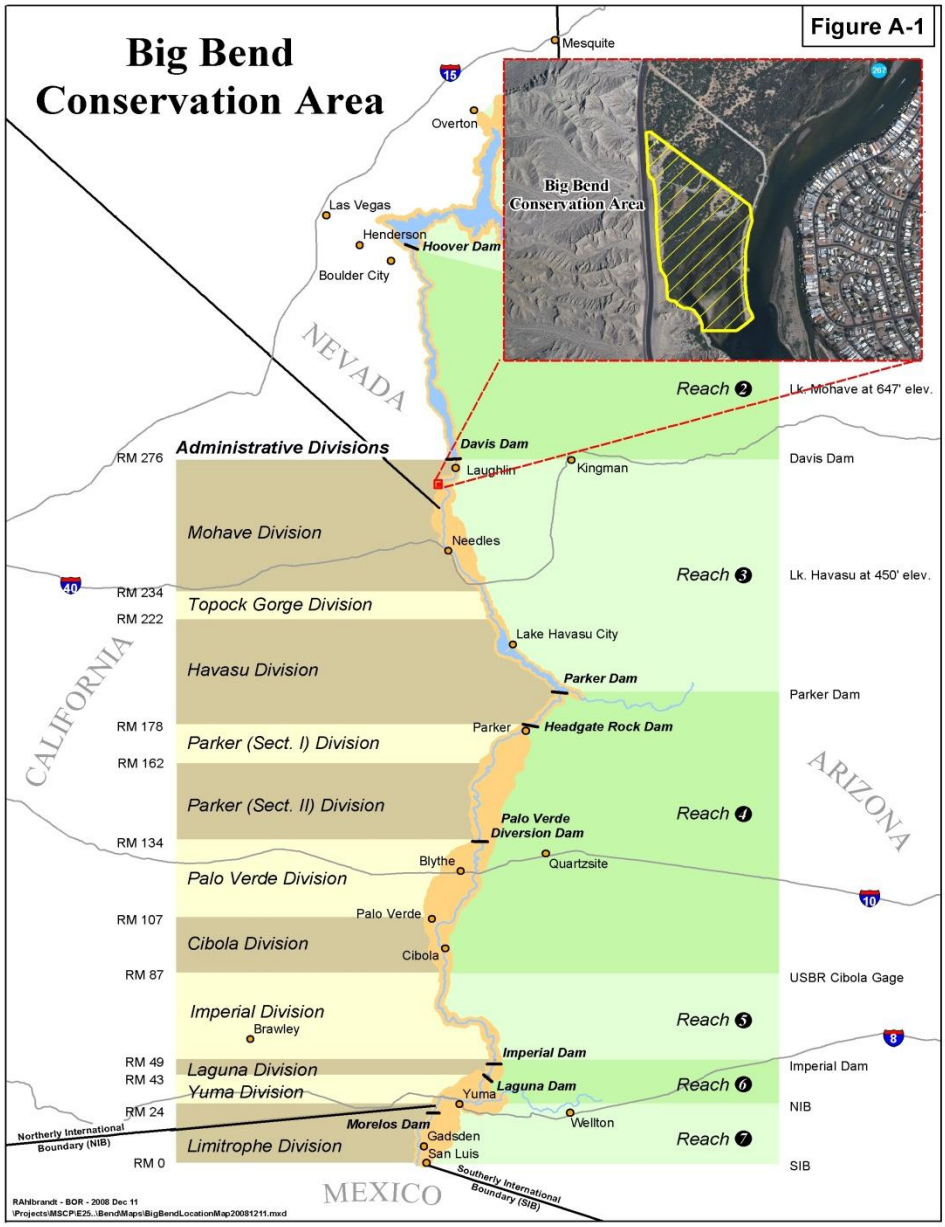

Figure 1.—Big Bend River location map.

