

Public Hearing

Draft Environmental Assessment Aquatic Habitat Restoration in the Rio Grande Canalization Project Sierra and Doña Ana Counties, New Mexico and El Paso County, Texas

Date: June 12, 2019

Location: Las Cruces City Hall
Rooms 2007B and C
700 N. Main Street
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Time: 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) is considering identifying, designing, and constructing aquatic habitat restoration projects in the Rio Grande Canalization Project. On June 4, 2009, the USIBWC issued a Record of Decision (ROD) on the long-term management of the Rio Grande Canalization Project. The 2009 ROD authorized restoration of aquatic habitat and a mosaic of native riparian plant communities at 30 sites over 10 years (through 2019).

The purpose is to identify, design, and develop aquatic habitat restoration sites to satisfy USIBWC's commitment in the 2009 ROD. Restoration actions could include vegetation removal, disposal of wood debris, native vegetation planting, overbank lowering, bank cuts, natural levee breaches, secondary channels, bank destabilization, channel widening, arroyo mouth management, construction of inset floodplains, and use of supplemental water for on-site irrigation.

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The USIBWC released the *Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact for Aquatic Habitat Restoration in the Rio Grande Canalization Project* on May 31, 2019. In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Draft EA is available for public comment until July 5, 2019.

The Draft Environmental Assessment evaluates potential environmental impacts of the No Action Alternative and seven alternatives (Exhibit 1):

1. Alternative A - No Action Alternative
2. Alternative B - Yeso Arroyo Alternative
3. Alternative C - Angostura Arroyo Alternative
4. Alternative D - Broad Canyon Arroyo Alternative
5. Alternative E - Selden Point Bar Alternative
6. Alternative F - Las Cruces Effluent Alternative

7. Alternative G - Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park Alternative
8. Alternative H - Downstream of Courchesne Bridge Alternative

USIBWC's Preferred Alternative is to implement four aquatic habitat restoration sites (Broad Canyon Arroyo, Selden Point Bar, Las Cruces Effluent, and Downstream of Courchesne Bridge). A brief description of the four aquatic habitat restoration sites included in the Preferred Alternative is provided below:

Broad Canyon Arroyo Site

Broad Canyon Arroyo is a tributary to the Rio Grande that enters from the west side of the river near River Mile (RM) 68. The Broad Canyon Arroyo site is an approximately 2-acre site, and the site has been the focus of previous USIBWC riparian habitat enhancement through U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), as well as nearby restoration work by other entities. The conceptual restoration design for the Broad Canyon Arroyo site would create 0.2 acre of aquatic habitat by enhancing backwater function and habitat diversity as a result of creating a series of embayments supplemented with diverse riparian-wetland revegetation (Exhibit 2).

Selden Point Bar Site

The Selden Point Bar site is a vegetated, bank-attached (point) bar located on the east side of the Rio Grande near RM 66. The site is owned by USIBWC and is approximately 9 acres in size. An arroyo enters the Rio Grande just downstream of the site. The proposed conceptual restoration design for the Selden Point Bar site is designed to create a high-flow channel and a backwater channel supplemented by revegetation with native riparian and wetland plant species (Exhibits 3 and 4). The conceptual design for the Selden Point Bar site would create 0.8 acre of aquatic habitat.

Las Cruces Effluent Site

The Las Cruces Effluent site is an approximately 4-acre site located on the east side of the Rio Grande near RM 44. The conceptual design is to replace the straight concrete-lined channel currently used to convey treated wastewater from the Las Cruces Waste Treatment Facility to the Rio Grande with a relatively long, meandering channel with diverse aquatic habitat features (Exhibit 5). The conceptual design for the Las Cruces Effluent site would create 0.9 acre of aquatic habitat. A check structure would be constructed off the concrete-lined channel to reroute water into the constructed channel. The aquatic habitats would be enhanced by planting aquatic vegetation within backwaters, and riparian vegetation (cottonwood and willow) along the channel margins. A fish passage structure is being considered as an option under this alternative.

