

# RESTORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE RIO GRANDE CANALIZATION PROJECT: PROJECT BRIEF JUNE 2009 - JUNE 2014

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION, U.S. SECTION

## RESTORING THE RIO GRANDE

### The Record of Decision

In 1999, the International Boundary and Water Commission, U.S. Section (USIBWC) began a public scoping and consultation process to develop alternatives for an Environmental Impact Statement on river management of the Rio Grande Canalization Project (RGCP), the 105-mile project area from the Percha Dam near Arrey, NM downstream to the American Diversion Dam in El Paso, TX. In June 2009, after ten years of discussions with the public and stakeholders, the USIBWC signed the Record of Decision (ROD) on River Management Alternatives for the RGCP. The ROD committed the USIBWC to continuing the agency's mission of water delivery, flood control and

maintaining flood capacity while changing management practices of the Rio Grande corridor. New management practices would now include implementation of a variety of environmental improvements through the year 2019, including: phasing out grazing leases, ceasing floodplain mowing on almost 2,000 acres to develop managed grasslands, updating the river management plan, evaluating alternative channel maintenance activities,

resurveying river cross sections, implementing 30 habitat restoration sites which would restore about 550 acres of 12 habitat types, and developing

an environmental water transactions program to acquire water rights.

*The 2009 Record of Decision committed the USIBWC to implementing about 550 acres of habitat restoration and 2,000 acres of managed grasslands along the Rio Grande in Lower New Mexico and West Texas.*



*On Right: Broad Canyon Arroyo Restoration:  
From top:  
Dense saltcedar August 2011;  
Saltcedar excavation March 2012;  
Post saltcedar excavation March 2012;  
Prescribed burns of saltcedar debris piles January 2013;  
Planting along the river banks February 2013; and  
Growing willow trees May 2014.*



Broad Canyon Arroyo  
Restoration 2011-2014

## Implementation: First 5 Years

In the first 5 years of ROD Implementation, the USIBWC and its partners have completed the following:

### Restoration Work

- Completed base studies for implementation (such as restoration plans, cultural resources investigations, soils and groundwater data, and endangered species surveys)
- From 2011 to 2014, planted almost 5,000 trees and treated or excavated about 350 acres of saltcedar on the first 9 restoration sites. Work was done by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through an Interagency Agreement.
- Installed 55 shallow groundwater monitoring wells at 21 sites.
- Began a restoration site monitoring program.

### Environmental Water Transaction Program

- Developed an Environmental Water Transaction Program (EWTP) through a Public-Private partnership with USFWS, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Audubon New Mexico, and the Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID). The EWTP established rules and procedures for the USIBWC to acquire water and water rights through voluntary transactions to sustain restoration sites.
- USIBWC intends to acquire water rights for about 475 acres of restored habitat through voluntary transactions with willing sellers.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with EBID to work collaboratively on the EWTP.
- Secured passage of an EBID policy that authorizes use of EBID-administered water for native vegetation on restoration sites.
- Identified initial willing water rights sellers, purchased surface water rights associated with 4.0 acres of land and is in the process of acquiring more.
- Created an irrigation plan for the Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8 restoration site with plans to irrigate in June 2014.
- Leased water for a second irrigation of the Leasburg restoration site in July 2014.

### Other Implementation Work

- Completed a draft River Management Plan and draft Channel Maintenance Plan in 2013 with ongoing stakeholder review.
- Consulted with the USFWS under the Endangered Species Act on possible impacts to federally endangered species, specifically the southwestern willow flycatcher. The USFWS issued a Biological and Conference Opinion in August 2012, requiring the USIBWC to maintain 53.5 acres of flycatcher habitat.
- Secured exclusion of the Lower Rio Grande from designation as critical habitat for the flycatcher because of USIBWC's commitment to a flycatcher management plan including agreements to develop a water transaction program and implementation of the overall restoration plan.
- Signed an Interagency Agreement with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to conduct flycatcher surveys.
- The USIBWC continues to coordinate with stakeholders (environmental groups, irrigation districts, and elected officials) through an Implementation Committee which meets about every other month.

## Implementation: The Next 5 Years

- In the next 5 years, the USIBWC anticipates restoring the remaining 21 restoration sites, purchasing water rights, continuing channel maintenance discussions and studies, and finalizing the River Management Plan. The USIBWC estimates the 10-year implementation of the ROD will cost \$11.1 million. As of June 2014, \$2.6 million has been obligated or spent, representing about 23% completion.



**Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8 Restoration Work:**  
*From top: Tree planting February 2012; Blooming cottonwoods August 2012; Measuring groundwater levels July 2013; Blooming cottonwoods and willows May 2014.*