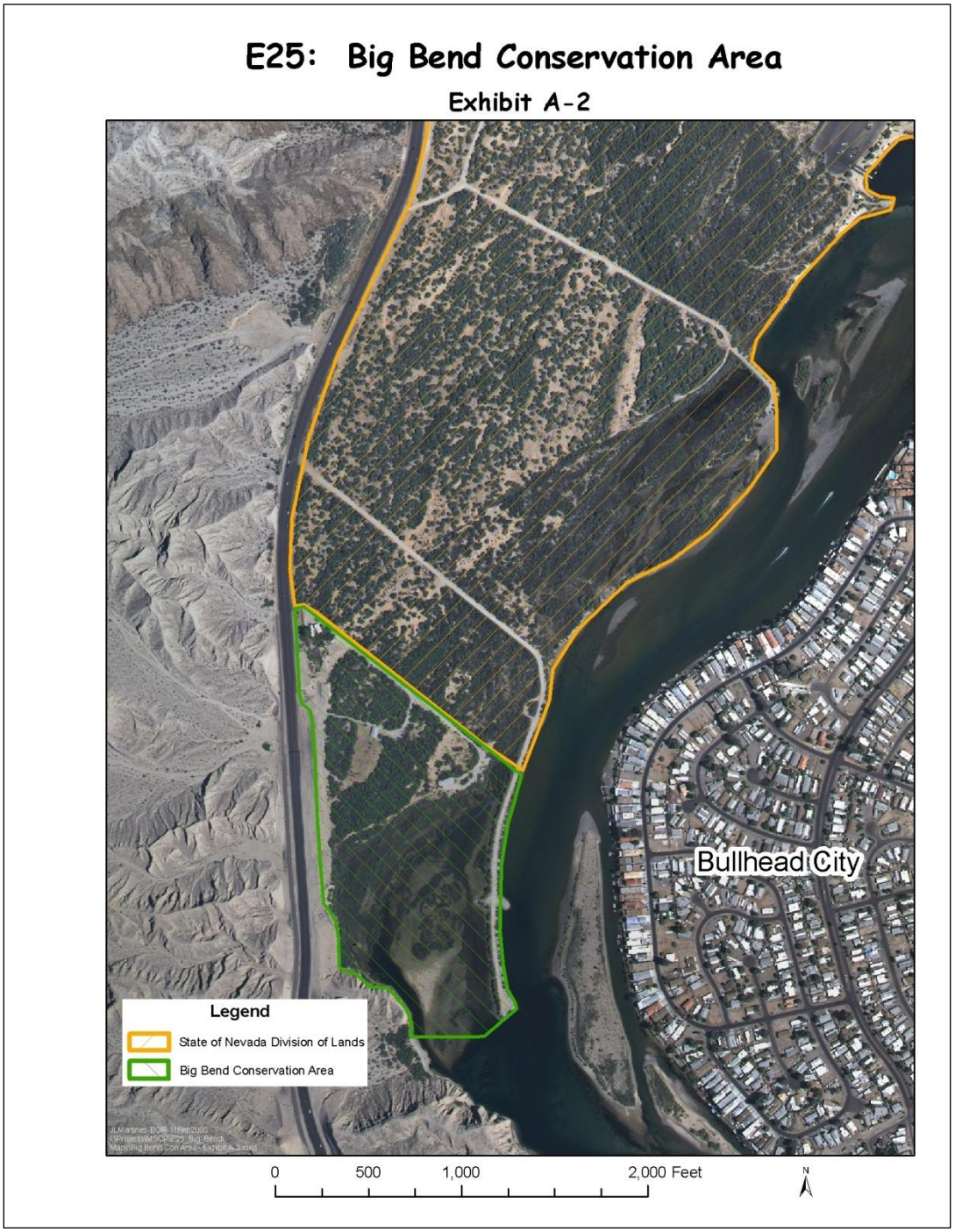

Figure 2.—Big Bend State Park and BBCA boundaries.

