

Work Task E16: Conservation Area Site Selection

FY14 Estimate	FY14 Actual Obligations	Cumulative Expenditures Through FY14	FY15 Approved Estimate	FY16 Proposed Estimate	FY17 Proposed Estimate	FY18 Proposed Estimate
\$600,000	\$701,608.57	\$2,451,472.03	\$500,000	\$1,300,000	\$700,000	\$700,000

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Start Date: FY05

Expected Duration: FY25

Long-Term Goal: Habitat creation

Conservation Measures: CLRA1, WIFL1, BONY2, RASU2, WRBA2, WYBA2, CRCR2, YHCR2, LEBI1, BLRA1, YBCU1, ELOW1, GIFL1, GIWO1, VEFL1, BEVI1, YWAR1, SUTA1, FLSU1, MNSW2, CLNB2, and PTBB2

Location: Reaches 1–7, Arizona, California, and Nevada

Purpose: To identify, visit, evaluate, prioritize, and recommend potential conservation areas to the Steering Committee for development under 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 Conservation Area Development and Management (Section E) work tasks.

Project Description: 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 program.

When developing a financial value for subject lands and water, Reclamation must administer a Federal appraisal using the U.S. Department of the 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 or Program Decision Document.

This approval allows Reclamation to move forward with the new site and prepare specific Restoration Development and Monitoring Plans that guide implementation of the conservation area.

In FY14, backwater site selection previously tracked under Work Task E15 was combined with this work task, which reflects the change in the process to select backwaters and allows integration of multiple land cover types on a conservation area in which the primary purpose is the creation of a backwater.

Previous Activities: Guidelines have been developed to describe the process of 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. Through FY13, 11 conservation areas have been established.

FY14 Accomplishments: LCR MSCP staff attended and contributed at numerous meetings held with other resource agencies and Tribal entities. Quarterly meetings were conducted with USFWS representatives from all four Federal National Wildlife refuges (Bill Williams River, Cibola, Havasu, and Imperial) on the LCR, two Complex Refuge Managers, and staff from both the Ecological Services Office and the Arizona Fisheries Research Office of the USFWS.

The CDFW and Reclamation have partnered with the California Wildlife Board, Trust for Public Land, and The Conservation Fund to identify lands within the State of California that could be secured and developed as conservation areas under the LCR MSCP. The potential acquisitions range in size from small undeveloped parcels (less than 10 acres) to large parcels over 2,000 acres in size. Securing additional acreage for restoration of marsh and backwaters within California is the highest priority at this time.

California Lands:

PVER-South: Two adjacent landowners have been contacted and have expressed an interest in selling small, undeveloped parcels that would expand the footprint of PVER-South. During the due diligence portion of a potential land acquisition, some discrepancies in the title documentation were discovered. Those discrepancies are being discussed with the landowners and the California State Lands Department. Resolution may take a significant effort over several years and will involve formal land surveying.

In addition, a small fire, approximately 60 acres in size, occurred within the undeveloped portion of PVER-South in December 2013. LCR MSCP staff took advantage of the situation to survey the topography and limit the re-sprout of non-native vegetation in advance of the restoration of the entire conservation area using funds from Work Task E18.

PVID Lands: Negotiations to acquire a large tract of agricultural lands in the southern portion of the PVID was initiated; however, an agreement could not be reached, and negotiations have ended.

Mohave Valley Lands: Approximately 1,600 acres of land, located just south of the Avi Casino in California, were identified for potential acquisition. During negotiations with the landowner, the property was sold to a developer in Needles, California.

Reach 3 Backwaters:

MVCA: Development and construction of the MVCA, 56 acres of open water and emergent marsh, along with planting approximately 34 acres of cottonwood-willow and mesquite habitats, is expected to result in approximately 90 acres of native land cover types. A survey of the parcel was conducted to establish new control points and develop elevation contours. Additionally, a temporary gauging station was installed to monitor river stage. For the MVCA, a preliminary design drawing was completed. The NEPA/CEQA permitting process and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 application has started. These data, in conjunction with the site elevation data, will be used to determine the volume of material that will need to be excavated. Starting in FY15, the project is progressing under a new work task, Work Task E35.