Downstream of Courchesne Bridge Site

The Downstream of Courchesne Bridge site is an approximately 13-acre site located near RM 1 in El Paso, Texas. The site is owned by USIBWC and USIBWC is considering using a portion of the site for wetland mitigation for levee construction. The conceptual design at this site focuses primarily on creating a meandering channel that routes stormwater from below Highway 85, through the site, and into the Rio Grande (Exhibit 6). Design elements would include terraces, embayments, and pools within the channel and the along the margins. Supplemental herbaceous wetland plug plantings and low density, overhanging woody vegetation will increase native wetland species diversity and aquatic habitat complexity at this site.

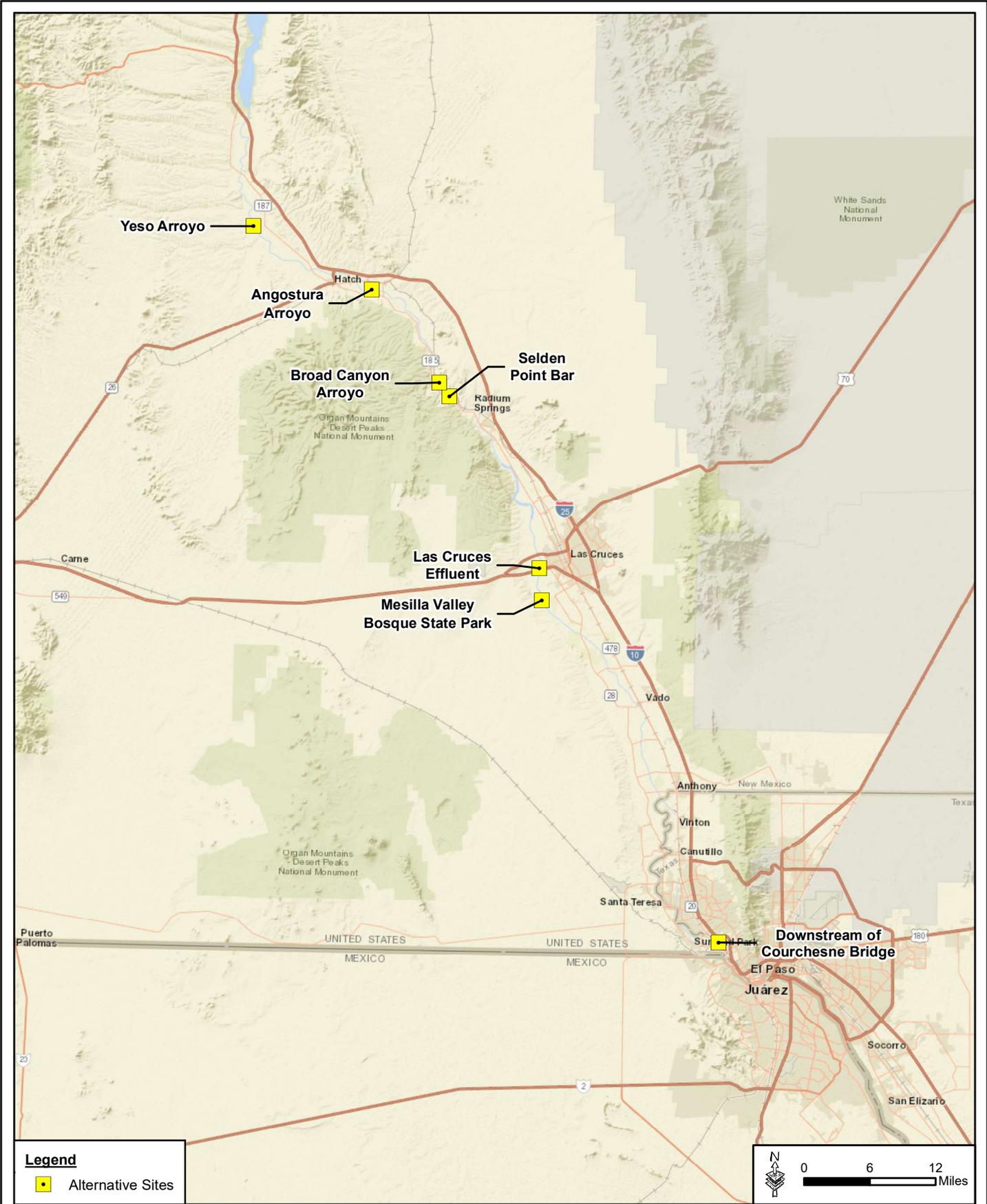


Exhibit 1. Project Area Map Showing the Location of Alternative in the Environmental Assessment