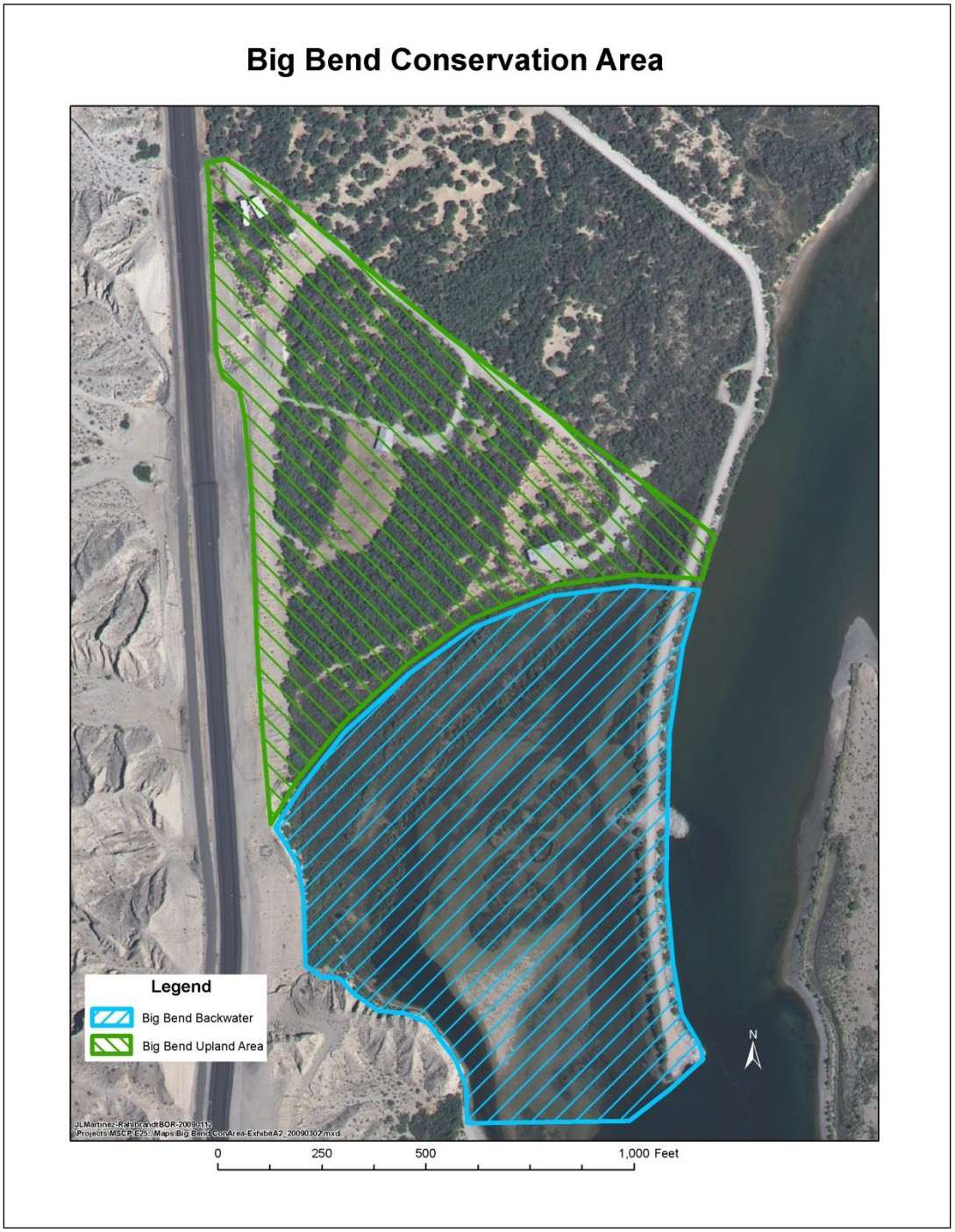

Figure 3.—BBCA backwater and upland boundaries.

Landownership

In 1966 the land was federally withdrawn by the U.S. Department of the Interior and transferred to Clark County. In 1968 the land was sold to the Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scouts of America used the property through the early 1990s. In September 2005, the SNWA purchased the 15 acres of upland adjacent to the backwater.

Water

The Boy Scout Camp property maintains two wells and has a diversionary water entitlement of 10 acre-feet.

Pursuant to Assignment No. 1 of Contract No. 9-07-30-W0011, dated January 23, 2007, SNWA was assigned the right to divert up to 10 acre-feet per year of Colorado River water for use on lands in Nevada.

Agreements

A Memorandum of Agreement was signed by LCR MSCP, SNWA, Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), and Nevada Division of State Parks (PARKS), committing resources to the evaluation of the property as a LCR MSCP Conservation Area in 2007. A long-term Land Use Agreement was signed by LCR MSCP, SNWA, NDOW, PARKS, and the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in February 2010, agreeing to the protection of the backwaters and the restoration efforts by SNWA on the upland area.