Needles Lagoon: Four adjacent parcels of land, totaling 53 acres and located along the Colorado River at River Mile 247, were investigated as the location for a potential 20-acre backwater project in Needles, California. The site, commonly referred to as Needles Lagoon, is a remnant of the old river channel that became isolated once the river was channelized in 1960. Three of the four parcels are owned by the California State Lands Commission and leased to the city of Needles, and the fourth is federally owned. Needles Lagoon is adjacent to the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation, creating a partnership among the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, the city of Needles, and the LCR MSCP.

A feasibility report for the backwater was developed and presented to both the city of Needles and the Fort Mohave Indian Tribe. The report reviewed the location and site characteristics, proposed a design and layout for the backwater based on species-specific Conservation Measure FLSU2 for the flannelmouth sucker, discussed the design for both the inlet and outlet structures, assessed potential sediment and flood runoff dynamics, and provided a cost estimate for construction and maintenance of the backwater. Although the lagoon does have the potential to be restored, the high cost and technical issues associated with the site do not make it viable at this time. However, should conditions change or the priorities of the program be altered, the project may be revised and re-evaluated for implementation at a later date. Should the project move forward based on the current design concept, approximately 20 acres of connected backwater habitat would be created in California for the flannelmouth sucker.

Other Lands:

Virgin River: The Virgin River lands owned by the NDOW on the Overton WMA have been identified for potential restoration. For safety reasons, the data loggers installed in FY13 are no longer monitored. Data collection may resume at a later date.

FY15 Activities: Coordination with resource agencies and attendance at planning meetings is expected to be expanded slightly with the inclusion of Work Task E15 (closed). A workshop with representatives of the California parties was held to evaluate the status of establishing new conservation areas within the State of California.

PVER-South: Negotiations and due diligences for the adjacent undeveloped lands is continuing. We anticipate resolution of landownership, and surveying of property boundaries and the initiation of the appraisal process will begin. Pending a successful negotiation, a land and water resolution would be brought to the Steering Committee for approval.

Parker Dam Camp: Investigatory borings and wells were drilled earlier at Parker Dam Camp. The results of the investigation revealed high saline groundwater and limited well production; therefore, Parker Dam Camp was not suitable for the development of native fish ponds using the well water. However, potential for establishment of habitat on the site still exists. In FY15, other techniques to collect and distribute the return flow (water) from Gene Reservoir to create backwaters and establish riparian habitat at the camp will be evaluated.

Proposed FY16 Activities: Coordination with resource agencies and attendance at planning meetings is expected to be similar to that in FY15. The following potential conservation areas, primarily in California, are to be evaluated and the findings brought back to the Steering Committee.

Parker Dam Camp: A Restoration Development and Monitoring Plan is expected to be drafted and submitted to the Steering Committee. The plan would identify the technique to capture drainage from Gene Reservoir as well as the restoration concept that is expected to include 20 acres of backwater and a small riparian component.

3 Fingers Lake: This lake was identified during a workshop with representatives of the California Parties workshop in FY 15 and has the potential to provide both backwater and marsh land cover types for the program. The lake is located on the Cibola NWR within the State of California on lands owned by the USFWS. A Restoration Development and Monitoring Plan is expected to be drafted and submitted to the Steering Committee. Expenditures would include topographic surveying, design, creating a water budget, and drafting of the development plan.

Davis Lake: This lake was also identified during a workshop with representatives of the California parties in FY15. The concept being evaluated includes creation of a shallow marsh similar in size to Hart Mine Marsh. The remnant lake is located on the Cibola NWR within the State of California on lands owned by the USFWS. A Restoration Development and Monitoring Plan may be drafted and submitted to the Steering Committee. Expenditures would include topographic surveying, design, creating a water budget, and drafting of the development plan if necessary.

Pertinent Reports: N/A