Exhibit 2. Broad Canyon Arroyo Conceptual Design

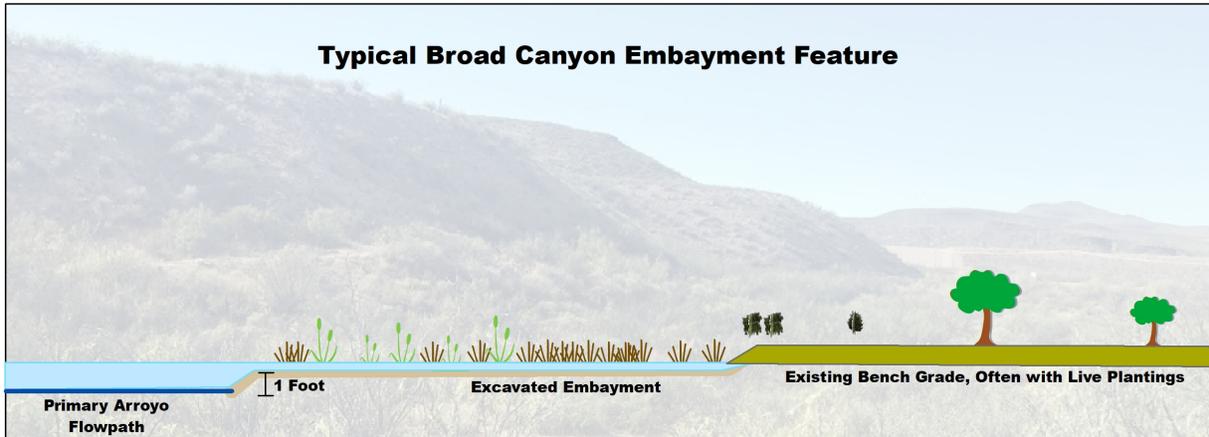


Exhibit 3. Selden Point Bar Side Channel Conceptual Design

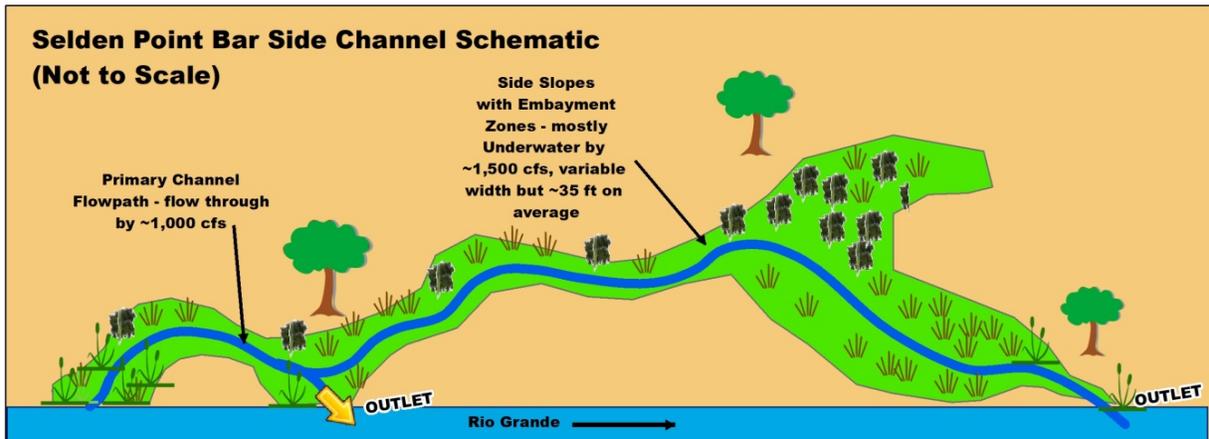


Exhibit 4. Selden Point Bar Backwater Conceptual Design

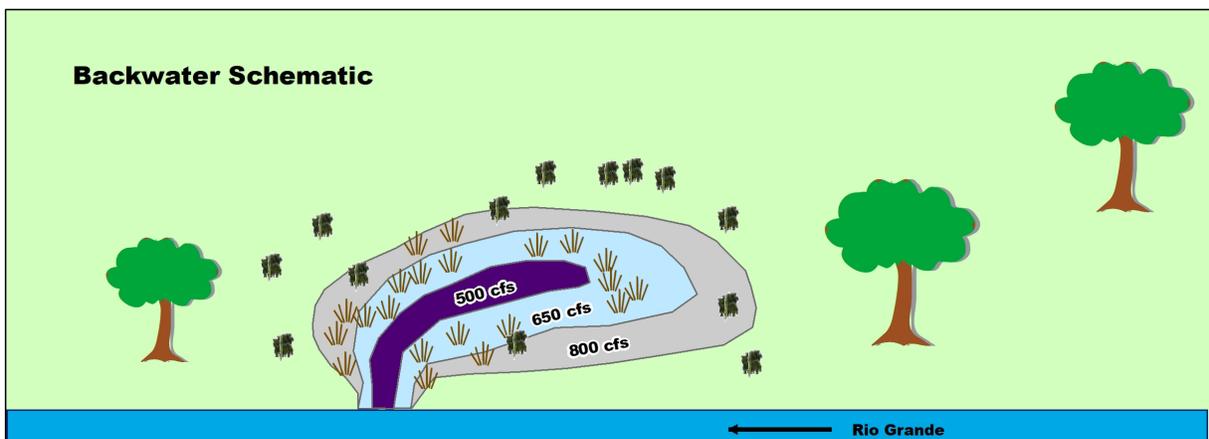


Exhibit 5. Las Cruces Effluent Conceptual Design

Las Cruces Effluent



Construction Elements

1. Construct meandering clearwater channel
2. Install selective fish passage structure
3. Install flow monitoring stations, pedestrian bridge, and pump
4. Plant cottonwood-willow in surrounding riparian enhancement area
5. Plant wetland plugs in channel