To establish the value of the land, a federal appraisal was conducted. The appraisal price for the upland area was set at $872,000. The compensation will be split over 2 fiscal years beginning with FY10. An in-kind contribution by SNWA of $436,000 was agreed upon for compensation in FY10. The 10 acre-feet of water attached to the Boy Scout Camp property acquired by SNWA was excluded from the Federal appraisal. Compensation was approved by the LCR MSCP Steering Committee in October 2008. A long-term lease agreement was signed in March 2010 by LCR MSCP and SNWA.

2010 SITE ACTIVITIES

Site Monitoring

Monitoring of the backwater is ongoing. Maintenance and adaptive management will be conducted as needed on a long-term basis until the year 2055. As of yet, there are no plans to alter the backwater area.

Marsh Bird Surveying

Using a standardized protocol from the National Marsh Bird Monitoring Program, surveys for the California black rail, least bittern, Virginia rail, and Yuma clapper rail were performed between March 15 and May 31 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 2003; Conway 2008; USFWS 2006). Three surveys were conducted during the appropriate time period during 2010. Surveys began 30 minutes before sunrise and continued until marsh birds ceased calling, but never continued later than 10:00 a.m. Four survey stations were surveyed for each of the three surveys conducted on March 25, April 21, and May 21. The only LCR MSCP covered species detected was one least bittern. The least bittern was detected one time during the March survey. For further methodology and results, refer to Kahl (in prep.).

Cattail (*Typha* spp.) and bulrush (*Scirpus* spp.) species were present at all four survey stations, but no quantitative measurements were taken.

Fish Surveying

All fishery surveys for 2010 were conducted as part of the ongoing flannelmouth sucker activities associated with work task C15, Flannelmouth Sucker Habitat Use, Preference and Recruitment Downstream of Davis Dam. Trammel nets were set monthly from February through May at locations that were dictated by water level or at locations that have historically produced native fish. Trammel nets were set in the afternoon and retrieved the following morning. During the 3-month period, a total of 12 nets were set and consisted of eight ½” x 75', three 1" x 150', and one 1" x 300' net. Only one LCR MSCP covered species was contacted, a single flannelmouth sucker adult (610 millimeters in total length), which was captured during the February survey. Additional seining was conducted during the May sampling trip in an attempt to contact age 0 flannelmouth suckers. Four 10-meter seine passes were made within the backwater, but no LCR MSCP covered species were contacted. For further methodology and results, refer to the C15 Annual Report, Investigations in Flannelmouth Sucker Habitat Use, Preference and Recruitment Downstream of Davis Dam, in the Lower Colorado River, October 2009–September 2010.

MANAGEMENT

Wildfire Management

Wildfire suppression, prevention, patrol, and planning are conducted by the Bureau of Land Management, Las Vegas (U.S. Department of the Interior and Wildland Fire Associates, 2009).

Public Use

The upland area consists of a low-impact recreational hiking trail and a wildlife viewing area. Interpretive signage is located at the gravel parking lot for visitors. Although the LCR MSCP does not have substantial involvement in the interpretive area, cooperation is necessary to ensure all activities conducted in the upland area are consistent with the program's goals and objectives.

Currently, the backwater area is open to jet skiers who frequent the area often. Coordination between NDOW and the Nevada Wildlife Commission (Commission) has been ongoing for the installation of a buoy at the entrance of the backwater. A motion was passed by the Commission in FY10 for Commission general regulation 382, Colorado River Regulation, LCB File No. R004-10. Regulation 382 approves BBCA backwater as a no-wake zone. Two buoys are scheduled to be installed in 2011 and will restrict access to the backwater to only wake-less speed in order to decrease disturbance to the wildlife.

Law Enforcement

SNWA is responsible for law enforcement at BBCA. Reclamation will work with SNWA to ensure these activities do not conflict with the LCR MSCP Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).

Future Habitat Development

At this time there is no future habitat development of BBCA. However, BBCA is adjacent to and buffered by Big Bend State Park, which may provide an opportunity for restoration in the future.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Adaptive management relies on the initial receipt of new information, the analysis of that information, and the incorporation of the new information into the design and/or direction of future project work (LCR MSCP 2007). The Adaptive Management Program's role is to ensure habitat creation sites are biologically effective and fulfill the conservation measures outlined in the HCP for 26 covered species and potentially benefit 5 evaluation species. Post-development monitoring and species research results will be used to adaptively manage habitat creation sites after initial implementation. Once monitoring data are collected over several years and then analyzed for the Big Bend Conservation Area, recommendations may be made through the adaptive management process for site improvements in the future.

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