Legend

-  Check structure
-  Flow Monitoring station

-  Pedestrian bridge

Proposed Design Feature

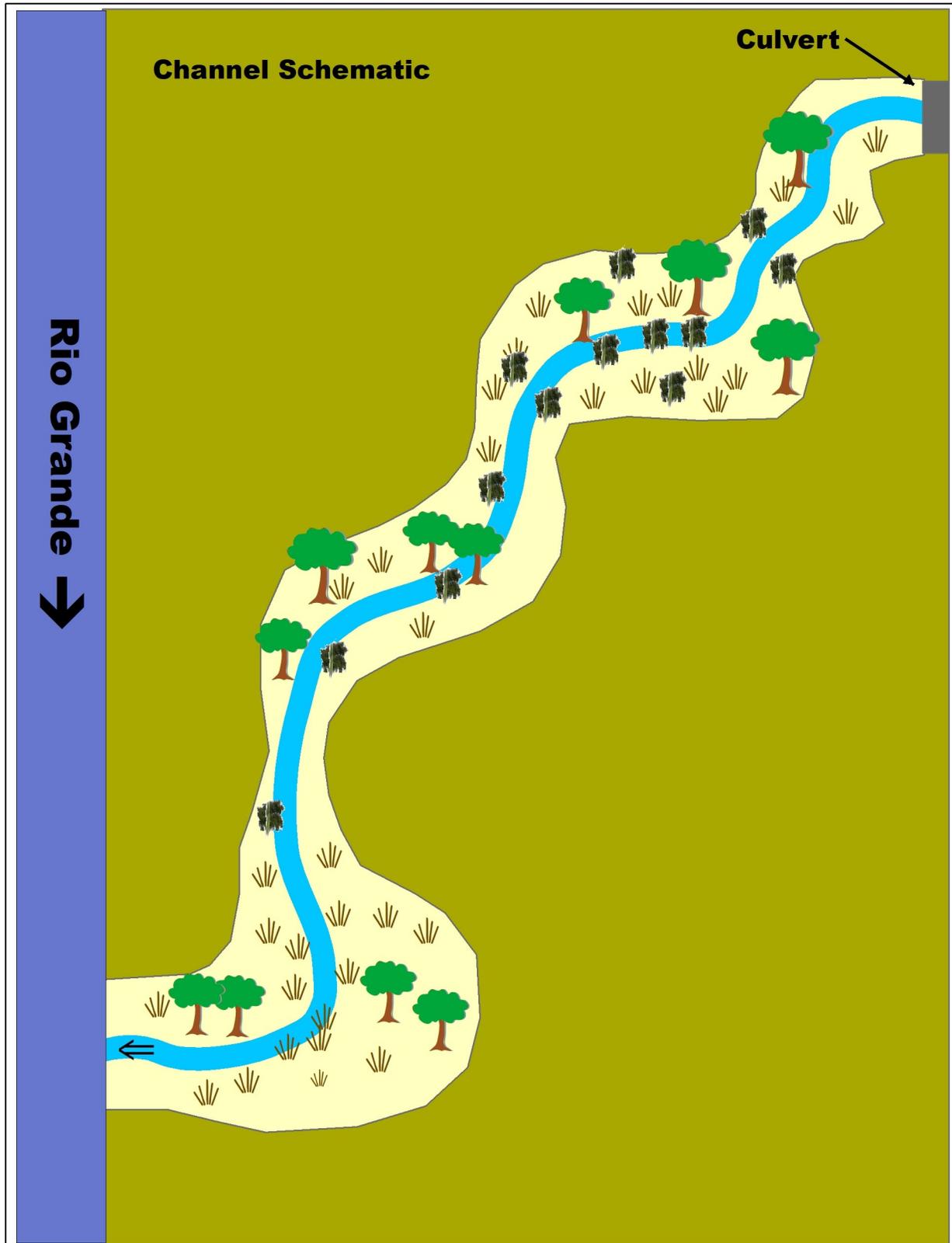
-  Channel

-  Riparian Enhancement

0 50 100 200
Feet



Exhibit 6. Downstream of Courchesne Bridge Conceptual Design



FINDINGS

The evaluation performed in the Draft EA concludes that there would be no significant impacts to the natural or human environment as a result of the implementation of any of the alternatives in the Draft EA. Therefore, the USIBWC is issuing a Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and will not prepare an environmental impact statement unless additional information which may affect this decision is brought to the agency's attention within the 30-day public comment period.

COMMENTS

The public comment period for the Draft Environmental Assessment is until **July 5, 2019**. The Draft EA is on USIBWC's website at http://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/EIS_EA_Public_Comment.html. The Notices of Availability for the Draft EA was published in the Federal Register on May 31, 2019. Written public comments are due by **July 5, 2019** and should be submitted to:

Elizabeth Verdecchia, USIBWC Natural Resources Specialist
Elizabeth.Verdecchia@ibwc.gov
4191 N Mesa
El Paso TX 79902
(915) 832-4701

A comment sheet is provided at the end of this handout for your convenience. If you wish, the comment sheet can be turned in at the reception table at the end of this meeting. Thank you for your participation.

